

INSPECTION REPORT

FERRYHILL COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Ferryhill, Durham

LEA area: Durham

Unique reference number: 114299

Headteacher: Mr S Gater

Reporting inspector: Barbara O'Brien
13019

Dates of inspection: 22 - 26 April 2002

Inspection number: 186489

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Merrington Road Ferryhill County Durham
Postcode:	DL1 78RW
Telephone number:	01740 651554
Fax number:	01740 654980
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Rev. Keith Lumsden
Date of previous inspection:	January 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
13019	Barbara O'Brien	<i>Registered Inspector</i>		What sort of school is it? How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9478	Linda Callaghan	<i>Lay Inspector</i>		How high are standards? Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
31129	Jeff Pickering	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Art.	
8360	Frederick Peacock	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Music.	
24127	Jim Kidd	<i>Team Inspector</i>	History.	How high are standards? The school's results and achievements.
22906	Barry Hodgson	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Physical education; Sixth Form; Information and communication technology.	
12118	Allan Paver	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Geography.	
12885	John Hunt	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Mathematics.	
4922	Mike Driver	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Science.	
30941	Keith Brammer	<i>Team Inspector</i>	English.	
15396	Ronald Bulman	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
2714	Martin Patterson	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
8806	Martin Flatman	<i>Sixth Form co-ordinator</i>	Religious education.	
20619	Jenny Hazlewood	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Information and communication technology; Business studies.	
2746	Roy Lund	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Special educational needs.	

The inspection contractor was:

*Westminster Education Consultants
Old garden House
The Lanterns
Bridge Lane
London
SW11 3AD*

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ferryhill Comprehensive School is a mixed community school for 873 students aged 11 to 18. There are 64 students in the Sixth Form. The school makes joint post-16 provision with Spennymoor Comprehensive and New College, Durham. There are no students from ethnic minority groups and no students for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. However, the proportion with statements of special educational need is well above the national average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The attainment of students at intake is well below the national average. The school has experienced substantial staffing difficulties in relation to recruitment, retention and long-term illness of staff. This has hindered progress in significant areas of the school, despite the best efforts and imaginative recruitment drive by the headteacher and governing body.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Ferryhill Comprehensive School is an effective school that has improved considerably since the last inspection. On the basis of lessons and work seen during the inspection, students make at least satisfactory progress as they move through the school. Nevertheless, standards of attainment are well below national averages. The overall quality of teaching is good and the personal development of students is very good. The monitoring and assessment of students' academic progress is unsatisfactory overall. The overall management of the school is good and the excellent leadership of the headteacher is a strength of the school. The school has a clear sense of purpose and an understanding of what needs to be done in order to continue to improve, and it has the capacity to do so. The school provides good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- The headteacher provides excellent leadership, strongly supported by the senior management team and a highly effective governing body.
- The quality and range of learning opportunities provided for students, especially in Years 10 and 11 and in the Sixth Form.
- The pastoral care and personal development of students.
- The very strong ethos, aims and values of the school.
- Collaboration with and contribution to the wider community.
- The procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Standards of attainment in the majority of subjects are well below the national average.
- Monitoring and evaluation of subject departments by middle managers is not consistent.
- Assessment and monitoring of academic progress.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are not developed well enough through all subjects of the curriculum.
- The school does not fully meet the requirements for information and communication technology and religious education.

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 improved considerably since it was inspected in January 1996. Standards have risen and students are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment. Nevertheless, examination results are still not good enough. Attendance has improved and the registration system fully meets statutory requirements. The number of exclusions has been significantly reduced. There has been significant improvement in the quality of teaching, although there are still not enough planned activities and opportunities for independent learning for gifted and talented students. The curriculum has improved in many respects but arrangements for a daily act of collective worship and for Sixth Form religious education are not adequate. Statutory requirements are not fully met for the teaching of information and communication technology. The school has introduced good procedures for monitoring and evaluating its work, although the monitoring of students' academic progress is unsatisfactory. The cost effectiveness of major spending decisions is now very good.

STANDARDS

The table below shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Years 11 and 13, based on average point scores in GCSE and A Level/AS Level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key <i>well above average</i> A <i>above average</i> B <i>average</i> C <i>below average</i> D <i>well below average</i> E
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	D	D	E	C	
A Levels/AS Levels	E*	E*	N/A	N/A	

Standards of attainment in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2001 were well below the national average overall. Attainment is well below average in English, below average in mathematics, and in line with the national average in science. Over the past four years, standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 have been rising. Results in mathematics and science compare more favourably with similar schools than those in English. In relation to their prior attainment on entry to the school, students achieve well in English and mathematics, and very well in science.

In the GCSE examinations in 2001, a below average number of students gained five or more grades in the A*-C range. The number gaining five or more grades in the A* - G range was well below average. The results were close to the national average for similar schools. Based on results for the last three years, the trend in the school's average GCSE points

score per pupil was below the national trend. In business studies, double award science and information and communication technology, the number of students reaching the higher grades was well above average. It was above average in design and technology and history. In art and design, single award science and German, however, results were below average. They were well below average in English, French, mathematics and geography.

The school set challenging targets for 2000 - 2001. They were exceeded at age 14 in English, mathematics and science. At age 16, the number of students gaining five or more A*-C grades, including GNVQ results, was better than the school's target, but the number gaining one or more A*-G grades fell short of the target.

Based on the lessons and work seen, students' achievement in the first three years is good in most subjects and very good in modern foreign languages. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is good overall and very good in business studies and information and communication technology. Standards of literacy are below average, but those in numeracy are satisfactory overall.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. The majority are proud of their school and keen to take advantage of the opportunities offered.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. There is a friendly and orderly atmosphere.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between staff and students are very good. They demonstrate a mutual respect for each other.
Attendance	Students' attendance has improved although it is still below the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Satisfactory

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.

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all lessons seen, with over a quarter of lessons judged as very good or excellent. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics is satisfactory. In science, the quality of teaching overall is good. The key skills of literacy and numeracy are taught satisfactorily in English and mathematics, but they need developing through other subjects.

Good quality planning and high expectations of students have a significant impact on learning. Students' attitudes to learning demonstrate interest and a desire to succeed. In history and music, for example, well-planned lessons enable teachers to get the best out of students. However, in some English, geography and religious education lessons, not enough challenging activities are planned for the higher-attaining students. In some

departments, such as science and history, the use of ongoing assessment to monitor the progress of students and to set targets for improvement is a strong feature, but this is not the case in all subject areas. In the learning support unit, activities are carefully chosen to enable students to meet their individual targets.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is particularly good in Years 10 and 11 and in the Sixth Form. Information and communication technology provision does not fully meet statutory requirements.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. The school offers an inclusive education, including good teaching that is well matched to students' needs.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good, with a strong emphasis on the school as a moral community. The range of cultural opportunities needs to be further developed.
How well the school cares for its students	Pastoral care is a strength of the school. Students feel secure, valued and confident. Procedures for monitoring the academic progress of students are unsatisfactory overall.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides excellent leadership, strongly supported by the senior management team. Overall, middle managers provide satisfactory leadership.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are effective, having a very good understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Systems are good, but they need to be implemented more consistently by middle managers.
The strategic use of resources	Good deployment of teachers and use of accommodation. Resources are used effectively overall. The school takes very good care to seek best value in its purchasing decisions.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children make good progress in school.• The teaching is good.• They would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.• The school expects students to work hard and achieve their best.• The school helps students to become mature and responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents feel that their children do not get the right amount of work to do at home.• Some parents would like more information about how their children are getting on at school.

Only 58 questionnaires were returned. The majority of these parents responded positively to all aspects of the work of the school. The meeting for parents presented a very positive picture of the school. The inspectors agree with the positive comments made by parents. The information provided by the school to tell parents how their children are getting on is good. However, it is the inspectors' view that homework is not used consistently across all year groups to consolidate and extend learning. This is an area for improvement.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM FERRYHILL COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The school has a small Sixth Form of 64 students. The estimated entry for September 2002 is significantly higher than in previous years. The attainment of students on entry to the Sixth Form is below average overall. The school implements an inclusive education policy and welcomes into the Sixth Form students who in many other schools would not have the opportunity. The school currently teaches fourteen courses on its own site, including Advanced Vocational Courses, GCE A Level and AS courses, Intermediate Vocational Courses and GCSE courses. Some joint provision is made with New College Durham and Spennymoor Comprehensive School. The impact of this collaboration is a significant strength. The number of students with special educational needs is in line with the national average, but the proportion with statements of educational needs is over twice the national average. The attendance of students is in line with the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The Sixth Form is successful and provides students with a good foundation for life-long learning, although it is costly to run. Standards of attainment are below average in English, mathematics and art. They are satisfactory in business studies and information and communication technology. Students' attitudes to the school are positive. Teaching in most subjects is satisfactory. The quality and range of courses on offer to students is very good, except that religious education is not on the curriculum. Students with special educational needs are well catered for and make good progress against the targets in literacy and numeracy set out in their individual education plans. Their progress is satisfactory overall, when other subjects are taken into account. The pastoral support given to students is very good, but the procedures for assessing their attainment and progress are unsatisfactory. Leadership of the Sixth Form is very good. The Sixth Form provision is highly valued by students.

STRENGTHS

- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of all the students.
- The school provides good quality pastoral support for all students.
- The school is committed to collaboration with other education providers and the community in order to enrich learning opportunities.
- The school has an inclusive policy, which encourages life-long learning of all students.
- The leadership and management of the Sixth Form are very good.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Standards in most subjects.
- The monitoring of students' academic progress.
- The development of enrichment and cultural activities.
- The development and monitoring of key skills.
- The provision of religious education.

THE QUALITY AND PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

Curriculum area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
English	Satisfactory. Standards are below national averages but generally meet expectations. Teaching is at least satisfactory.
Mathematics	Unsatisfactory. The progress of the current students is unsatisfactory. Teaching is mainly satisfactory. Staffing changes have adversely affected the quality of provision.
Business Studies	Satisfactory. Standards at GCE A Level are satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory, and teachers have very good subject knowledge.
Information and communication technology	Good. Standards of work are at expected levels. Teaching is very good, with good planning, marking and use of technology.
Art and Design	Unsatisfactory. The 2001 AVCE and 2000 GCE A Level results were well below the national average. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The department has the capacity and will to improve.

Work was sampled in design and technology, health and social care, modern foreign languages and physical education. In these subjects, teaching is good and students make good progress. The quality of teaching is a strength in history.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Satisfactory overall. The quality of careers advice is good. The quality and accessibility of information provided for learners is good. Support and guidance provided through marking and feedback in departments is variable.
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Leadership and management by the head of the Sixth Form are very good. Management at departmental level is satisfactory overall. The school has a clear vision for the development of the Sixth Form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the Sixth Form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about Sixth Form studies. Induction into the Sixth Form. Support for personal problems. Being treated as young adults. The listening and response of the school to Sixth Formers' views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about their academic progress. Assessment of their work. Advice from the school and careers service about post-school opportunities. More worthwhile activities and enrichment opportunities.

Twenty-nine students returned questionnaires about their views of the Sixth Form. The large majority have positive views and believe they made the right decision in staying on. The inspectors agree with the views of a significant minority who felt that students do not receive as much information about their academic progress as they need and that assessment could be more rigorous. Inspectors judge that the school provides good advice for students on Post 16 opportunities. There is a need, however, to enrich the curriculum with worthwhile cultural activities within subject areas.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Standards of attainment are well below the national average overall. Based on nationally recognised tests and National Curriculum tests at age 11, students' standards on entry to the school are well below average. About 30 per cent of students arrive in Year 7 with a reading age two or more years below their actual age.
2. At the end of Year 9, attainment in English is still well below the national average. It is below average in mathematics, and girls performed significantly better than boys in the national tests in 2001. Students do better in science and, at the age of 14, attainment reaches national averages. Over the past four years, standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 have demonstrated a rising trend, but results in mathematics and science compare more favourably with similar schools than those in English. For example, performance in mathematics is above average and science is well above in relation to average National Curriculum points achieved by students. More girls than boys reach National Curriculum Level 5 or above in English and mathematics. The picture is different in science, where boys outperform girls. Compared to their prior attainment on entry to the school, students achieve well in English and mathematics and make very good progress in science.
3. In Foundation subjects, attainment by age 14 is variable. Attainment is in line with the national average in design and technology, history, music, and physical education and is below in geography, modern foreign languages, information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education. In art, attainment by the end of Year 9 is well below average, owing to students' underdeveloped basic skills of working and recording from observation. In ICT, the attainment of students in Years 7 to 9 is better than the national average. Where teaching is carried out by specialists and experienced teachers, students can select and summarise information from the Internet and use imaginative slides for presentations in Power Point.
4. Students' achievement during the first three years is good in most subjects, and very good in modern foreign languages. It is satisfactory in religious education, but this is lower than in other subjects because not enough attention is given to the quality of written work and there is a lack of challenge in homework assignments. Progress in art is unsatisfactory, due in the main to a shallow depth of study.
5. In 2001, results in GCSE examinations are below the national average for the number of students gaining five or more grades A*-C. The results are well below the national average for the number gaining five or more grades A*-G. The results are close to those of similar schools for the number gaining higher grades and for the total scores in GCSE as a whole. However, based on results for the last three years, the trend in the school's average total GCSE point score per pupil was below the national trend.
6. In, business studies, double award science and information technology, the percentages of students reaching the higher grades were well above the national average. They were above average in design and technology and history. In art and design, single award science and German they were below average. They were well below in English, French, mathematics and geography. However, there are signs that the overall progress of students is beginning to accelerate.

7. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good overall. It is very good in business studies and information technology. The standards of work seen in lessons mirror this improvement, but they are still below average in English, mathematics, science and art.

8. Standards of literacy are below average, although the school has introduced a variety of relevant initiatives, including adopting the National Literacy Strategy in Year 7. Students' speaking and listening skills are weak. They often find it hard to develop and sustain argument in extended writing. The technical accuracy and presentation of their work are in need of improvement. However, Year 7 students following the English Progress Units and those with special educational needs make good progress from a low base in learning literacy skills. Some departments have made particularly good progress in ensuring that students are given many opportunities to develop their skills. The history department, for example, places emphasis on high standards of presentation, well-constructed, technically accurate essays, and also on the accurate use of the language of the subject. The geography department has devised its own policy to ensure that literacy is taught in lessons, as well as subject skills and knowledge. Nevertheless, literacy provision and its management across the curriculum are currently unsatisfactory because literacy is not fully embedded in the work of all departments and, therefore, the expected rise in standards is not yet apparent.

9. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory overall. Students benefit from entering the school with better developed skills and confidence in handling problems with number. The school is placing an increased emphasis on the continued development of numeracy skills, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9. Mathematics lessons, for example, frequently involve starter activities, which comprise mental arithmetic exercises and timed number games. Mathematics teachers have received relevant training, but frequent staffing changes have reduced its impact across the school. However, good use of numeracy is being made to support the progress of students with special educational needs and also in modern foreign languages. Use in most subjects is satisfactory, though it is limited in geography. In science, students demonstrate satisfactory skills of numeracy, but their abilities are more restricted during the GCSE courses.

10. The students are making good progress in literacy and numeracy in the Learning Support Unit. In mainstream classes, students with special educational needs are making good progress in English, design and technology, history, modern foreign languages and physical education. This good progress is associated with good support from learning support assistants (LSAs) and with teachers involving them fully in all aspects of the lessons through the use of questioning and special materials.

11. The numbers studying GCE A Level courses have been well below the national average since 1999, and the numbers of students studying AS Level courses in 2001 were below average. Standards reached in the Sixth Form overall are below average, and no students gained A or B grades in the A Level examinations in 2000. However, in relation to the low prior attainment of students entering the Sixth Form, AS results are more encouraging. GNVQ courses in art and in health and social care demonstrate a full pass rate, with half the students reaching distinction level. Attainment in individual subjects is variable. In English, mathematics, art and history, it is below average. It is satisfactory in information technology, design technology, modern languages, physical education and business studies. With the exception of mathematics, achievement is at least satisfactory. It is good in information technology, history and modern languages.

Sixth Form

12. In 2001, results in GCE A and AS examinations were below national averages. However, it is not possible to make statistically accurate comparisons against the national average for individual subjects, as the numbers entered are too small to ensure reliability. At GCE A Level there were entries for eight subjects, and all students entered obtained graded results in business studies, design and technology, English literature, French and German. Half of the students entered in history obtained a graded result (in the A-E range). There were no graded results in geography and mathematics. Of the total of 17 A Level entries, 65 per cent achieved grades C to E; there were no grades in the A to B range.

13. There were 29 subject entries for GCE AS Level, covering nine subjects. Of these, seven per cent were graded A-B and 55 per cent graded C-E. All students entered for biology, business studies, chemistry, German and physics obtained a graded result. In English language, 88 per cent achieved a graded result, while for French it was 40 per cent and history 33 per cent. There were no grades A-E obtained in mathematics.

14. Of the small number of entries for GNVQ Advanced Level examinations in health and social care and in art, the majority achieved distinction and merit grades and all achieved a pass.

15. Overall, these results represent satisfactory achievement by students in the Sixth Form, in the light of their prior attainment at age 16. Although still below the national average, standards in the Sixth Form are rising.

16. Students are able to retake English language, business studies and mathematics GCSE at the end of Year 12 if they did not achieve a grade C or above at the end of Year 11. In 2001, of the 12 subject entries in these three subjects, only 33 per cent achieved a grade C.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

17. Students' attitudes to school are good overall. They are proud of their school and keen to take advantage of the opportunities it offers. Most students respond well to constant encouragement to work hard and do their best. The result is a positive climate for learning. Interest in and enthusiasm for what they are asked to do in lessons is particularly good when teachers' expectations are high and the work is stimulating and challenging. For example, in a design and technology lesson for Year 7 students, the enthusiastic and lively teaching style engaged and inspired the class, so that the students were keen to learn and eager to achieve well. In a Year 9 netball lesson, the students were responsive to the good teaching and were enthusiastic and interested throughout the lesson, producing concrete gains in learning. Where work is less well matched and the teacher's subject knowledge is limited, their interest wanes and poor behaviour results.

18. The behaviour of the students is good. Students are polite and are only too willing to tell visitors about the positive aspects of their school and of the opportunities open to them. All adults at the school provide positive role models for students by showing respect and treating them consistently. Students respect teachers and the opinion of others. Good behaviour is promoted through the use of rewards, where the accumulation of merit stamps can give rise to solid benefits such as vouchers or the opportunity of 'winning' a mountain bike. Students socialise together in the dining hall at breakfast club and lunch-time in a

pleasant and friendly atmosphere. Fixed term exclusions are used as a last resort and there has been only one permanent exclusion over the last year. Both permanent and fixed term exclusions have declined steadily since the last inspection, with some help from the local education authority (LEA), as the school has become a learning environment that includes all.

19. Attendance rates have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. Nevertheless, it was noted during the inspection that attendance in some lessons dropped to unacceptable levels due to poor punctuality, illness and 'study leave' by some students. The school puts in an enormous amount of time and effort in ensuring that students regularly attend school. Some parents, however, still do not recognise that regular attendance is crucial in raising the attainment of their children, nor do they make enough effort to ensure that their children arrive promptly.

20. Students talk with empathy about victims of bullying or racism and they also acknowledge the positive ways in which the school responds to their concerns. Incidents of bullying are infrequent. Students and parents report that such incidents are dealt with promptly and effectively. Students produced some excellent work on anti-racism which encouraged them to think about a cultural heritage different from their own and the impact of their actions on others: they recorded their thoughts and feelings on video.

21. Support groups are organised in an attempt to stop cases of bullying. The FAB.com (Ferryhill Against Bullying) group is an innovative project whereby students themselves are trained in listening skills to sort out disputes and incidents amicably. This group, along with other similar projects throughout the school, empower students to take an active role in their own well-being.

22. The quality of relationships is very good and a strength of the school. Most students enjoy working together, interacting socially and participating in recreational activities. They listen to the views of others and support one another in celebrating good work. This supportive learning environment provides students with confidence and raises self-esteem.

23. The school has worked hard at researching and implementing the Framework for Effective Learning, which takes into account the way individual students learn best. Students are beginning to understand how they learn, and are taking increasing control of their own learning. When given the opportunity and support, students take responsibility to serve the school through the School Council, by volunteering to support younger students, or by being trained in peer support. Opportunities for them to take initiative and responsibility within the classroom, however, are more limited.

Sixth Form

24. The attitudes of Sixth Form students to their school and to their work are satisfactory overall. Sensible behaviour and respect for others are characteristics of these students. The girls tend to be better motivated to study than the boys, and girls tend to ask more questions in class and of their tutors. The school has a strong emphasis on the students' personal development and the head of the Sixth Form devotes much of her time in one-to-one dialogue with the students.

25. Many students devote insufficient time to their academic work, often through commitments to part-time employment, and this has a negative impact on the standards they achieve. Most students need to develop more rigorous attitudes towards their own personal and learning skills when not in the classroom. The attendance of the students is satisfactory overall, although unsatisfactory attendance by a significant minority is hindering their progress.

26. Students who take English and mathematics are often too passive in their approaches to learning and many lack confidence. Art students have satisfactory attitudes to the subject and those studying ICT are very positive. Business studies students respond well when there is variety in teaching methods. In history, design technology and physical education lessons the response of students is very positive because they have the utmost confidence in their teachers. There is a genuine sense of purpose and co-operation between students and teachers in modern foreign language lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

27. The overall quality of teaching is good, with over a quarter of the lessons observed very good or excellent. The teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all of the lessons seen, and the percentage of teaching that is good or better is consistent across all year groups. These figures show very good improvement since the last inspection.

28. Overall, teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subjects, and this has a positive impact on students' learning. However, the staffing difficulties experienced by the school, in relation to long-term absence and recruitment and retention of specialist staff, has had an impact on the overall quality of teaching and subsequent standards, particularly in mathematics and English.

29. In the best lessons observed, teachers use well-organised activities and high expectations as a means of ensuring that students behave and co-operate. Students are clear about what is expected of them in relation to their work, attitude and behaviour if they are to achieve well. As a result, they work hard and behave in ways that are appropriate to effective learning. Good examples of learning that was accelerated in lessons as a result of skilful management by the teachers were seen in some history, design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. The effective use of open questions to check students' understanding and to encourage them to think more deeply were features of the best lessons observed in the majority of subjects.

30. The quality of teachers' planning is good overall. Good planning in the majority of subjects ensures that demanding yet achievable targets challenge the majority of students. In history, for example, the high quality of planning of lessons and units of work incorporates a range of learning strategies to suit the range of students' needs. In music, well-planned lessons get the best out of students and ensure that all are well catered for, including the gifted and talented. However, in some English, geography and religious education lessons, more challenging activities for the higher attaining students are not always planned for sufficiently. Teachers generally use a wide range of teaching methods that are well chosen to support learning and keep students interested in their work.

31. The overall use of time, support staff and resources is satisfactory. In some departments, time is used effectively and resources are well chosen to develop a range of learning skills. In science, for example, teachers make very efficient use of time by setting clear time-scales. Students made good progress as a result. In some lessons, 'starter activities' are used effectively to engage students' interest from the very beginning of the

lesson. In geography, teachers make good use of audio-visual resources. Here, students respond very well to visual stimulus and gain much, for example, from a video clip on the development of coastlines. This is not the case across all departments, however. Whilst the art department is well resourced for ceramics, there are few occasions when students work with clay. Work in printing and textiles is a very small proportion of the work of the department, while computers, scanners, digital cameras and specialist software figure little, though they are common enough in art education. Across the curriculum, there is not enough use of ICT to support learning. Throughout the school, when classroom assistants are present, they make a good contribution to the effective progress of students' work, and students with special educational needs are particularly well supported in the classroom.

32. There are some examples of departments where the quality and use of ongoing assessment is good. However, it is unsatisfactory overall across the school, with too much inconsistency across departments. In science, for example, teachers use assessment data effectively to monitor students' progress and set targets for improvement. In history, assessment and the evaluation of performance has led to a greater understanding of what is needed for further improvement. Teachers use continuous assessment well in modern foreign language, music and physical education lessons, involving the students in assessing their own and peer performance. In geography, teachers keep good record books that contain a rich seam of continuous assessment of students' work, but this is not yet used well enough to assess individual progress or to set 'smart' targets for improvement. In design and technology, teachers mark work regularly, but do not give sufficient attention to written guidance points on how students might improve their work. In mathematics, the quality and use of assessment is inconsistent, while marking, when undertaken, is not always carried out in accordance with the agreed school policy. The quality of marking is variable. Some includes significant feedback to the students indicating where the working is incorrect and how improvements could be made. Other marking sometimes contains very limited feedback to the students. In English, work seen during the inspection revealed a significant weakness in marking and assessment within the department. Some teachers do not regularly mark students' work. There is little evidence to show that teachers in Years 7 to 9 use National Curriculum assessment data to show students exactly what they must do to improve, or to identify how they can be helped. Although students are set individual targets in terms of the levels or grades to be achieved at the end of their courses, few teachers give sufficient guidance on how this can be done. Homework is not consistently given to consolidate and extend learning within all subjects of the curriculum.

33. The quality of teaching is good in the Learning Support Unit and in the learning support base. Activities are carefully chosen to enable the students to meet their individual targets. There are good routines here that make the students feel secure. There is always plenty to do, which means that the students maintain interest and behave well. The support offered by the Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) to subject teachers is of a very high standard, which enables the teachers to involve all the students positively. The Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and LSAs make very good use of ICT to interest the students and to enable them to improve their numeracy and literacy skills.

34. Most subject teachers are good at asking questions that are suited to the needs of each pupil. Some are able to work with the LSAs to produce different worksheets to suit individual students' needs. However, these strategies are not sufficiently developed across the whole teaching staff, and teachers do not assess the students' work in a manner that demonstrates progress against their individual targets over time. They make little positive

use of each pupil's individual education plan (IEP). Assessment procedures in all areas of the work of the learning support department are not sufficiently developed to be able to demonstrate the progress that pupils make towards meeting their individual targets over time and this is an area for development.

Sixth Form

35. The quality of teaching throughout the Sixth Form is good, although the quality of teaching in the subjects that the team focussed upon was satisfactory overall. Teaching was satisfactory in four out of the five subjects, namely English, mathematics, business studies and art. In information and communication technology (ICT), teaching was very good. In English lessons, the limited range of teaching strategies and the limited opportunities for students to learn independently impeded their progress at times. Teachers in English displayed a good range of open questions, which encouraged students to participate and think critically. In mathematics, there was generally an appropriate range of teaching and learning approaches, with relevant and appropriate links to other subjects. The quality of teaching in art ranged from unsatisfactory to very good. A very good lesson was enhanced by the presence of the artist in residence. In unsatisfactory art lessons, students were not stimulated and so they lacked enthusiasm. Good subject knowledge and good question and answer sessions were strong features of the satisfactory business studies lessons. The sharing of objectives at the beginning of lessons and good one-to-one support for students were some of the many positive characteristics of the very good ICT teaching.

36. The quality of Sixth Form teaching in the history department is a strength. The thorough preparation of lessons and good subject knowledge significantly enhance lessons. In Sixth Form design and technology, the teacher's planning was detailed and appropriately matched to the needs of the students. In a well-taught health and social care lesson, the teacher's strong subject knowledge and confident delivery of the theory enabled students to learn with confidence and enthusiasm. In lessons in both German and French, there were good relationships between students and teachers. This led to a healthy spirit of co-operation.

37. The school has not, as yet, addressed the teaching of the key skills of communication, the application of number or ICT in a co-ordinated way. The development of these key skills and the monitoring of students' progress in them are areas for urgent attention and action.

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

38. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good for students in Years 7 to 9 and very good for those in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum is broad, balanced, and thoughtfully adapted to provide varied, flexible courses that are well suited to students' individual needs. Teachers and governors continuously review and update the school's provision, which is emulated by other local establishments. The school has gained the School's Curriculum Award and the Healthy Schools Award. As well as offering a wide range of qualifications, the curriculum provides a sound basis for students' personal and social development. The school provides very good careers guidance and a successful work-related programme for students who benefit from a modified National Curriculum. The planning and teaching of the curriculum reflect the school's strong inclusive ethos, providing pathways to success and equal opportunities for all.

39. A concerted response to the recommendations of the last inspection has led to significant improvements, including better allocations of time to art, a GCSE course in religious education for all students, and less complex setting arrangements in English and mathematics. Modern foreign languages now make a stronger contribution to students' learning, as do the discrete courses in information and communication technology (ICT). Nevertheless, statutory requirements are still not fully met in the provision of a daily act of collective worship and of religious education in the Sixth Form. The school does not meet the requirement for planned use of ICT across all subjects throughout the school. The provision of GNVQ courses for some students in Year 9 and for all students in Years 10 and 11 reflects a boldly vocational bias.

40. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 builds on very good links with local primary schools. The teaching time of 25 hours a week builds on government recommendations. All National Curriculum subjects are taught, together with religious education. The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) pays good attention to major issues, including health, drug and sex education, and citizenship, with significant themes taught to all year groups. The PSHE programme makes a good contribution to the development of students' interpersonal and decision making skills. The division of students in all three years into two equivalent bands, with further selection into appropriate classes for different subjects, ensures a good match of teaching to students' learning requirements. All students learn French and over half learn German in addition. Provision for students with special educational needs is good, involving beneficial withdrawal for literacy instruction in small classes and good support in lessons.

41. All students in Years 10 and 11 study a core of English, mathematics, science, physical education, religious education and careers, with optional subjects added in Year 11. Students have a wide range of option choices, with different emphases on academic, practical and work-related studies. Boys and girls, including those with special educational needs, follow one of three pathways leading to external qualifications. Additional GCSE subjects, vocational courses and programmes specifically designed for individuals or groups extend the range of options available. Each student's choices are carefully considered, and much thought goes into catering for specific requirements. An extra ICT class is created, for example, to cope with growing student interest, or lessons after school accommodate small numbers studying music. An unusually large number of boys and girls study two languages. The inclusion of a vocational subject in every student's programme has proved both popular and successful.

42. The inclusive nature of the curriculum is well illustrated by the care and attention devoted to raising students' self esteem and motivation to study. This is promoted through well-designed packages such as a family learning project for students and their parents. Original thinking and profitable use of external resources underpin the work-related pathway, which combines conventional lessons in school with weekly work experience and study in a local college. The school has identified its gifted and talented students and, as recommended in the previous inspection report, makes some provision for them through curricular enrichment in various subject areas. However, a properly identified and co-ordinated programme has yet to emerge. Some students who are borderline candidates at GCSE in the range C/D are offered a 'Go for It' programme to boost their self-esteem. This is successful, and training is being cascaded through significant staff.

43. The school has greatly improved its extra-curricular life, with many subjects offering clubs, extra activities in or out of school, such as the thriving Interact club and Young Enterprise schemes, and study visits locally or further afield. There are numerous games fixtures and regular involvement in local sporting competitions, which produce a high degree of success. Frequent good opportunities exist for musicians to display their talents in school

and the surrounding district. A Comenius link with other schools in Europe as well as trips to France and Germany bring students into contact with their neighbours abroad. Numerous very good links are maintained with the local community; several aspects of school life are supported by business, industry and the college of further education. Members of the public use the school's computer and adult education facilities daily. An artist in residence makes useful contributions to students' learning, though opportunities for further cultural enrichment are underdeveloped in art and religious education.

44. Careers and vocational education are very good. They make a strong contribution to the positive view of the future of the vast majority of the students, who are very well prepared for the next step in their education. The two leaders in the area are highly committed enthusiasts, who relate very well to the careers service and the range of providers of extended education and training. Vocational guidance is effectively taught from Year 9, and all students undergo work experience. All students receive three formal interviews during Years 10 and 11 and all have mentors in Year 11. There is a firm and effective structure of advice and guidance.

45. The school has established a strong position in its community, and is home for an evening centre. The On Line Centre provides a link with New College, Durham, and is used by adults during the day. It encourages a cradle-to-grave view of education. Further links with University of Durham have led to the School Targeted Aspiration Raising Scheme for Year 9 students, a study guide for students, and Business and Enterprise opportunities for students in Year 11. In addition, students are provided with an induction day at the Stockton Campus which focuses on raising student and parent awareness to opportunities beyond school. Teachers from the school are members of various community groups, such as the residents' association and local health community.

46. Spiritual development in the school is good. The overwhelming majority of students leave the school with strong and positive hopes for the future. The strength of spiritual development lies in the very positive ethos of the school, founded on its mission statement: 'Aim high for comprehensive success'. Staff work intelligently to create an atmosphere where all students can begin to grow and flourish, respecting others and being respected themselves. They provide good role models, and very good relationships throughout the school create an atmosphere of trust and safety. Inclusion is developed well. The very good learning opportunities offered by the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form give opportunities for all. Over ninety per cent of students are entered for both the English language and the English literature examinations. This is an unusually high percentage. Year 11 assemblies are organised each week so that individual students can meet with their mentors as a positive check on progress. Assemblies are carefully planned, and visiting speakers from a wide range of backgrounds deliver a variety of social and ethical messages. Thought-provoking themes are offered each week in poster form to be given in assembly and followed up in tutorial time. Unfortunately, though, not all tutors display the poster or follow up the thought. The annual departmental review includes an evaluation of the curriculum for opportunities to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The delivery of spiritual education through the subjects of the curriculum is satisfactory at best. There is no evidence of it in maths and it is a weakness in business education, ICT and surprisingly, in art. Good opportunities are taken in religious education, English and history.

47. Moral development is good in most subjects of the curriculum. Students learn the difference between right and wrong. There is a strong work ethic in modern foreign languages and in special educational needs, with clear routines, high expectations of students' work and behaviour and a clear structure of rewards. The issues-based curriculum in history, for example, faces students with major moral issues to compare with their own

developing values. Students learn a good sense of fair play from their physical education lessons. The school merit system leads to a major prize at the end of the year.

48. Social development in the school is good. Students are offered the opportunity to work in pairs and small groups in the majority of subjects. They listen with respect to the opinions of others and learn to value opposing viewpoints. They learn good teamwork and good sharing attitudes in physical education.

49. Cultural development in the school is satisfactory overall. The music department makes very good contributions to the cultural development of the students. A good number of performing groups play at a variety of functions and competitions outside of school. The head of music has strong links with the feeder primary schools whose students perform jointly with the secondary school, so that good expectations are established before students reach the age of 11. The modern foreign linguists have good links with schools abroad and make visits. Cultural development in other departments is more limited and opportunities are missed. The school could do more to celebrate the cultures of a multi-ethnic population.

50. The students' spiritual, moral and social development is good in the learning support base and in the Learning Support Unit. Spiritual development is enhanced by the ongoing development of the students' positive self-image. Their moral development is enhanced by very good adult role models and a clear understanding of what constitutes inappropriate behaviour. Their social development is enhanced by a very positive social ethic in which the group functions well together, taking turns and helping one another. The students who have been withdrawn to the Learning Support Unit are more confident and settled when they return to their main classes. As a result of well-targeted support, students are able to access the curriculum better. For example, lower attaining students are able to access GCSE courses in English more easily.

Sixth Form

51. The quality and range of academic and vocational courses that the students in the Sixth Form are offered are very broad and generous. The school attempts to meet the needs of all its students and strives to provide appropriate courses at appropriate levels, whether based on the school's site or elsewhere. Current students are offered a choice of fourteen subjects at school, three at a neighbouring school and one at a local Sixth Form college. Sixth Form students who were interviewed praised the school for the variety of courses at different levels that were on offer. The open access Sixth Form provides for students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs. The school has a very strong commitment to equality of opportunity and access. It responds well to the local circumstances, working very well with other education providers and industry. The headteacher is currently working with colleagues from neighbouring schools and colleges to provide an even richer curriculum that maximises the use of staffing and resources over the consortium. The school's commitment to the life-long learning of the students is a very positive feature. The development of online learning features significantly in the headteacher's vision, but the development of key skills in literacy and numeracy are not key aspects of the curriculum at present.

52. The new English language AS and A2 courses are popular and well suited to students' abilities. The mathematics curriculum is appropriate and meets current demand. A broader base of curricular opportunities would enhance the current business studies course. There is a good range of courses in art. In information and communication technology (ICT), there is a need to provide students not taking the AVCE course with alternative structured ICT courses. The breadth and balance of the curriculum is satisfactory in English, mathematics and business studies. It is very good in ICT but unsatisfactory in art.

53. The school does not meet the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for the Sixth Form students nor a programme of religious education that meets the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

54. The wide ranging and effective curriculum enrichment programme for students consists of ten well-planned personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons each term. In addition, all Sixth Former students are taken off their normal timetable for one day each term. There is a good variety of sports in the range of extra-curricular activities, including football, basketball, netball, cricket, ice skating, dry skiing, bowling and go-karting. Students have the opportunity to take the Community Sports Leaders Award (CSLA) and to work in primary schools to gain the necessary experience. This course is of a good quality and popular with students.

55. Students have travelled to London and visited places such as Downing Street, The Palace of Westminster, the National Portrait Gallery and Westminster Abbey. This good opportunity broadens their perspective and provides them with first hand experiences of the nation's history and culture. Students have the opportunity to go on exchange visits to France and Germany. All students are encouraged to become Millennium Volunteers. Some four or five students have mentored younger students in their reading. The students feel that the PSHE programme gives them a good preparation for life after school, and they value these lessons. Sixth Formers who are applying to universities spoke highly of the help and assistance given by the school and the careers service. Students spoke of the growing relationship that the school has with certain universities, and the value of being awarded places on university summer schools. The PSHE programme is a well-planned and comprehensive one that covers key areas of students' personal development.

56. The spiritual life of the Sixth Form is satisfactory. Nevertheless, the weekly assembly often covers predominantly Christian issues and concepts. In the week of the inspection, the teacher in charge of religious education led and delivered a well-planned assembly that looked at public and private morality. Within the new English language course, students are made aware of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural background of the texts being studied.

57. The provision for students' moral development is good. They receive much input from the head of sixth and a Sixth Form tutor regarding expectations for their general conduct in school and their roles in the wider society. The school's student counsellor makes a significant contribution and is regularly called upon to counsel, in complete confidence, students with personal problems and general concerns.

58. The provision for students' social development is good. Opportunities for social activities are plentiful in the school holidays, though less so in term time. Nevertheless, there is a rich variety of sporting activities in which the students may participate. For example, during the week of inspection, the Sixth Form football team played and won a match against another local school. Students also have good opportunities to meet with adults in the community when they go on work experience placements. Work placements vary in length from one day a week for childcare students to two-week placements for some others.

59. The provision for students' cultural development is satisfactory. Students have been taken to centres such as London, Newcastle and Durham and have participated in a range of social and cultural activities. Multicultural education is less well developed. For example, some opportunities are missed in art to build upon the rich diversity of the area's cultural heritage, and the study of multi-cultural art is limited. Nevertheless, the business studies department is forging strong links with industry through work experience and through the Durham University enterprise project (SEED) in which students are given good opportunities to solve a business problem with a specific company.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

60. One of the strengths of the school's work is its success in making students feel secure, valued and confident. Each student is valued and the school tries very hard to meet the personal needs of every individual. These strong procedures ensure that the support given to every student is of a high standard. However, the arrangements for monitoring the academic performance of individual students are inconsistently implemented. There is insufficient attention given to helping individual students identify targets for academic improvement.

61. The pastoral team is very strong. It benefits from leadership that is focused sharply on doing whatever it takes to support individual students and encourage them to do well. The students have access to an excellent school counsellor with whom they can discuss feelings or seek help with emotional problems. This service is extended to families and staff of the school where needed. This support means that some obstacles to learning are removed and that students with problems get back into lessons quickly.

62. All staff provide high levels of pastoral care and are very well supported in this role by the headteacher and the senior management team. Students are offered a variety of courses designed to boost their self-reliance. Some courses are open for both parents and students to attend together, such as the 'Go For It' programme. This six-week course is held on Saturday mornings for parents and students to learn together how to build confidence and self-esteem.

63. The Learning Support Unit has made a good start in enabling some students who might become disaffected to improve their basic skills in literacy and numeracy and in personal and social development. However, the block arrangement of groups of students from different year groups does not seem to be the most effective way of using the facility. The school needs to consider how students' behaviour can be assessed and targets set more rigorously for each placement. There should be clearer individual targets for each placement, including targets for full-time reintegration into mainstream classes. Consideration needs to be given to admitting students for differing periods of time, whether full-time or part-time or from specific subjects. There also needs to be ongoing assessment during the placement that can be used to evaluate its effectiveness and the effectiveness of the work of the unit as a whole.

64. The school makes good provision overall for the care, health and welfare of students, and has secure systems in place to support all groups. The procedures for health and safety are effective: there are satisfactory arrangements for first aid including qualified first aiders. However, the absence of a suitable medical or welfare room in a school of this size is unusual and a weakness. Satisfactory procedures for child protection are in place.

65. Attendance is carefully monitored by the school, which has set targets for both attendance levels and unauthorised absence. All students are telephoned on the first day of absence. This procedure, combined with the good partnership the school has with most parents, has helped to reduce the rate of unauthorised absence to an acceptable level.

66. The ethos of the school is its strength. Students like their teachers and teachers care well for their students, so that all lessons proceed in a comfortable atmosphere of trust and security that enables learning. Relationships between staff and students are very good. Students are keen to tell visitors that their teachers are fair and caring, and teachers talk about their 'canny' students with pride. The school's procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are very good. Lines of responsibility are clearly defined and applied. They effectively support the school's behaviour and discipline policy of which the students have a good understanding. Students respond positively to the expectations made of them and to the school's reward system.

67. The school's procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are very good. Records are kept of any incidents of bullying or racism and students are confident in the staff's ability to act on anything that is reported to them.

68. Monitoring and supporting students' personal development is very good. The teachers' close knowledge of students' personal strengths and weaknesses is accumulated through close relationships with the primary schools, running summer schools, participation of students in extra curricular activities, trips and residential visits, initiatives the students take and the offices they hold. In addition, form tutors meet regularly with the heads of year responsible for monitoring the personal progress of students in their year groups and supportive action plans are devised for individual students. The students acknowledge the effort that staff make and the significant boost this support adds to their self-confidence.

69. The school's procedures for assessing students' academic progress and attainment are, overall, unsatisfactory since assessment is not at present being used in a focused way in all subjects to raise standards. In science, there is effective use of data to monitor students' progress and set targets. In geography, the head of department makes a good analysis of the examination results of the previous year and uses the information to set targets for improvement. In physical education, assessment is being well developed, although students need to be made more aware of their standards in relation to National Curriculum Levels.

70. The use of assessment to guide curriculum planning is good in history and science. In these subjects, teachers use the information they have on students to plan lessons and units of work that incorporate a range of teaching strategies to suit individual students' needs. However, such information is not yet consistently used to good effect in art, English and mathematics to inform curricular planning.

71. Arrangements for monitoring the academic and personal needs of students with special educational needs are good. Students' with statements of special educational needs are given clear objectives relating to their individual needs. The learning support department uses the objectives well to set overall targets for learning and for personal and social development, including behaviour, in each pupil's individual education plan (IEP). The annual reviews of statements are good as parents and carers are involved and students are enabled to judge their progress in meeting their targets and in writing new ones. Not all IEPs are clear, however, because they confuse the school's suggested strategies with the students' targets.

Sixth Form

Assessment

72. Assessment of students' work in the Sixth Form needs more attention and is unsatisfactory. It is not common practice as yet for all teachers to use assessment to guide curriculum and lesson planning. The students who were interviewed found that marking and feedback were good in English, French and history, but the standard of marking is satisfactory overall.

73. In English lessons, the marking of essays and investigations is usually helpful. In mathematics, students mark most of their work in classroom review sessions. In business studies, there is currently a lack of positive strategies for the early identification of and action to deal with underachievement. The students' information and communication technology (ICT) work is well marked, and teachers set their students realistic targets. The large uptake of twelve ICT students in Year 12 shows that students' needs are well met. Since the arrival of the new head of art, assessment of students' work has much improved. Support for students' academic work in art is satisfactory, but the department needs to enhance its careers support and guidance.

74. In physical education, the support and guidance given to students on both courses is satisfactory. In design and technology, a dedicated team of very experienced staff gives extensive support to students. Support and guidance are very good in history, where marking is both regular and diagnostic. There is good one to one support in modern foreign language lessons.

Advice, support and guidance

75. The educational and personal support given to Sixth Formers is satisfactory overall, though the academic guidance is not as good as the personal support. Students who were interviewed found their teachers approachable and willing to stay behind after lessons to give them help. They also felt that they were usually treated as adults.

76. The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance provided to learners is good. The Sixth Form brochure is a well-constructed, informative and detailed document. The quality of careers advice is good and prepares students well for future courses or career opportunities. Students spoke positively about the advice and support they had received related to their university applications, and praised the school for opportunities to go to University Open Days at York and Northumbria.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

77. Despite efforts by the school to encourage responses, only a small percentage of parents replied to the questionnaire and only 8 parents attended the pre-inspection meeting. Parents who attended the meeting were very supportive of the school and felt that they would find it easy to approach staff should they have any complaints or problems. Analysis of the questionnaire shows that parents feel the school is well led and managed, that it expects their children to do well, and that it is helping them to become mature and responsible. Nevertheless, some parents reported that they did not feel well informed or that their children got the right amount of work to do at home.

78. The inspection agreed with parents that the setting of homework was inconsistent throughout the school. Some teachers give homework regularly and make sure that students write it up in their planners for scrutiny by parents. It was clear, though, from looking at planners that some teachers do not follow this practice. However, inspectors judge that parents are kept well informed. Each student has a planner, which is used to communicate between school and home as well as recording homework. The planner is signed by parents and checked each week. School reports on students' progress are useful and informative, showing parents the work students have covered as well as appropriate targets set. Added to this are the regular parents' consultations, weekly newsletters, information on the school's web site and telephone calls. The school provides a comprehensive prospectus that covers all aspects of school life. The governors' annual report to parents fulfils all statutory requirements.

79. The FOCUS group (Friends of the Comprehensive United for Success) was founded after the last inspection. Made up of parents, staff and members of the community, the group works hard throughout the year raising funds to support the school. More than £20,000 has been raised. Although parents are not a visible and pro-active force around the school, they do support the school, when called upon, by attending concerts and open evenings and by helping to raise funds.

80. The school is a focal point in the local community. The headteacher and governors recognise the important role the school can play in serving the local community. Therefore it is open and welcoming, not only to the parents but also to the rest of the community. This has a positive influence on the general ethos of the school and the quality of learning and standards of achievement. There is a UK Online Centre run in conjunction with New College Durham that is very well used by local groups and students alike. There are various night classes and Saturday classes that members of the community can sign up for. There are very good links with local primary schools, and procedures for transfer from Year 6 to Year 7 are very good.

81. At the moment, parents and carers of Year 11 students are involved in setting targets for learning and for personal and social development. The school should consider how parents and carers could be more actively involved, for example, by making a place in the learning support unit conditional on a face-to-face discussion with parents and carers. The current day-to-day involvement of parents and carers is limited.

Students' views of the Sixth Form

82. The school has positive links with parents of Sixth Form students. The impact that parents have on the work of their sons and daughters in the Sixth Form is variable but in line with many other similar schools. The quality of information provided by the school to parents is of a high quality, especially the annual reports. Parents support their sons and daughters well and often express their appreciation to the staff.

83. The students who returned the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school and the good working relationships with the teachers. They valued the documentation provided for them prior to their entry into the Sixth Form, and valued the advice and support given by the teachers. They consider that they are treated as adults and felt that they always have somebody in the school to whom they can turn for advice and

counsel. The minority of students who itemised areas for improvement cited the need for more information about their academic progress, more feedback from the assessment of their work, more in-depth advice about Post 16 opportunities and more culturally relevant activities. Inspectors agreed with the first two areas but not the latter two areas.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

84. The headteacher provides excellent leadership for the school. He provides clear educational direction and has a strong commitment to the development of staff in the drive for school improvement. He is committed to maintaining the standard of Investors in People and to further professional development as an integral part of the school's planned strategy. He is passionate about making 'aiming high for comprehensive success' a reality. The school has a strong senior management team that places a clear emphasis on improving learning for students. Senior managers are effective in fulfilling their responsibility to promote high standards of student achievement. The very strong ethos of the school reflects very well its official aims and values in its work. There is a clear commitment to the inclusion of all students, and effective strategies to bring it about. The school's priorities and development planning for all aspects of special educational needs are very good. This is a genuinely inclusive school where the whole school community respects individual differences and needs.

85. The headteacher has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to ensure continued improvement. The school improvement plan provides an effective structure for identifying school priorities and setting out how these will be addressed. The plan is reviewed regularly by the senior management team and sub-committees of the governing body. Significant developments have been identified and are being addressed, including improving the curriculum, the achievement of students, and the quality of teaching and learning, as well as developing the ethos and community links. The school has successfully extended the curriculum to include vocational elements in Years 10 and 11. Sixth Form provision continues to be developed in partnership with the local Further Education College to secure curriculum coverage and to raise achievement. A teaching and learning framework, developed by staff in conjunction with local education authority (LEA) staff, and a Year 11 mentoring programme, are contributing to the improvement of teaching and learning and the subsequent achievement of students. The very good links established by the headteacher with local residents, voluntary groups, schools, further and higher education and business, are having a positive impact on the quality of educational outcomes.

86. The school has developed a good strategy for performance management. All teachers now have performance targets, and common procedures have been agreed for monitoring and review. As a result, professional development opportunities for teachers are now closely related to the school's performance management process.

87. Overall, the leadership and management of subjects are satisfactory. Where it is very good or excellent, for example in design and technology, history, and science, there is clear vision for what has to be done to further improve. In these subjects, monitoring of the work of the department is systematic, schemes of work are effective, and the monitoring and evaluation of students' performance is good. Appropriate procedures have been developed for monitoring, evaluating and developing teaching and learning. However all heads of department do not follow a common approach in monitoring the work of their departments in raising standards, and more consistency is needed. The continued development of middle managers has been significantly hindered by staff shortages.

88. Statutory targets for student performance have been set. In doing so, the school makes good use of data on students' attainment on entry, results of standardised tests and teachers' assessments and comparison with other schools. These targets are kept under review with officers of the local education authority and revised appropriately in the light of success to date.

89. Governors know the school very well. They have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and are a strength of the school. The governors' committee structure is used very effectively to contribute to the development and monitoring of school policies, such as the policy for special educational needs. Governors are very well informed about developments in the school through the headteacher's reports, presentations by heads of department and senior managers, and through regular visits to classrooms. They make an important contribution to determining, supporting and monitoring priorities and action in the school improvement plan, and are very effective in monitoring the school's finances. The governing body is very effective in fulfilling its responsibilities, with the exception of the statutory requirements relating to the provision of information and communication technology (ICT), a daily act of collective worship and religious education in the Sixth Form.

90. Management of the school's finances is very good. Educational priorities are supported through the school's financial planning and the budget is regularly reviewed. Best value principles are effectively applied. Regular reviews ensure that best use is made of the resources available to the school and the best means are adopted to effect the desired improvements. The school makes very good use of all grants and additional funding, and links decisions on spending to educational priorities to very good effect.

91. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining key staff and the long-term sickness of other staff continue to retard development in significant areas of the school. English, mathematics, ICT, special educational needs, art and geography have all suffered from combinations of these factors. The forward momentum of improvement has slowed, despite the best efforts of those involved and the imaginative recruiting by the governors and the head teacher. Nevertheless, in other areas of the school, the match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum is satisfactory overall. Whilst the use of non-specialist teachers in the school has been heavily reduced since the last inspection, lack of subject specialist knowledge still has a negative influence on teaching and learning in maths, ICT and religious education.

92. The school is now the biggest employer in Ferryhill, but it remains difficult to recruit and retain non-teaching staff in a number of areas. Though the number of support staff for those with special educational needs is satisfactory compared with other schools of the same size, there are not enough for the above average number of students with a statement of need.

93. The school provides a good base for the training of student teachers, and induction arrangements for staff new to the school are effective. The professional development of staff is satisfactory overall and strong in some departments. For example, it is closely linked with development targets in special educational needs and has underpinned very good improvement in teaching and learning in geography. All teachers have completed training in the use of computers in teaching.

94. The school manages the condition of its accommodation well in the face of difficulty. The physical education area is undergoing a programme of significant repair and development, and the closure of the gymnasium and the swimming pool has had a negative impact on the students' learning activities. The accommodation for the learning support base is good and that of the learning support unit very good and has a positive impact on student learning.

95. Resources for learning are good across the school. Those for ICT are very good. The proportion of students to computers at 4:1 is much better than the national average, and the school has invested heavily to provide all rooms with Internet access and to fit smart boards in classrooms. A number of heads of department make effective use of laptops supplied by the school for storing and interpreting assessed information about students. The music department is well supplied with electronic equipment. The learning support unit is well resourced, especially with computers and software.

Sixth Form

Leadership and management

96. The head of Sixth Form gives strong and effective leadership and management, exerting her authority in a calm and firm manner for the good of the students. The Sixth Form adds value to the life of the school and is well integrated into its ethos and aspiration. The governing body is totally committed to the provision of Sixth Form education and has released the necessary finance to make it work. Governors have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the Sixth Form and have taken an active interest in its development, in conjunction with other local education providers. However, the governing body has not ensured that the school meets the statutory requirement to provide religious education for Sixth Form students.

97. The head of Sixth Form monitors the progress of students well, but there is a need for subject leaders to monitor students' academic progress with more rigour and to take effective action when students are underachieving. The leadership and management of curriculum areas are variable. They are satisfactory in English, ICT and business studies. Until recently, the mathematics department has been adversely affected by difficulties in the recruitment and retention of teachers, including a head of department, which led to unsatisfactory leadership and management. However, it is expected that this picture will change following the recent appointment of a new head of department. The leadership of the art department is now good and the department is in a good position to go forward. The quality of leadership and management is very good in history. It is excellent in design technology, and this makes a significant contribution to the successful results in the subject.

Resources

98. Careful and consistent financial planning supports the educational priorities of the Sixth Form. The school has developed a good strategy for the use of resources and using specific grants. The school funds the Sixth Form generously, and students have sufficient resources with which to pursue their studies. The Sixth Form applies best value principles in all that it does.

99. Although there have been significant staffing problems, the school has managed to recruit and match staff to the demands of its broad and balanced curriculum. The Sixth Form accommodation is adequate overall, but better individual study areas are needed to enhance private study outside the subject areas. Learning resources in the Sixth Form are more than adequate and of good quality. Students also make very good use of the school's Online Centre.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

100. This is an improving school. In order to secure further improvements the governors, headteacher and teaching staff should:

- Continue to raise standards of attainment in all subjects throughout the school.
(Paragraphs: 1-8; 11-12; 101-107; 119-121; 128; 130; 137-139; 158-159; 173; 186; 204-205)
- Develop formal systems to guide middle managers in monitoring and evaluating teaching and its results, to ensure that:
(Paragraphs: 31-32; 34; 60; 63; 69-70; 87; 112-113; 123; 125; 136; 141; 144; 169; 183; 197; 202; 208)
 - * assessment information is used consistently in all subjects to inform planning and set precise targets for what students are to learn;
 - * strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning are clearly identified and acted upon.
- Develop policies for the development of literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects and ensure that they are put in to effect.
(Paragraphs 8-9; 11; 116-117; 127; 164-165)
- Ensure that there is planned use of information and communication technology (ICT) across all subjects in Years 7 to 11.
(Paragraphs: 31; 39; 89; 109; 111; 124; 135; 146; 166; 178; 185; 191; 197; 210)

Other issues to address

- * Ensure that a co-ordinated programme of activities for gifted and talented students is planned, developed and provided across all subjects of the curriculum.
(Paragraphs: 30; 42; 110; 162; 209)
- * Ensure that a daily act of collective worship is provided.
(Paragraphs: 38;89)

Sixth Form

- Raise standards of attainment through the identification and sharing of best teaching practice.
(Paragraphs: 11-12; 35-36; 212-213; 216; 228-229; 231; 234; 236-237)
- Develop the systematic monitoring and evaluation of students' academic progress to ensure that appropriate and challenging targets are set for individual students.
(Paragraphs: 72-73; 83; 97; 214; 219)
- Continue to develop the enrichment curriculum, giving more attention to the cultural and multi-cultural dimension so as to broaden students' horizons and better equip them for lifelong learning.
(Paragraph: 59)

- Enhance students' appreciation of and use of basic skills by ensuring that all students have a continuing education in literacy, numeracy and ICT.
(Paragraphs: 37; 39; 51; 215; 226)
- Ensure that the statutory requirement to teach religious education to Sixth Form students is met.
(Paragraphs: 39; 89; 96; 209)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	144
	Sixth Form	21
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		116

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 - 11

Number	7	31	61	37	5	3	0
Percentage	5	22	42	26	3	2	0

Sixth Form

Number	1	4	9	6	1	0	0
Percentage	5	19	43	28	5	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of students on the school's roll	809	64
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	224	12

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	42	3
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	174	5

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	30
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	29

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.7
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	76	75

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	29	36	48
	Girls	41	48	42
	Total	70	84	90
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	47 (44)	56 (54)	60 (49)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	14 (9)	32 (20)	27 (24)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	24	37	51
	Girls	41	48	51
	Total	65	85	102
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	44 (45)	58 (55)	68 (44)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	16 (13)	32 (23)	23 (18)
	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	95	67	162

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	27	80	87
	Girls	25	58	62
	Total	52	138	149
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	35 (29)	85 (90)	92 (94)
	National	48 (47)	91(91)	96(96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	31.2 (32.3)
	National	39.0

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	11	100
	National	N/A	N/A

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form (Year 13)

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A Level or AS Level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	12	22	34

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A Levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A Levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	3.5	7.5	5.5(2.7)	0	0	0
National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

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

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	873
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	47	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	56
Number of students per qualified teacher	15.6

Education support staff:

Y7– Y13

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	241

Deployment of teachers:

Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	87%
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Average teaching group size:

Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	24.6
Key Stage 4	20.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001
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	£
Total income	2798008.00
Total expenditure	2847177.00
Expenditure per pupil	3265.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	114059.00
Balance carried forward to next year	52181.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	11
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	17

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	8
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

873
58

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	46	9	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	36	55	7	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	46	17	2	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	53	21	5	0
The teaching is good.	34	59	5	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	47	33	17	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	38	3	3	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	34	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	52	31	12	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	50	36	9	2	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	47	0	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	48	14	3	2

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

The majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire responded positively to all aspects of the work of the school.

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 **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- Improving standards of literacy in Year 7.
- Good progress made by students with special educational needs.
- Students behave well and are co-operative in lessons.
- Good improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection.
- All students follow courses in GCSE English and English Literature.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
- Standards of literacy, especially speaking and listening and critical and extended writing skills.
- Planned extension activities for students identified as gifted and talented.
- Revision of planning to ensure opportunities for all students to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in drama, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

101. In the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2001, results in English were well below the national average and below the average of similar schools. Teacher assessments are similar to the test results. The attainment of students on entry is well below the national average.

102. The percentage of A*-C grades attained by students is well below the national average in both English and English literature. However, the results of both boys and girls in 2001 showed a good improvement compared with those of 2000. Most students are not as successful in English and English literature as they are in most other subjects, but the school enters a greater percentage of its students for the two GCSE examinations than most other schools. In terms of A*-G grades, students achieve in line with national average. Girls do better than boys, as they do nationally.

103. Standards of work seen during the inspection were below the national average, although this represents satisfactory achievement given the low attainment of these pupils when they entered the school.

104. Speaking and listening skills remain below average throughout the school. Many students, of all ages and abilities, lack confidence and are reluctant speakers in whole class discussions. Individually, most can answer questions and give explanations, but they rarely volunteer answers, except Year 7 students, many of whom participate readily.

105. By the age of 14, the attainment of students in reading is below average. Most can read a range of texts to obtain information, yet only the most able confidently make inferences, deductions and predictions based on what they read. A range of fiction and non-fiction is readily available in all English rooms, but there are few books for those students who read fluently or who are looking for more challenging texts. There is little evidence of students reading for enjoyment, though some lessons, especially in Years 7 and 8, occasionally begin with a few minutes of quiet reading.

106. Standards of writing by students aged 14 are well below average. Students currently in Year 7 are improving at a faster rate than those in other years. This is because of the department's introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, with its emphasis on the development of vocabulary and sentence structure, which is building on the work already done in primary schools. In Years 7-9, lower attaining students can write simple stories, letters, character studies and diaries, but these are often beset by poor presentation, predictable and limited vocabulary and inadequate punctuation and spelling. Higher attaining students show a growing ability and confidence in the use of complex sentences, and enliven their creative writing with figurative language and a mature vocabulary.

107. Standards of written work by students aged 16 are below average. Unsatisfactory presentation and technical inaccuracy are still common. The high attaining students produce lively and sometimes original stories and descriptions, but even they find factual and critical writing difficult. Girls are usually able to sustain a story or an argument better than boys, and they have fewer problems when writing at length. Lower attaining students often fail to develop their ideas because they do not plan their extended writing effectively. In literature, all students can write about characters in plays and novels and most know that they must support what they say with textual references and quotations. However, this evidence is often poorly selected and, when they do comment on it, many students only explain or paraphrase this evidence rather than analyse it. Students can usually say what literary texts are about, for example the poetry of Simon Armitage or Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. However, few are able to write about how the language, symbolism and imagery contribute to our interpretations of them, which are insights needed to reach the higher grades in the examination.

108. Students with special educational needs make good progress because of the individual support that they receive from teachers and learning support staff. Staff work closely together to plan lessons and help students to achieve their improvement targets. Students who enter Year 7 with a National Curriculum Level below that expected for their age are withdrawn from some classes to do Progress and Catch-up Units. These students are receiving very good assistance from a visiting primary school teacher, and most are improving rapidly. Students in Years 10 and 11 make such good progress that the school is able to enter most of them for both the English and English literature GCSE examinations.

109. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Nevertheless, regular opportunities are not planned for all students to acquire a range of skills in information and communication technology, drama, speaking, listening and numeracy, or to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. In Years 10 and 11, the teaching time allocated to the subject is below that in many schools. This is particularly significant, given students' low standards of literacy and the fact that most of them are preparing for both English and English literature at GCSE. There is a limited range of curriculum enhancement activities, though there is a useful paired reading scheme whereby older students help younger ones to develop their reading skills. In addition, students contribute to the county's anthology of poetry. They attend the GCSE Poetry Day organised by the examination board and after-school support groups for GCSE students. A school newspaper group contributes to the town newsletter and produces *The Grapevine*, which reports school news to parents and students.

110. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. Just over half of the remainder were good, and one was very good. In this lesson, students' learning about adjectives was very well reinforced when they completed posters on their computers and added adjectives from other languages, using foreign dictionaries, to show that they understood how parts of speech are used. Other characteristics of good lessons seen include well-explained learning objectives, a range of activities to interest students of all abilities, good lively lesson pace, and students' strong awareness at the end of

lessons of what they have achieved and what they need to do next. Teachers also make effective use of open questions to check students' understanding and encourage them to think more deeply. They use praise frequently to boost self-confidence and make learning enjoyable and rewarding for their classes. In those lessons with some shortcomings, there are unclear learning objectives, the most able are not challenged and there is a limited range of teaching strategies. There is also a lack of opportunity for the most able to show what they can do and to extend their knowledge and skills when all students in a class are set the same simple homework task. Such tasks are weaker when they are not open-ended and do not offer individual choices, investigations and research.

111. Behaviour is good in lessons. Students are co-operative and positive about the subject and their teachers, and contribute well to the good relationships in the classroom. Students do use information and communication technology (ICT) in English, though opportunities are not planned for each year group and, therefore, students' individual experiences depend upon which teacher they have. Lower attaining students make good use of the interactive *Successmaker* to develop their reading skills but, generally, students' use is limited to word processing and desktop publishing. A Year 9 class was observed using a range of Internet sites to develop their knowledge and understanding of *Macbeth*, and a Year 8 class reported having used *PowerPoint* to give class presentations. However, such lessons are not part of an organised and equitable programme of ICT use within English for all students.

112. Work seen during the inspection revealed a significant weakness in marking and assessment within the department. Marking is inconsistent. Some teachers do not regularly mark students' work, and there is little evidence to show that they use National Curriculum assessment data in Years 7-9 to show students exactly what they must do to improve, or to identify how they can be helped. Although students are set individual targets in terms of the levels or grades to be achieved at the end of their courses, few teachers give sufficient guidance on how this can be done. Assessment information is well displayed in classrooms, but only one teacher referred to it in the course of a lesson during the inspection. Teachers' comments on GCSE work, in those cases where it is marked regularly and thoroughly, are positive and usually more helpful than those made on work in the lower school.

113. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. A new head of department with fresh ideas and vision has only been in post since the start of the term, yet he is already beginning to have a strong impact on the organisation of the department and the quality of its teaching. Procedures for the monitoring of students' work and teachers' marking have not been rigorous enough to date, and the department acknowledges that this is a priority for development. Its schemes of planned work are not sufficiently detailed to ensure that all teachers, especially those who are inexperienced, provide regular opportunities for students to have access to a wide range of learning opportunities. They do not always clearly identify the communication skills to be taught. The new appointment has enabled the headteacher to delegate the responsibility for developing literacy across the curriculum to the former head of department. This is intended to allow his successor to concentrate on managing a department that now has far greater stability than in recent years. Communication in the department is very good. There are regular meetings and staff development appears on most agendas. Resources are good and the newly qualified teachers are well supported by more experienced staff.

114. Staffing difficulties in the department have had a detrimental effect on standards of teaching and learning, particularly in the past two years. These have included the long-term sickness of an experienced teacher and problems with recruiting subject specialists. Current staffing includes two supply teachers and two newly qualified teachers, one of whom is not a specialist.

115. Overall improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. Standards rose last year, but they are lower than at the time of the previous report. The use of assessment by teachers to inform their planning is still unsatisfactory, as is the monitoring of students who make poor progress. Learning opportunities have improved, particularly the wider use of ICT, and so has teaching in lessons. However, drama skills continue to be undeveloped and the library is used even less frequently by students because its principal use is now as a resource centre and teaching area.

116. Standards of literacy in the school are below those expected nationally, although the school has introduced a number of initiatives intended to lead to improvement, including adopting the National Literacy Strategy in Year 7 English classes. Particular weaknesses are in students' speaking and listening skills, their ability to develop and sustain argument in extended writing, and in the technical accuracy and presentation of their work. There is inspection evidence to show that students following the English Progress Units in Year 7 and those with special educational needs are currently making good progress.

117. The teaching of literacy skills is satisfactory. There has been training for staff in other departments on developing teaching strategies, but recommendations and methods have not been fully implemented in many departments. Good practice in all subjects includes teachers regularly sharing learning objectives with students and the prominent display of key subject words in classrooms. However, few departments have yet successfully revised their units of planned pupil work to identify opportunities for the development of literacy. Students are not always helped to overcome their general lack of confidence and fluency in speaking activities because some teachers plan few opportunities for them to use talk to discuss, evaluate or debate in groups. Little use is made of activities such as drama and role-play to encourage students to be creative and to learn from each other. Nevertheless, the history and geography departments have made particularly good progress in developing literacy skills within their subjects. The commitment of the history department to high standards of presentation, well constructed, technically accurate essays in which students use appropriate subject knowledge is impressive. The geography department has also devised its own policy to ensure that literacy as well as geography subject skills and knowledge are taught in lessons.

118. The use of the library and the integration of literacy into students' personal development programmes have also to be investigated and developed. At the moment, there is no agreed whole school literacy policy to reinforce the obligation of heads of department to support the co-ordinator through rigorous monitoring of the planning, teaching and marking of literacy in their subjects.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths:

- GCSE results are improving.
- Teaching is mainly satisfactory and occasionally better.
- Progress is satisfactory for the majority of students throughout the school.

Areas for improvement:

- Inconsistent marking.
- Frequent staff changes have adversely affected the quality of students' experience, the implementation of school policies and the effective management of the department.
- Limited use of information and communication technology (ICT).

119. Standards of attainment in mathematics at the end of Year 9 are below average. The proportion of students reaching the expected level in the national tests has remained broadly constant over the last three years, at A Level below the national average. However, the proportion reaching the expected level in 2001 was average when compared to schools whose students are from similar backgrounds. Test results in mathematics are better than those in English but below those in science. Girls did significantly better than boys in the national tests in 2001. Students' attainment in mathematics on entry to the school is rising, and it is now below rather than well below average. Numeracy skills in particular have risen. Students make satisfactory progress between the ages of 11 and 14. The progress of students with special educational needs is also satisfactory between these ages.

120. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 11 are below average. The percentages of students obtaining grades in the range A-C in recent years have been below average when compared to all schools. This percentage has, however, risen in recent years so that in 2001 it was marginally above average when compared to similar schools. Almost all students in the school are entered for the GCSE examination. The proportion of students who obtain a grade in the range A*-G in 2001 was close to the national average. Boys performed slightly better than the girls in the GCSE in 2001. Progress of students including those with special educational needs is satisfactory between the ages of 14 and 16.

121. Standards of work seen in lessons and in pupils' workbooks are below average. Although the majority of students in the top sets in each year attain national average levels or better, those in the lower sets have below and in some cases well below average levels of attainment. Numeracy skills are improving, and most students particularly in the lower school are becoming increasingly confident and accurate when dealing with problems requiring the use of mental arithmetic. A low attaining Year 9 showed satisfactory numeracy skills when responding to numerical questions as part of a 'starter' activity. However, many in the same class showed a lack of confidence when undertaking revision work in preparation for the forthcoming national tests. On the other hand, a Year 11 class of high attaining students showed good knowledge and understanding when accurately plotting graphs and finding points of intersection to solve given equations.

122. Teaching is mainly satisfactory, sometimes good and occasionally very good. Lessons are well planned, and most contain an appropriate range of teaching and learning approaches. Group work involves good questioning of students to check their level of understanding. In almost all classes, the management of students is effective and standards of discipline are at an appropriate standard. In one unsatisfactory lesson,

however, the poor management of students led to unsatisfactory behaviour and limited learning by the majority of students. One very good lesson involved a very lively and interesting presentation by the teacher, producing excellent responses from the students. Students working on an individual basis are given good support, frequently by several members of staff.

123. There has been a lack of effective management of mathematics in the school. Over the past year the department has been led by two temporary heads of department. Although there are school policies and procedures relating to monitoring and evaluation, these have not been fully implemented within the department. A permanent head of department has been recently appointed and is beginning to implement school policies in the department. The school is also currently seeking to fill the vacant post of second in the department. There have been difficulties in appointing specialist mathematics teachers, and use has had to be made of temporary staff as well as non-specialists. These arrangements, together with the frequent changes in staff that have resulted, have had an adverse effect on the quality of students' learning. Several groups have more than one member of staff teaching them for mathematics, and this adversely affects the continuity of their experiences. However, the school has recently appointed two further specialist teachers, and this will reduce the number of temporary and non-specialist staff.

124. The curriculum for mathematics is satisfactory. Statutory requirements are met, and schemes of work lead to the progressive development of students' knowledge, skills and understanding across the range of requirements. There is, however, only limited evidence of the use of ICT to support teaching and learning in mathematics. Appropriately a greater emphasis is being placed on the further development of students' numeracy skills, particularly in the lower school, as part of the mathematics curriculum. Lessons include mental starter activities, some of which are enjoyed by the students. Good use of numeracy is now being made to support work with students with special educational needs through use of a range of computer software.

125. Assessment in the department is inconsistent. Homework is set, marked and returned to the students in some but not all classes. Marking when undertaken is not always carried out in accordance with the agreed school policy. The quality of marking is variable. Some includes significant feedback to the student, indicating where the working is incorrect and how improvements could be made. Other marking sometimes contains very limited feedback. Some students do not understand the grading system that teachers use in marking. Individual National Curriculum targets are set for students in Year 9 and GCSE targets are set for students in Years 10 and 11. This is good practice, but students' progress in achieving these targets is not monitored closely enough. Because of the substantial changes in staffing, records of students' progress are frequently not available.

126. There have been some improvements since the last inspection but a number of weaknesses remain. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have improved and are now closer to the national average. GCSE results have also improved. Marking continues to be inconsistent. Leadership was good at the time of the last inspection but it has recently been hindered by frequent staff changes and lack of a permanent head of department. Recent effective action includes the appointment of a permanent head of department and two further specialist teachers.

127. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory. Students are entering the school with better developed skills and confidence when handling problems involving number. The school is appropriately placing an increased emphasis on the further development of these skills, particularly in the lower school. Mathematics lessons frequently include starter activities, which involve students in mental arithmetic exercises. Some involve timed activities in the

form of games and these are enjoyed by the students. Mathematics teachers have been trained to support this work, though frequent staff changes have reduced the impact of the training. Good use of numeracy is now being made to support the work with students with special educational needs and in modern foreign languages. Use is satisfactory in many other subjects, though there is limited evidence of use geography. Overall, the majority of students show satisfactory numerical skills when undertaking work in science. However, a number of students in Years 10 and 11 have restricted and therefore unsatisfactory skills.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths:

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above those in similar schools.
- Standards are improving in Years 10 and 11.
- The overall quality of teaching is good.
- Procedures to monitor students' progress and set targets are effective.
- There are systematic procedures for monitoring teaching.

Areas for improvement:

- The attainment of girls.
- Opportunities are missed to engage and motivate students through an extended treatment of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues.
- Planned use of data logging activities and information and communication technology (ICT) generally.
- Students are not consistently given constructive feedback through marking of work.

128. Standards of attainment in national tests in Year 9 have risen significantly in recent years. In 2001, they were average compared with schools nationally, and well above those in similar schools. Attainment at GCSE has also risen. In 2001, results were below average though above those in similar schools. In 2001, the results obtained by girls in single award science were significantly below those in most of their other subjects. However, there has not been a consistent trend of underperformance by girls. Students with special educational needs and gifted and talented students make satisfactory progress.

129. Standards seen in Years 7 to 9 during the inspection were average. Students generally make at least satisfactory progress and often make good progress in terms of their factual knowledge and grasp of concepts. In a top set Year 9 revision lesson, for example, students were working on computers using the Bite Size Revision programme. This allowed them to work at their own pace answering questions on a variety of topics. They completed a number of tests requiring them to apply their knowledge and understanding. Typically the students finished three tests on topics including forces and electricity. Most students were working at the expected level, and about a quarter of the class were operating at a level above that expected for their age. As such, they could solve problems involving more complex parallel circuits. Students carry out practical tasks safely and make appropriate measurements. Investigative skills are average overall but on occasions the investigative and practical tasks set are not demanding enough, resulting in students making less than expected progress.

130. Standards are higher in Year 10 than in Year 11, but below average overall. Progress is usually at least satisfactory and often good. In one Year 11 revision class for a middle set, average ability students made good progress in developing their skills in a variety of

chemistry calculations. These included working out formula masses, percentage composition of compounds and quantities in moles. Their progress was due to very good teaching utilising a very well produced revision guide, devised by the teacher, in which calculations of progressively increasing difficulty were tackled. By the end of the lesson, students' performance was above average. However, progress in lower sets is hampered by attendance problems. Students in these sets follow instructions and carry out practical tasks safely. They have investigative skills appropriate to their general level of ability. They plan and carry out a range of suitable experiments, relating to topics such as rate of chemical reactions, factors affecting photosynthesis and what affects the resistance of a wire. However, they do not always make suitable predictions that draw on relevant scientific theory in advance of doing their experiments.

131. Overall, the quality of teaching is good, with lessons observed ranging from unsatisfactory to very good. More than half the lessons observed were at least good. The two lessons observed that were unsatisfactory were in Years 10 and 11. The students are generally well behaved, but attitudes to work are more consistently positive in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have good subject knowledge. All the lessons seen were revision lessons. Lessons are generally well planned, with a variety of activities, and conducted at a brisk pace. Lesson objectives are communicated clearly to the students and reviewed at the end of the lesson. Teachers' explanations are clear and questioning is used effectively to check students' understanding and to find out their ideas. Teachers pitch their questioning at suitable levels for students of different abilities.

132. The best lessons seen were characterised by a number of features. Planning was particularly good, with the use of a range of activities including the use of video clips, demonstrations and class practicals. Written resources were well matched to the ability of the students but also challenged them. There was very efficient use of time with clear time-scales being set. As a result, the students made good progress. In some lessons, 'starter activities' were used effectively to engage students' interest from the very beginning of the lesson while the teacher was taking the register. For example, in two good lessons with top sets in Year 9, students were revising for the national tests using a computer programme. They worked individually and with interest on test questions and made good progress in applying their knowledge and understanding of a variety of topics, including the principle of moments and the relationship between pressure, force and area. The computer programme allowed students to work on tests at an appropriate level, and some went on to tackle GCSE questions. The programme gave students individual feedback about their performance and directed them to revision sections as required. In a very good revision lesson with a lower set in Year 11, the teacher carried out a succession of demonstrations and then questioned the class to consolidate their understanding. Questions reviewed their understanding of chemical change, combustion, fuels, tests for carbon dioxide and water, the fire triangle, exothermic and endothermic reactions and factors affecting the speed of reactions. Concepts were developed in a systematic and progressive fashion. Effective use was made of a video to reinforce key learning points, and a worksheet was provided to structure students' notes. In a good lesson with a top set in Year 10, students were given a series of problems to solve involving applying their knowledge and understanding to work out the current and voltage drops in various circuits. The questions were ordered to give progressively more and more challenge.

133. In lessons that were satisfactory rather than good, students made appropriate progress but opportunities were not taken to really challenge them. On some occasions, practical work that has been done before lower down the school, or in primary school, is repeated, albeit at a brisk pace, without any extra demand or development. Sometimes practical work requires a simple observation when, with just a slight adaptation, it could be made into a more interesting problem-solving or investigative activity that would offer more challenge.

Although teacher explanation is clear and questions are asked at appropriate levels for different students, in some lessons the same set workbook is used for students over a wide range of ability. Students would benefit from more tailored worksheets. On occasions, some students need more structure to help them with their writing. Some work, such as that on chemical change and the purification of rock salt, would be better done lower down the school so as to give a better structured progression of ideas. The department is introducing a new lower school scheme of work, which should address this issue. In a small number of lessons, students made unsatisfactory progress because of inefficient time management and also, in one lesson, because of a lack of support from the teacher.

134. Teaching and learning styles have been broadened since the last inspection. Investigative work has been strengthened and the CASE (Cognitive Acceleration Through Science Education) Project has been introduced in the lower school. A number of lessons were seen during the inspection where students used computer-assisted learning. Students of different abilities responded very well to this type of learning activity and made good progress. As planned, the department needs to extend the use of computers to make it a more regular feature of students' learning. From the lessons seen such an approach has the potential to have a powerful impact. Whilst treatment of social, cultural, spiritual and moral issues is satisfactory, these aspects are generally not treated in an extended fashion. Opportunities are not taken to actively engage students through activities such as debate, group discussion and role-play. The ideas and evidence strand of the National Curriculum needs to be implemented, and this would make a significant contribution to students' cultural development. There are at present too few opportunities for students to undertake research and extended writing.

135. Students' ICT skills are underdeveloped in science. The use of data logging equipment needs to be increased, as planned. Literacy skills are satisfactory overall, although opportunities for extended writing are too limited. Students' numeracy skills are about average.

136. Management of the science department is very good. There is effective use of data to monitor students' progress and set targets. Teaching is monitored systematically, but there is no formal programme for teachers to observe one another. Very effective procedures have been implemented to help students to revise. There is still some variation in the quality of teachers' marking, particularly in the quality of constructive feedback. Teachers work hard to ensure all students are included and taught the National Curriculum. There is a lack of real enthusiasm for science amongst some students in lower ability sets in Years 10 and 11, however. Consideration should be given to providing an alternative science curriculum for these students. The improvement within the science department since the last inspection has been very good.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- Leadership and management of the department.
- The capacity to succeed.

Areas for improvement:

- The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements.
- Raise standards by improving basic skills.
- Monitor teaching and learning to improve their quality and ensure consistent practice.
- Increase and improve the use of sketchbooks for personal research, investigation and experimentation.
- Broaden the curriculum.

137. Standards in art are below average. Teacher assessments of students aged 14 in 2001 show that below average numbers met or exceeded national expectations. Below average numbers of students aged 16 gained a pass in the ranges A*-C and A*-G in the 2001 GCSE examination. Girls outperformed the boys, although the difference was no greater than the national difference. These results were an improvement on 2000, but lower than at the time of the last inspection. Above average numbers, especially boys, opt for GCSE art and design.

138. The work seen during the inspection is well below average because students have under-developed basic skills of working and recording from observation. Too many students say, 'I can't draw!' Their failure to maintain sketchbooks for investigation and experimentation into methods and materials, or as a reference for future working is slowing their progress. It prevents them knowing how well they are doing or how they might improve. Few work with their sketchbooks open alongside them. Little of their work gives any indication that the school is located in a region with a rich industrial, religious, political and cultural heritage, and spectacular panoramas of surrounding countryside. Students make prints from found materials such as cardboard and wood shavings, but most work is two-dimensional painting and drawing. Limited opportunities to generate imagery with computers also prevent them developing their basic skills and do not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Recognising the students' varied and often limited experiences of art and their under-developed basic skills in their earlier years, their achievement by the age of fourteen is satisfactory.

139. While the work produced by students in Years 10 and 11 is below average and continues to suffer from undeveloped basic skills, there is evidence of increased ambition. GCSE and GNVQ students make use of the increased range of processes available. The higher expectations of students and teachers are evident. Nevertheless, many students prefer to copy photographs of high performance motorcars or exotic images from magazines than develop their own compositions through personal research. Students have produced good quality work based on observations of leaves, interpreted into collage and mixed media paintings. Equally good work has been based on heads after students have looked at and developed Picasso's 'Weeping Woman' and his 'Portrait of Jacqueline'. The value of the work was somewhat reduced by the students having used Picasso's imagery rather than images developed from their own drawings of their relatives or friends. Similarly, many students prefer to copy photographs of high performance motorcars or exotic images from magazines rather than develop their own compositions through personal research, slowing their progress. The students' work is based firmly on European or North American art.

Although they explore Aboriginal and African art, such as that related to Cubism, their knowledge of multi-cultural art is limited. Students seldom consider the reasons behind artwork or its spirituality, as in the case of Aboriginal and African art. The more mature attitudes and behaviour of these students and the greater interest they bring to their work lead to satisfactory levels of achievement.

140. Those who have special educational needs make overall satisfactory progress in the art department although those students in Years 7, 8 and 9 make unsatisfactory progress. While there have been recent improvements aimed at raising students' expectations, much of the work is undemanding, unfinished or rushed. There are recently introduced measures to identify those students who have particular needs in art, aimed at improving their achievements. None of the students was awarded an A*, the highest grade, in the 2001 GCSE.

141. Teaching and learning in art are satisfactory. Five lessons were observed in Years 7 to 9: two were good, two satisfactory and one was poor. Five lessons were seen in Years 10 and 11: two were very good, two were good and one was satisfactory. While none of the lessons seen during the inspection were unsatisfactory, it is clear from the work seen that learning is often slow with inconsistencies in the way teachers deliver their lessons. The new head of department's methods of improving the teaching of drawing and basic skills, and making greater reference to the work of famous artists, are beginning to have a positive impact on learning. The students are not yet skilled at keeping a sketchbook, preventing them carrying a continuous thread of development through their work. The teachers' views of standards are not yet consistent, and their expectations are not always high enough. Classes are occasionally insufficiently challenged by both classwork and homework from Year 7 onwards, breeding low expectations in students. Sometimes their attention wanders, and learning slows. Not all teachers are consistent in the way they explain new words. Few students are comfortable using words such as form, tone or composition, when talking about their work, their classmates' work, or the work of famous artists.

142. In a very good lesson, Year 10 GNVQ students were fully engaged designing a logo for an airline sponsoring a kite festival. Their teacher made it clear what the students were expected to do, how they should do it and how much time they had. His planning, knowledge, and classroom management allowed good creative opportunities. Even though their drawing and design skills were well below average, the students made very good gains in knowledge and understanding of designing for advertising and the place of sponsorship in the world of work.

143. In the one poor lesson seen during the inspection, the teacher was not able to manage the behaviour of a small number of Year 7 students, mainly boys who arrived with the intention of being disruptive. Their behaviour interfered with the learning of others. Even though the teacher spent too long talking about the activity, it was not sufficiently well planned to allow satisfactory progress.

144. While the department offers GCSE and GNVQ courses, the curriculum in art is narrow. The department is well resourced for ceramics, but there are few occasions when students work with clay. Printing and textile work occupy very small positions in the work of the department, while computers, scanners, digital cameras and specialist software, common enough in art education figure little. The assessment of students' work is good and much improved since the last inspection. Students in Years 7 to 9 carry out self-assessment on well-designed, in-house record sheets. These self-assessments are reviewed regularly by teachers and contribute to end-of-year progress reports. The data gathered from assessment of students' work is not used well enough to identify weaknesses in the curriculum.

145. The leadership and management of art are now good. Following a period of instability caused by illness, regular staff changes and temporary leadership, all interfering with the quality of education provided, the recently appointed head of department has introduced a number of initiatives that are bringing about improvements. Her very good subject knowledge and previous experiences in leadership provide a welcome, refreshing, and clear vision for the future. She has the energy and strength of purpose, together with the complete support of the management of the school, to overcome the recent decline and carry the department forward, raising the status of the subject and increasing students' achievements. Documentation, including schemes of work, is being improved, but there is insufficient detail of the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in art. Plans to liaise with feeder schools to improve continuity of learning are being made. Strategies to improve the provision for those who have special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented are being planned, including the increased use of artists-in-residence and visits to galleries and centres of artistic interest. Development planning for the future does not pay sufficient regard to raising standards or improving teaching and learning. The monitoring of teaching and learning is not yet sufficiently rigorous to ensure that all teachers are teaching to the same high standards and developing the basic skills of the students. The quality and quantity of students' work displayed around the school is disappointing.

146. Since the last inspection standards have fallen. Sketchbooks are not yet used consistently and observational drawing remains weak. There remains a dependence on secondary source materials although this is improving. The appreciation of art does not yet provide enough knowledge to allow students to make connections with their own work and that of famous artists. Information and communication technology (ICT) is no longer used helpfully across the curriculum, and the curriculum continues to breach statutory requirements. Teaching has not improved and learning in Years 7 to 9 is slower than it was. The new head of department has introduced improvements and benefits are increasingly visible.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- Excellent leadership and management.
- Above average grades A*-C at GCSE.
- The good progress and achievement made by most students in all years.
- The success of much of the teaching in developing students' basic design and making skills.
- The level of improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection.
- The very strong and experienced team of specialist teachers.

Areas for improvement:

- The low proportion of students who follow a GCE A Level course.
- The need for more attention to be given to guiding students on what to do next.
- Lack of a suitable technician.

147. Standards attained by students by the end of Year 7 are below those expected nationally. Students join the school with weak technical skills. Many have never used basic workshop and tools, such as wood planes, before and have no experience of formal drawing and lettering techniques. During the first three years in the school, they make good progress

in acquiring these basic practical skills and graphic techniques. In work on simple projects, they draw with accuracy and make products of a good quality. The development of students' designing skills has significantly improved since the previous inspection. Standards by the age of fourteen are in line with the national average. Thus their achievement is good, which is better than at the last inspection, as most students develop their skills, knowledge and understanding well.

148. The design and technology GCSE performance in 2001 is much improved compared with the previous inspection. The number gaining grades in the A*-C range is above the national average, especially in food technology. Work seen during the inspection confirmed these standards. Results have gradually improved over the period since the previous inspection. In 2001, students' average points score in design and technology was above average, and students did better in design and technology than in many other GCSE subjects within the school.

149. Overall standards attained and progress by the age of 16 are above average, though there is a variation in the quality of work between those students working in graphics, resistant materials and those in food technology. Design work is good in most areas, and students explain and communicate their ideas to a high standard. Broad ranging research is undertaken to develop initial design ideas. Students process and make good use of data generated by questionnaire surveys; this helps them to understand consumers' views when developing specifications for their products. In food technology, students' evaluation of their practical work as they make their food products is very good, and they draw on a good technical vocabulary to help them.

150. Standards in the Sixth Form design and technology courses are average. Students learn well and make good progress in these courses. The professional help and support given to students is extensive and effective.

151. Teaching and learning are good overall. All lessons seen are at least satisfactory, with a high proportion being good, very good or excellent. Overall, students benefit from some exceptionally good teaching. The key strength of the teaching is the way teachers encourage good habits and develop students' basic skills. Good practice in design is constantly reinforced by helpful discussions. When teaching is outstanding, teachers insist that students measure very accurately and guide them well about how to plan and make an electronic testing device as in a Year 7 lesson observed, or about how to complete a sensory analysis of food products in a Year 11 lesson. In all areas of the subject, but in food technology in particular, students' communication skills are improved by activities that encourage them to use technical and descriptive words when analysing their products. However, students would benefit from more opportunities to explain their reasons for their design decisions to their peers.

152. The curriculum offers a good range of opportunities for students to develop their practical creativity. For examination courses, teachers have written workbooks which show students how to improve their drawing, designing and planning skills and how to match these against clear targets and GCSE criteria. The teaching programme is being reviewed to ensure that the use of control in technology is extended. In Years 7 to 9, students' understanding of material working properties or work in textiles technology needs to be extended. Higher and middle attainers in particular need to be able to reflect more on different materials that they could use for the products they have designed. The links between different modules in Key Stage 3 and the level of work in some of the resistant materials project work need further review and development.

153. Teachers mark work regularly, but do not point out clearly enough in their comments how students might improve their work. In electronics and food technology, students benefit from very good assessment of their coursework against exam criteria as each stage is completed. In other areas, talks with the teachers about progress are helpful, but the approach gives students less precise indications of how they are doing. Teachers need to give students clear written guidance on what to do next.

154. Students enjoy their creative work and apply themselves fully in lessons. Some show good independent study skills when they research information outside lessons. However, the degree to which students are encouraged to develop their own initiative and display independence within lessons is underdeveloped. Their competent computer skills help them to improve the quality of their designs, to process survey information, and to carry out research, either on the Internet or through contacting businesses by e-mail. An excellent lesson involved Year 9 students in using computers to tabulate their research findings into spreadsheet tables and interesting graphs, and they showed great enjoyment. Students with special educational needs make good progress and are very well supported by teachers. The excellent relationships established by staff with their students, together with their detailed knowledge of their needs, are used to very good effect in developing students' design and making capability.

155. Leadership and management are excellent. There has been good evaluation of the subject's performance since the last inspection. This has resulted in effective systems for identifying and supporting students' progress across the department. The team approach to developing and improving the subject is a strength of the department. Consequently, results have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Differences in approach remain, however, between resistant materials and graphics on one hand and food technology and electronics on the other. Opportunities exist for staff to consider sharing good practice and working in each other's areas to extend the effectiveness of students' experiences, especially in Key Stage 3. The department gives appropriate attention to health and safety matters. It has worked together in a very effective manner and is well placed to move forwards to achieve even higher standards.

156. The range of accommodation is adequate to meet the needs of the curriculum. However, some resources and the ethos in most resistant materials rooms are unsatisfactory. These rooms need refurbishing to provide appropriate workbench surfaces and a suitable range of quality hand tools and light machinery. By contrast, the food technology rooms have been extremely well cared for and present a very positive and effective working atmosphere in which students can succeed. The lack of a suitable technician for design and technology is a significant issue that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths:

- Very good progress since the last inspection.
- Good leadership and management.
- Good quality teaching and learning.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students and the good attitudes and behaviour of the students.
- Good capacity for further improvement.

Areas for improvement:

- Raise standards further by accelerating progress across the main school.
- Vigorously improve teaching and learning of basic skills.
- Make more rigorous demands on those students with higher prior attainment.
- Use data to set 'smart' targets for further improvement.
- Complete the implementation of the new scheme of work for practical geography in the lower school plan.
- Implement the plan for improvement.

157. Prior attainment on entry to the school is well below the expected level, particularly in English, so that weak literacy skills impair future progress for many students to the age of sixteen. Many do not know that they have studied geography before.

158. Attainment remained well below average by the age of fourteen when estimated by teachers in 2001. However, scrutiny of exercise books and observation of lessons show that standards are rising. Achievement by age 14 remains below average, but more students are achieving the nationally expected level or above, and progress across the lower school is good. For example, the top set in Year 9 speculates confidently in extended talk about the nature of river processes. They can explain how a sharply angled rock is reduced to sand by being carried along in a river. Progress of all students is not consistent, though. Boys achieve better than girls. Both boys and girls of higher attainment are held back sometimes if they are asked to wait whilst others catch up. They could manage more difficult work. Those with special educational needs are supported with work that matches their level of prior attainment, for example in a letter describing the British climate to a fellow European. They are known to their teachers and receive extra visits during lessons. They make satisfactory progress, though not enough in-class support is available to help them to prosper.

159. Attainment at GCSE was significantly below the national average in 2001, and students performed less well at geography than in any other subject. However, most students were of such low prior attainment that when their score at the beginning of the course is compared with that at the end, they made better progress than students in more than half of the schools in the country. Nevertheless, teachers have correctly identified the raising of the quality of course work as a good early target for raising standards.

160. Achievement in class in the upper school is improving and the increasing numbers of students with higher prior attainment who choose to study geography are making good progress. In a Year 10 class, for example, more than half are already achieving at or above the national average, and can describe and explain the causes and effects of plate

tectonics. There is much irregular attendance on the examination course, and this hampers continuity and progress. The heavy influence of low literacy skills is clearly evident on the examination course. For instance, one boy talked fluently about pyroclastic flow using sophisticated vocabulary but could not write it down; another who explained long-shore drift very clearly wrote about the 'ShoR'.

161. Teaching and learning in geography are good in three lessons in four. The rest are satisfactory. This is a very good improvement since the last inspection when the department was failing to provide a satisfactory standard of education for its students. All teachers prepare their lessons well, using a school-wide format. Materials are well prepared in advance, particularly using the colour copier. Enlarged sheets help a visually impaired pupil to study. Progress is enhanced by the ready supply of materials. Teachers have a secure subject knowledge that is displayed in their organisation and presentation of well-prepared materials. Students are therefore enabled to increase their knowledge and understanding. The management of students in the classroom is good so that there is no misbehaviour. The good attitudes and behaviour of the students contributes significantly to good teaching and learning. The quality of relationships between teachers and students is very good, and lessons proceed in an atmosphere of comfortable security. This is a position of strength from which the department needs to make more rigorous demands on its students.

162. All lessons begin with effective settling exercises, though these sometimes take too long. The aims of all lessons are shared with students and checked at the end so that students know what they have to do and why. Students gain good knowledge and understanding of a variety of topics because their learning is regularly reviewed and reinforced by questioning and by the routine setting of revision tasks at the beginning of each lesson. However, these activities and some in the departmental booklets do not challenge students with above average attainment. There are not enough activities that allow students to work at their own level and pace so that those of higher prior attainment can be stretched to higher achievement in class. For example, one higher attainer was observed to be pacing his work to finish at the same time as the others, though he said he found the work unchallenging. He was able to provide an incisive answer for his neighbour who was struggling to link two pieces of information when comparing Britain and Brazil.

163. Teachers use questioning well to reinforce knowledge, though they do not always spread the questions widely enough. Girls were observed to be more reluctant than boys to speak in discussions led by male teachers. Nevertheless, they were able to explain their ideas successfully when given sympathetic encouragement. Where students are asked open questions they respond well in long sentences, but there are insufficient opportunities for them to talk at length in class.

164. Teachers have enthusiastically embraced the departmental literacy policy and the teaching of key words and meanings is a particular strength of their work. Students listen with respect when someone reads his/her own work out loud. Sometimes good opportunities are taken for students to criticise and to suggest improvements to the writing of others, though this is not used as a learning tool frequently enough. Word frames are used as a means of forming the base of extended writing, and there are examples of writing in a variety of styles. Nevertheless, there are not enough opportunities for students to write at length. Literacy is such a weakness amongst these students that it is necessary to create every opportunity to enhance it.

165. As with literacy, the department has a numeracy policy though the school does not. However, the policy needs to be more rigorously implemented in teachers' planning so that every opportunity is taken to exercise perceived weaknesses in numeracy and graphicacy skills. Examples seen in GCSE course work are very simple and do not ask enough of the students by way of manipulating a strong database.

166. The department does not meet its statutory obligation to deliver parts of its curriculum through the medium of information technology. This is because it is difficult to book computers so that all students have access, even though the number of computers available is much better than the national average. The department does not know which students have computer, printer and Internet access at home. As a result, it cannot compensate by arranging access to a school computer in advance for those who do not. Consequently, the enquiries about Japan produced by Year 9, though very well presented, are insufficiently selective and do not transform information.

167. Students develop their skills in using an atlas and are good at picking out information from gazetteers for example. However, their practical skills are limited because not enough practical work is done in the lower school to prepare them for the demands of GCSE course work.

168. Teachers make good use of audio-visual resources. Students respond very well to visual stimulus and gain much, for example, from a video clip on the development of coastlines. Frequently the same work sheet that pupils have in front of them is projected onto a screen. This is good practice because it improves their comprehension. A smart board, new in the department, is being tried out for its full potential use.

169. Teachers keep good record books that contain a rich seam of continuous assessment of students' work. Nevertheless, in Years 7 to 9, the information is not yet used well enough to assess individual progress or to set smart targets for improvement. Practice is better in the upper school where students know their target grades, though not necessarily how to improve them. The head of department analyses well the examination results of the previous year and can show precisely the contribution to the variance of every individual pupil, class and teacher. This is a powerful tool and is already being well used to set targets for improvement.

170. Homework is set and recorded, though was only once seen to be collected. The department is adopting a good plan to use homework to consolidate and extend learning.

171. Leadership and management are good. The head of department has filled effectively a management vacuum that has existed since the last inspection, since when there have been three acting heads of department and one other permanent incumbent. Teachers have benefited well from good in-service training and from observing good practice in another school. They would benefit further from training in the development of thinking skills and the provision of tasks to challenge students to extend their achievement. With the support of good line management and unusually effective contributions from the link governor, dramatic changes have been implemented within the last eighteen months and the foundations laid for further development. The department is wisely adopting the model curriculum for students up to the age of fourteen proposed by the Quality and Curriculum Authority. This is already resolving problems of cross-year assessment and the moderation of levels of attainment. The innovation is not yet completely in place. Its full and effective implementation would automatically resolve many of the issues raised above. Teachers are now in a good position to make further improvements and have the capacity to do so.

HISTORY

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

Strengths:

- GCSE results are above average and both boys and girls are making good progress in acquiring historical skills.
- Quality of teaching is good.
- Students respond very positively to the subject, have very good relationships with each other and their teachers.
- The department is very well led.
- Very good monitoring and evaluation procedures.
- Very good use of assessment to support student achievement.
- Excellent classroom display.

Areas for improvement:

- Insufficient use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a research tool.
- Insufficient opportunities for historical visits.

172. Students arrive at the school with attainment levels that are well below average. From this low baseline, they achieve well during the first three years, and by the end of Year 9 achieve standards in line with those expected for their age. Because of teaching that is both challenging and supportive, they make good progress in understanding how historians work. This good progress continues in Years 10 and 11, when students build on the skills gained in the lower school and make articulate and reasoned comments on the reliability and usefulness of a variety of source material. They learn new skills rapidly and demonstrate good background knowledge of the topics under consideration. Moreover, teachers know their students well and are concerned to make sure that everyone benefits from what is on offer. As a result, students who sometimes find the work difficult make good progress too, and are often operating at levels above what would normally be expected. In all year groups, students respond most positively to the subject. They express gratitude for the hard work and care of their teachers, who work long and hard to produce resources to interest them, challenge them and enable them to approach their studies with confidence.

173. In 2001, GCSE results at the higher grades were above average for both boys and girls, demonstrating a significant improvement on previous years' performance. The proportion of students attaining results across the full range of grades however, was below the national average. Since the last inspection overall results have shown an upward trend which is higher than the national trend.

174. The standards observed in lessons confirm these examination results and mirror the rising trend. In Year 7, for example, students display good chronological skills and can order the life of Thomas a Becket accurately. In Year 8, they use historical terminology correctly to describe how Elizabeth controlled her people. In Year 9, they operate at a higher level and analyse the significance of 'The Silent Highwayman' in their efforts to decide why public health legislation was needed in the middle of the nineteenth century. Their skills of source interpretation are developed in Year 10, when they imagine what it must have been like to be an evacuee during the 'Phoney War'. They also attempt to put themselves in the position of those accepting young children into their families, and what kind of child they would prefer to take. These skills are practised again in Year 11 when students compare the actions of Kruschev and Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis. They also show just how much they have learned when they are able link a variety of historical topics during a lesson on mind mapping.

175. The high quality of teaching is a strength of the department, characterised by a profound understanding of how people learn and of how, therefore, teaching methods can meet the needs of all students, irrespective of their interests and attainment levels. Teachers have real presence, warm relationships with their students and care deeply for their welfare, both academic and social. Teachers have high expectations of what their students can achieve, challenge them realistically, value their views and offer them the utmost support in their search for the truth. During the inspection, teaching was never less than satisfactory and in three-quarters of lessons it was good or very good.

176. Students are given opportunities to learn from each other, in pairs and in groups, during all lessons. Teachers are concerned to encourage their students to acquire historical skills early on, so their questioning is both rigorous and relentless. Because teachers use historical terminology confidently and because classroom displays include detailed word walls, students become articulate very quickly. They are not afraid to practise their skills of expression both orally and in writing. Furthermore, students with special educational needs express opinions and use appropriate language, paying testament to the emphasis that teachers place on literacy. Praise and encouragement abound, and teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is infectious; students respond with a mature approach to their studies and, in most lessons, are very keen to contribute. In turn, higher standards are the end result.

177. The department is very well led and reflects regularly on its own performance. The scheme of work is of very high quality and allows for detailed lesson planning, which has the welfare of all students at its core. The department places great emphasis on literacy and has produced a variety of worksheets to help students gain greater accuracy in their writing and become more objective in source analysis. Learning resources are good, classroom display is excellent and teachers encourage their students to take great pride in their work.

178. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection, particularly in the quality of teaching and in the standards achieved by students. Assessment and recording practice is now more cohesive, and the evaluation of performance has led to a greater understanding of what is needed for further improvement. The department is, for example, looking at ways of developing ICT as an additional tool for students' personal research. In addition, teaching methods continue to be under review and the meeting of students' learning needs is always prioritised in lesson plans, departmental agendas and action plans. Teachers in the department support each other fully and share a vision for how history should be taught. The department has, therefore, a very good capacity for improvement and is well placed for further development.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths:

- High attainment in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching by specialist and experienced teachers helps students learn.
- The introduction of GNVQ in information and communication technology (ICT) provides motivating activities.
- Very good access to ICT hardware and software in discreet ICT lessons.

Areas for improvement:

- Inconsistency in marking and use of assessment information across all years.
- Schemes of work need to include a wider range of teaching and learning styles.
- Need for planned use of ICT across all subjects.

179. Standards of attainment are satisfactory at the end of Year 9, and very good at the end of Year 11. Teacher assessment of students at the end of Year 9 shows that the numbers attaining the expected level and above are well below national expectations. However, standards are in line with the ability of students on entry to the school. Levels of attainment have continued to decline during the last three years, due in part to staffing problems. In GCSE, attainment in 2001 was very good and well above national expectations for both boys and girls. Although a higher percentage of boys attain grades in the A*-C range, overall more girls than boys attain the higher A or B grades.

180. In lessons, the attainment of all students in Years 7 to 9 is better than expected where teaching is carried out by specialists and experienced teachers. In Years 8 and 9, students select and summarise information from the Internet and Encarta, and persevere well when using a range of enhancements to design a PowerPoint presentation. They produce imaginative slides which effectively combine text and graphics. Other Year 8, and some Year 7 students, make an excellent start with spreadsheet work, showing that they understand how to insert and copy formulae into columns, and produce graphs of their results.

181. In Year 10, GNVQ students are preparing for their first examination. Their attainment is higher than expected where students prepare different documents in response to the set case study. For example, intermediate standards are met in the planning and early drafts of web pages and a desktop published brochure. Students search the Internet, select and store a variety of images and choose appropriate text. This is stored in a Word document until they make their final selection to meet the needs of the document users. In Year 11, GCSE students consolidate their spreadsheet skills. The lower attaining students use formulae to add up a number of different cells, while the higher attaining students highlight a range of cells to insert and replicate formulae more efficiently. In Years 10 and 11, teaching groups are either all male or all female. This results in positive pupil attitudes, both to their work and for behaviour, and this enables teachers to give attention to raising standards and helping students make very good progress.

182. Overall the quality of teaching is good. In Years 10 and 11, it is at least good and often very good or excellent. In Years 7, 8 and 9 teaching by specialist teachers is excellent or very good. However it was judged to be unsatisfactory in two lessons observed in Years 7 and 8, where they were delivered by inexperienced or non-specialists with insufficiently detailed lesson plans for good subject delivery and classroom management. The best teaching across all years benefits from strong subject knowledge, aligned with good knowledge of

business, and this provides meaningful contexts. There are high expectations of all students and activities provide challenge. Students know what they are expected to do in the lesson, and this enhances their learning. In the majority of successful lessons, there is high quality support for individual students where teachers monitor work on screen and offer advice for improving skills and quality of work. Students with special educational needs are thus well supported, and many make better than expected progress on their presentations. Teaching is less effective when lessons start and finish without the full attention of students and there is limited use of information from previous lessons to focus on appropriate objectives that meet pupils' needs. In a minority of lessons, the most able students are not stretched since they have insufficient information about the task, and those students with special educational needs find the level of work on spreadsheets too difficult and make little progress. Where poor pupil behaviour is tolerated, this causes unnecessary disruption to lessons.

183. Ongoing formative assessment of pupils' work in progress is good. However, written marking is not carried out in Years 7, 8 and 9 and students lack useful guidance from feedback on their work through written comments showing its success and how it can be improved. Marking is inconsistent in Years 10 and 11. In some classes marking is thorough, indicating success and giving guidance, but students in other classes lack regular feedback on the quality of their work and so their rate of improvement is less secure.

184. Since the last inspection, the introduction of the full award GNVQ provides relevant and motivating activities to enable high quality learning to take place. The curriculum for Years 7, 8 and 9 is being reviewed to provide greater challenge, especially for those students coming to the school with higher prior knowledge than in previous years.

185. Management and leadership are satisfactory. The development plan has been reviewed for the school's bid for Business and Enterprise status and is intended to supersede the current plan. Schemes of work are under-developed and give insufficient support to non-specialist teachers. The technology and science departments take responsibility for teaching control and data logging, and the ICT assessment policy is being reviewed to take this into account at the end of Year 9. Students benefit from access to the very good provision of computers and software, which is well maintained by the technical support staff. There is no responsibility for the risk assessment of health and safety and teaching rooms are poorly ventilated. The new interactive white boards are used effectively to demonstrate keyboard operations, software use, and show examples of pre-prepared web pages and desktop publishing. This encourages students to try out and acquire new skills. All teachers in the school have completed their ICT subject training, but uses of ICT have not yet been formally planned into the schemes of work of all subjects. As a result, students do not have enough opportunity to practice and consolidate skills beyond ICT lessons or to benefit from learning through this medium more widely across the school. This particularly affects those students who have no discrete ICT lesson in Years 10 and 11. Cross-curricular support for ICT is an area for improvement.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- Standards of attainment in French and German have risen since the last inspection.
- The department is well managed and leadership is excellent.
- Teaching is good, with very good subject knowledge and management of students.
- Most students study one and many study two languages throughout their time in school.

Areas for improvement:

- GCSE results in French and German are below the national average.
- Underdeveloped use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Teachers' inconsistent use of French and German for the content and management of lessons.

186. In 2001, GCSE results in French in the A*-C range were well below the national average, though the results of both boys and girls were higher than those attained in the previous year. All students entering gained a grade at A*-G. Girls attained higher grades than boys, but the difference was less than that found nationally. GCSE results in German in 2001 at A*-C were below the national average but significantly higher than in the previous year. Girls gained higher grades than boys and the difference was greater than that found nationally. All students entering were successful at A*-G, with no grade lower than F. In both languages, boys' and girls' results were lower than those that the same students attained in other school subjects.

187. Inspection evidence confirms that students currently studying French and German in Year 9 now attain standards consistent with national expectations. This is due to improvements in teaching methods and a language curriculum responding more fully to pupils' abilities and needs. Most students arrive in school with little or no knowledge of French, but are soon able to follow classroom instructions and understand tape recordings of short statements and conversations by native speakers. Students ask and answer questions briefly and accurately, learning to talk about themselves and their daily lives, or simulating situations such as shopping for food. In Years 8 and 9, most students extend their vocabulary and grammar sufficiently to talk and write about past experiences, such as holidays, or to making suggestions about leisure activities in town. When writing, many students add details such as the weather or colours, or express their likes and dislikes simply. They use number effectively for prices, dates or to calculate the outcomes of classroom surveys. Most students read short texts with understanding, although a few, including some with special educational needs, are hampered by their limited literacy skills.

188. Over half the students in Years 8 and 9 learn German as well as French. They develop similar skills and acquire new language rapidly, using the good practice developed earlier in French. By the end of Year 9, the most competent linguists attain standards consistent with the national expectation.

189. Most students continue with either French or German in Years 10 and 11, a substantial minority successfully studying both languages. By age 16, many students reach standards equivalent to the national expectation, though relatively few reach the highest GCSE grades of A* or A. In classes where teachers use rapid continuous French and German, many students imitate the good model of spoken language. When too much English is used, pupils' speaking is more limited and confined to the responses required by the GCSE examination. Their knowledge of grammar is often good, due to teachers' concentration on

aspects such as verb forms, adjectival agreements and word order. Many higher attaining students learn to write expressively in various forms ranging from detailed descriptions to formal letters. Lower attainers, including some students with special educational needs, express themselves more simply in speech and writing, using everyday language useful for essential purposes abroad. A minority of students develop the good reading skills needed to understand authentic texts dealing with teenage interests, but many have low standards of literacy or a lack of application that inhibits their level of attainment.

190. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and overall it is good. Teachers speak French and German fluently and have detailed knowledge of the National Curriculum and examination requirements. In both languages, most lessons are well planned and structured. A logical sequence of short activities ensures that most students concentrate well and use their time in class to good effect. Teachers build systematically on previous learning to introduce new language, giving good opportunities for listening and speaking, before consolidating vocabulary and structures with reading and written exercises. Students concentrate well and respond promptly in clearly defined and formally taught grammar lessons. Many appreciate even more those chances they get to work independently in pairs or take part in presentations. Teachers' expectations of students' behaviour and concentration are high and usually fulfilled, but a minority of students find the tasks hard or lacking in stimulation and achieve little. Students with special educational needs gain from good examples of speaking and writing set by their classmates. They stay included, using large-print worksheets and materials that teachers give them to handle or use as prompts. Teachers assess students' work continuously in class, eliciting brief spoken responses or setting short tests of vocabulary and grammar. They give due attention to the outcomes of listening or reading exercises. Wherever possible, they involve their students in appraising their own and their partners' performance. The best examples of GCSE coursework, dealing with holiday experiences or the world of work, show close co-operation between teacher and students in achieving set targets. Homework features regularly, although many students are insufficiently used to independent research, reading and use of the Internet for realistic practical tasks.

191. The department is very well managed through collaborative efforts under very good leadership. Substantial progress has been made since the last inspection in curriculum content, quality of teaching and standards of attainment. Teachers have a strong interest in their students' welfare and have created for them a secure, welcoming and supportive learning environment. They have compensated for limited opportunities to attend training courses by maintaining a professional interest in methodology and developments at national level. Some aspects of teaching, such as the use of computers, remain underdeveloped although teachers have made a good start in presenting lessons with an interactive whiteboard. Extra-curricular activities such as study visits abroad and school links in Europe have added to the growing status and popularity of the subject area in school.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- The head of department's good subject knowledge.
- Improved planning and assessment.
- Good relationships.

Areas for improvement:

- Development of ICT in Years 7 to 9.
- Insufficient use of homework to consolidate and extend learning.

192. The 2001 teacher assessments show students' attainment at the age of 14 to be below average, but evidence from lessons observed and scrutiny of work shows that standards are now in line with the national expectations. There have been no GCSE music candidates for a few years, but two students have been entered for the examination this year. All students achieve well, including those with special educational needs or who are gifted and talented.

193. The work seen during the inspection shows that by the time students are 14 standards are average. This represents good achievement as a result of the good progress made by all groups and abilities. Although good co-operation is being developed with music staff in the feeder schools, many students still have under-developed musical skills on entry to Year 7. There are no music classes in Years 10 and 11, but there is a weekly twilight lesson for two Year 11 students who have been entered for GCSE music. Both students are predicted to gain the higher grades, and this also represents good achievement and progress over time. In the work observed, all students have equal opportunity to develop their musical skills and there are no gender differences.

194. Since the last inspection, standards have improved because of better teaching, planning and assessment. More students in Year 9 are now interested in taking GCSE music, while four students in Year 10 would like to do it in one year, which demonstrates the growing appeal of the subject. Many students take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities that include a choir, rock bands and a wind band/orchestra. Some members of staff are keen musicians and join with students in concerts and shows taking place in school and the local community. More students now have instrumental lessons and reach the higher grades in the associated board examinations. Gifted and talented students are encouraged to play instruments, join music groups and take part in the school shows. All this shows a department that has made great strides forward since the last inspection.

195. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is good overall, with one in four lessons being very good. The teacher has good subject knowledge and plans lessons well to get the best out of students. In the most successful lessons, varied activities and confident teaching ensure that students are kept on task and remain interested. Because of the teacher's careful explanation of musical objectives, students in Year 7 classes explore timbre, texture and dynamics and devise effective musical impressions of animals and birds on keyboards. Students' learning improves due to emphasis on concentration, co-operation and attentive listening. In a Year 8 lesson, the teacher's high expectations were rewarded by a class performance of 'Oh Sinner Man' sung in two parts and accompanied by groups of students playing a range of instruments. Students playing harmony parts were able to join in at the right time because of careful counting of beats. All abilities, including talented students and those with special educational needs, were well catered for and this reinforced the inclusiveness of the lesson's activities. The good pace ensured that there was time at the

end to make an audio recording of the performance. During this lesson, a music student in training worked very effectively with the teacher to move learning forward. Year 9 students learn about musical conventions. They compose, improvise and sing using a wide range of musical styles to enrich their musical progress. They improve their appreciation of different styles by listening to ragtime, jazz, blues and reggae music. Recorded examples of students' compositions demonstrate a firm grasp of the blues and the blues scale progression. Many students produce independent extended work, and one example by a pupil with special educational needs showed a well-developed musicality and understanding of this style of music. In all lessons seen, progress however small was being made by all abilities. Good working practices were evident due to careful management of students and the positive relationships being developed. Any off-task behaviour was soon nipped in the bud. No homework was set during the inspection.

196. Scrutiny of work, including listening to tapes and talking with students, indicates that teaching and learning are good in the Year 11 lessons taken after school. Standards are high because of the teacher's expectations and constant reinforcement of basic musical conventions. This helps to motivate students and leads to improved learning. Compositions are done using a software package installed on the department's computer. The present system of twilight teaching may have to continue, but the head of department is keen to have examination classes placed within the option system and taught during the day.

197. The department is well led and managed. The head of department, who is new to the school since the last inspection, has developed a scheme of work that interests and motivates students. The programmes of study are followed with emphasis on practical music making, and the department makes a worthy contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural experiences. However, students are not involved enough in appraising their own work during lessons and this inhibits the development of informed musical criticism. The time allotted to music is barely adequate to fulfil curriculum requirements and, in addition to this, there is only one computer in the department. The development plan is in place but some targets need to be brought up-to-date. Performance management targets include developing music with the feeder schools. Close links have been established, and this has led to the writing of projects spanning the musical work of Years 6 and 7 and the organisation of joint musical events. Assessment and monitoring of pupil progress is being developed to support learning, but where written work is marked in Year 9, there are few comments focusing on improvement. Students know their levels and grades and these are displayed around the music room. Self-assessment by students takes place after each unit of work, and they record their views on an evaluation sheet that also includes the teacher's comments. At present, staffing is adequate and monitoring of teaching has taken place. There are good resources, including keyboards, recording equipment and classroom instruments. The two good-sized practice rooms are used well, but the music teaching room is cramped because of its long and narrow shape. This room also suffers from over-heating in warm weather. The library does not have enough books on music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- Good quality of teaching.
- The relationships between teachers and students.
- Students' interest and attitude towards their work.
- High level of success in school netball and soccer teams.

Areas for improvement:

- The management of the department.
- Schemes of work need more detail to track progress.
- Curriculum does not fully comply with National Curriculum requirements for students in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Insufficient use of assessment using National Curriculum Levels in lessons.
- Need for a range of accredited courses in Years 10 and 11 to prepare students for more advanced courses in the Sixth Form.

198. Teachers' assessments of students' attainment in physical education at age 14 in 2001 indicate that students are achieving at the levels expected for their age. No students take GCSE physical education.

199. In Year 7 basketball, students have a good understanding of the need to be in space to receive the ball. Their short passing is good. In netball in this year, students know team positions and tactics and play well-structured games. In both of these games, students have good performance levels and understanding, and are above the level expected for their age. Students in Year 8 soccer have the skill level expected for the age group, and there are a few higher attaining students with good control when turning with the ball. Standards in Year 9 netball are very high. Students know the rules well, and are effective in passing, which contributes to their performances on team play. In athletics in this year students have a satisfactory understanding of relay running and the importance of the outgoing runner to be presenting a target hand while moving. Although girls in Year 10 understand the grip and stance and forehand technique in tennis, they lack control and are working below levels expected for their age. However, this is a new game as in previous years the tennis courts have been out of use. In Year 11 boys' soccer, there are high standards of performance as students show confidence in their ability to keep possession of the ball when under pressure. They have good knowledge of rules and tactics, and are working above the level seen in most schools.

200. Teaching is good overall, with some lessons that are very good or better. In two lessons observed the quality of teaching was excellent. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which helps them to give clear explanations and demonstrations to students, helping them learn new skills and improve existing ones. Lessons are well planned, with well-selected and appropriate practices for students of all attainment levels. Nevertheless, sometimes practices could be more challenging for higher attaining students. In good lessons, objectives are shared with students at the start, which helps them to focus on what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson. Classes are well managed, students are well behaved and in all lessons the good relationships contribute to students' learning. Teachers make good use of question and answer, particularly at the end of lessons when they recap work done and so reinforce learning. The department has established good routines at the start of lessons, to give students responsibility for their warm up, which is always well done. In very good and excellent lessons, very good subject knowledge,

relationships and carefully selected practices that challenge and extend all students, contribute to the significant progress students make. As a result, students are motivated and have very good attitudes towards the subject. Very few students miss lessons. They are enthusiastic, work hard at tasks set and respond well to teachers' instructions. Students are always well behaved. They are able to stay on task without constant teacher intervention, and their good work rate contributes significantly to their learning.

201. In all lessons, students of all attainment levels make progress as they learn new skills and improve and refine existing ones and increase their knowledge and understanding. Students make good progress in netball and basketball in Year 7, new games for many students. Where progress is less than might be expected, particularly in tennis, it is because students have not had a grounding in the basics of the game because of the previously poor condition of tennis courts. These are now in very good condition. Beginners in particular could make better progress in tennis if they were given more suitable equipment, such as short tennis rackets and slower tennis balls. Students achieve well in both key stages.

202. The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory. The unfortunate and unexpected closure of both gym and pool in September 2001 meant a modification to the planned curriculum was necessary, but this has not been done. The schemes of work are vague and do not give clear indications of how students are to progress through each required element. GCSE physical education is no longer offered to students in Years 10 and 11, though students in the Sixth Form can take AS physical education, Community Sports Leaders Award and recreational activities. The physical education staff have worked hard to overcome the problems created by the loss of the accommodation, and good use is being made of the local leisure centre to compensate for the lack of gym and pool. Assessment is being well developed, although students need to be made more aware of their performances and understanding related to National Curriculum Levels. The department has a considerable commitment to inter-school fixtures, which provide a route for talented students to reach higher levels of competition. There are particular strengths in soccer, netball, athletics and cross-country. Basketball and girls football is being developed well. During the inspection week, a number of inter-school fixtures took place, with teams in soccer, netball and basketball all winning.

203. Since the last inspection, satisfactory progress has been made. Standards have been maintained and improved in some activities. Teaching is good, and students have positive attitudes towards the subject. However the unsatisfactory leadership and management have led to a loss of direction and organisation of the department. It is therefore essential that this issue be addressed in light of the changing circumstances of the accommodation for the subject.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- Overall teaching is good.
- The quality and range of learning opportunities are good for 11 to 16 year old students.
- Students value their religious education lessons and have good relationships with their peers.
- The department is well led and managed.
- Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of attainment are unsatisfactory.
- The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is underdeveloped.
- Contact with local faith community leaders is minimal.
- Religious education is not provided for Sixth Form students.

204. Standards of students' work by the end of Year 9 are below average. They enter the school with poor knowledge and understanding in religious education but they make a steady improvement and good progress in relation to their starting points in Year 7. Many students struggle with religious concepts and terminology and are confused by the variety of religious experiences and practices. They acquire a very good knowledge and understanding of Christianity but are less confident in their understanding of Judaism and Islam. They struggle to express their views in writing, though they can explain themselves much more clearly through the spoken word. However, the quality of some observed debates about religious life and experiences during the week of inspection was of a high calibre.

205. Standards of work by the time students reach the end of Year 11 are also below average. However, some students gained good results in the GCSE Short Course, with forty per cent gaining grades B or C. Over the last three years, the GCSE results have been mixed, ranging from between 37 percent and 51 percent gaining A*-C grades. Very few students gain A* and A grades, but all students entered for the GCSE course have gained an A*-G grade. A good number of students are annually entered for the GCSE examination.

206. The quality of teaching is good overall, ranging from very good to one instance of poor teaching. In three lessons the quality of teaching was very good, in four lessons it was good, and in two lessons it was satisfactory. In some lessons, the teaching is dynamic with the students being involved and highly motivated by an inspirational and dedicated professional. Students are welcomed into the classrooms and treated with respect, dignity and sensitivity. As a result, they behave well and have good working relationships with their peers when teaching is good. These good and very good lessons are enhanced by good quality ICT and literacy applications. They include a range of engaging teaching styles that bring the subject and the students to life. Teaching is much less effective when the pace of lessons is much slower, there is no variety in teaching style, debate is limited, activities are not engaging and students do not progress appropriately nor enjoy their work.

207. The majority of lessons for students aged 11 to 14 were good and some very good although one lesson was satisfactory. Two lessons with Year 9 captivated students' interests as the teacher explained the design argument for the existence of God, used ICT imaginatively and encouraged the students to come up with counter arguments. Other lessons for Year 7 concentrated too much on 'building' the pillars of Islam on classroom walls without extending the students' knowledge and understanding of the Islamic beliefs and

teaching about the pillars. Students were generally taught well and enjoyed learning about the arguments for and against going to war. The teaching was lively, imaginative and related well to current affairs and contemporary world situations. The monitoring of students' work is satisfactory but not enough use is made of assessment information to guide lesson planning. Whilst normal assessment of students in classrooms is good, the marking of students' work is satisfactory overall. Where teaching concentrated too much on students reading from their textbooks and then completing writing exercises, students tended to become restless and some bored.

208. The department provides a good quality of education for students aged 11 to 16. The department makes a sound contribution to students' personal development. The work presented to them generally matches their aspirations and potential, and builds on their prior learning well. Students with special education needs are catered for adequately, though no classroom assistants attended religious education lessons during the week of inspection. The gifted and talented students need to be challenged to reach higher standards. There is good equality of access and opportunity for students to join GCSE classes in Years 10 and 11. The quality of education would be enhanced significantly if the school were to take students out to faith communities on a regular basis and to invite faith leaders to contribute to the curriculum. There is no religious education for Sixth Form students, though the school is aware of the need to provide religious education for Sixth Form students. However, this was a weakness noted in the previous inspection and there has been no improvement.

209. The leadership and management of the department are good. The teacher in charge has recently rewritten all the schemes of work and ensured that all the students between 11 and 16 follow the locally Agreed Syllabus. The schemes are well presented and fully cover the key world faiths in sufficient depth and breadth. The schemes need to specify more use of ICT, although this was well used by the teacher in charge throughout the week. Students do not generally have enough access to the Internet or other ICT applications in their religious education lessons. Although there are good teaching resources in the department, the accommodation is inadequate. The mobile accommodation is very poor and dilapidated.

210. There has been a good improvement in teaching since the previous inspection. The department has a good capacity to improve and build on its current strengths.

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

In the inspection, five 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
English	9	78		0		1.3	
Mathematics	3	0		0		0	
Biology	1	100		0		5	
Chemistry	2	100		0		2	
Physics	1	100		0		3	
Business	1	100		0		5	
French	5	40		20		1.4	
German	2	100		0		2	
History	6	33		0		1	

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
English	2	100		0		5	
Mathematics	2	0		0		0	
Business	6	67		0		2.3	
French	2	100		0		3	
German	1	100		0		6	
History	2	50		0		3	

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ Part 1							
Leisure & Tourism	51	15.6		2		2.1	
Health & Social Care	40	17.5		0		1.1	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics A Level for a small group of Year 13 students.

Mathematics

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

Areas for improvement:

- Below average A and AS Level results.
- Unsatisfactory progress of the current students.
- Frequent staff changes.

211. Standards of attainment in mathematics are below average. In 2001, all five candidates who were entered for the AS and A Level examinations failed to obtain a grade. Of the five candidates who were re-sitting GCSE mathematics in the Sixth Form, two obtained grade C, two grade D and the remaining candidate a grade U. Advanced (A) Level results were better for a number of years prior to 2001. In 2000, one candidate achieved a grade A and a grade C in Further Mathematics. In 1999, three of the four A Level candidates achieved pass grades. Although there have been few candidates at AS Level, none have recently achieved pass grades.

212. Standards of work seen in classes and students' workbooks are below average. There are currently only two students in Year 13 working towards the AS Level qualification. There are no students studying mathematics in Year 12. Although the students in Year 13 have been studying mathematics in the Sixth Form for nearly two years, the work being covered is at the basic level. For example, students in one class were undertaking basic work in statistics, resolving forces on a body in equilibrium. They lacked confidence in solving the problems, even though the examples required application of only very basic rules. In another class, the teacher was questioning the students to find out what they understood of correlation and regression. Although the topic had been covered previously by another member of staff, the students showed a lack of knowledge of the basic principles. Both students entered Year 12 having achieved grade Bs in their GCSE mathematics. Their progress in the Sixth Form is unsatisfactory, and it has been adversely affected by relatively frequent changes in staffing.

213. Teaching in the Sixth Form is generally satisfactory. Lessons are well planned. Since the classes consist of only two students, teachers encourage them to work together. However, in spite of this, they frequently lack sufficient confidence to make adequate contributions to the development of topics. Lessons consist of an appropriate range of teaching and learning approaches, with aspects of most lessons involving students working on an individual basis. The pace is slow in some lessons for Year 13 students. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject matter. Although homework is regularly set, most is marked by students themselves when the work is reviewed during a following lesson.

214. There has been a lack of effective management of mathematics in the school, including in the Sixth Form. Over the past year, the department has been led by two temporary heads of department. Although there are school policies and procedures relating to monitoring and evaluation, these have not been fully implemented in the past. However, a permanent head has been recently appointed and is beginning to implement school policies in the department. The Sixth Form curriculum is appropriate, but there is no evidence of the use of information

and communication technology (ICT) to support the work. Students have the opportunity to re-sit GCSE mathematics and work towards AS Level in Year 12 and to A Level in Year 13. Nevertheless, very few students have currently taken up these options, and it is particularly disappointing that no students have opted to take AS Level in Year 12 during the current session.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on business studies courses at A/AS Level in Year 13 and AVCE Level in Year 12.

Business Studies

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

Strengths:

- The subject is popular and developing, meeting the needs of the range of students.
- Teaching is enhanced by strong subject knowledge.
- Ongoing development of business links benefits the curriculum through the provision of real world contexts for problem solving.

Areas for improvement:

- Insufficient strategies to identify and deal with under-achievement.
- Schemes of work need to be reviewed and include a wider range of teaching styles to meet the needs of new teachers and the range of students.
- The marking policy needs to be reviewed to give positive guidance for improvement.

215. Standards overall are satisfactory. In GCSE A Level business studies, the examination results represent sound achievement when compared with students' other grades. Two thirds of students attain A-E grades, although the number attaining A/B grades has declined over the past three years. The standards achieved by current Year 13 students are satisfactory, but there is some under-achievement against predicted grades by mid-ability students in their modular examinations throughout the course. These students make good progress in calculating acid test ratios and in determining the return on capital employed, using statistics provided for their final examination. With the guidance of their teacher, students are developing the skills of analysis and evaluation necessary for higher level responses.

216. Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teaching shows very good subject knowledge, and this is used to set a firm foundation for students to develop and apply knowledge in a business context. In a Year 12 lesson, the teacher established student prior knowledge before methodically instructing them in the theory of economic indicators, and student confidence was raised as a result. Some students lack the confidence to respond to questions and find difficulty in identifying the demand and supply curves on a simple diagram. Too often there is a narrow range of teaching styles and the pace of lessons slows when there is little opportunity for students to become actively involved in learning. Students work willingly on collaborative activities when they are given the opportunity. Students enjoy business studies. They are keen to do well and express positive views of the subject. Relationships are good with teachers and their peers.

217. Work experience and the ongoing development of business links play a positive role in supporting business studies during Year 12. Students who take part in the Durham University Seed Project are able to practice their business skills in problem solving activities with local businesses. There is good access to computers. The Internet is a valuable source of information and written work is enhanced by the use of word processing.

218. In Year 13, students working independently on their examination case study made good progress, and the weaker and most able students benefited from the high level of individual support given by their teacher. Work available for inspection was minimal. Where work was marked in a Year 13 marketing assignment, grammar and spelling were corrected but there was insufficient guidance as to how it could be improved.

219. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The detailed development plan provides a clear direction and is an important part of the bid for Business and Enterprise status. The advanced vocational certificate has been adopted to meet the needs of the widening range of ability of students. However, schemes of work are embryonic and lack the wider range of teaching and learning styles needed to support new teachers to the department and the differing abilities of students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on information and communication technology at AVCE Level in Years 12 and 13.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

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

Strengths:

- Very good teaching.
- The relationships between teachers and students.
- The very good attitude of students.
- Students' achievements in Years 12 and 13.

Areas for improvement:

- The provision of structured ICT courses for students not taking the AVCE course.
- Documentation for ICT in the Sixth Form.

220. Standards of students' work seen during the inspection are at expected levels for both Years 12 and 13.

221. There is a wide range of attainment in Year 12. A few students have poor attendance records, and because of their lack of commitment, it is likely that they will be ungraded for some of their units of work. Students have a good understanding of databases. They know the importance of field types and have some knowledge of validation of data, although some have difficulty with this concept. Students are competent in creating and amending databases from their own source material. Students are creating a user guide in the spreadsheet unit of the course. For this, they are making more extensive use of a variety of skills, particularly word processing with which they create their user guide, showing an awareness of prospective audience. They understand how to use hyperlinks and screen dump into their documents.

222. Students in Year 13 have a good understanding of databases and types of fields such as numeric, text, date and logic. They know what is meant by a 'primary key'. Students are working on a systems installation unit. They know the internal workings and components of a computer and make good use of a digital camera to record assembly of a computer. In both years, higher attaining students have well organised and structured files that help them to revise and hence get better grades in their course work.

223. Students achieve well as they make increasing use of a wide range of software to complete the units of work required for the AVCE-ICT examination. Not all students have taken an ICT course in Year 11 and therefore perform well in meeting the standards required for the advanced course. Students in Year 13 achieve even better, as they are producing high quality work above national expected levels.

224. Teaching is very good. In each of the three lessons observed, the quality of teaching was excellent, very good or good. Teachers have very good technical knowledge in the use of software. This gives students the essential information they need to make good progress in the subject because it lifts their knowledge and understanding. Teachers also have very good understanding of the examination requirements for the AVCE-ICT course, which helps students prepare well. Lessons are well planned, and good use is made of the technology, such as interactive white boards and data projectors. The sharing of objectives at the start of lessons helps students understand and focus on what is required of them. There are good relationships between teachers and students, and students are very positive about the subject. Teachers mark students' work well and make helpful comments that provide them with information on how to improve their work. Teachers know their students well so they are able to set them realistic targets. Students work well in lessons, are quick to get down to work and stay on task productively. They show independence but also good cooperation with one another when the need arises.

225. Management of the subject in the Sixth Form is satisfactory. The delegation of the AVCE ICT course works well, and allows the teacher with this responsibility some autonomy. Documentation for Sixth Form ICT is restricted to an outline planning sheet and the current examination syllabus. Students have good access to computers in school and make use of these for course work in many subjects. However, apart from the AVCE course in ICT, there are no other structured ICT courses to help students develop their computer skills further.

226. Although Sixth Form ICT was not previously inspected, there has been a good response with the introduction of the AVCE ICT course. Now in its second year, the course has only three students in Year 13. However, there are 14 students in Year 12 showing that the needs of students are well met. This is reflected by the positive attitudes of these students about the value of the course and the quality of teaching on it.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus for this inspection was on art and design at A/AS Level and GNVQ Advanced Level.

Art and Design

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

Strengths:

- The leadership and management of the new head of department.
- The capacity for improvement.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of attainment.
- The quality of teaching and learning and the monitoring of teaching to ensure consistent practice.
- The teaching of basic skills and the use of sketchbooks.
- The breadth of the curriculum.

227. Four students followed the AVCE course in 2001; one was awarded a distinction, and one awarded a pass while the other two failed. These results were well below the national average. There were no Advanced Level GCE candidates in 2001. Two students sat the examination in 2000, one gaining a grade C pass, the other a grade D, below the national average. These results were similar to those at the time of the last inspection.

228. The work seen during the inspection is well below average, due mainly to students' under-developed basic skills of recording from observation through drawing, still neglected as they were in Years 7 to 11. Their progress is slowed by the failure to maintain a sketchbook for investigation and experimentation into methods and materials, and to collect visually stimulating material, or as a reference for future working. It prevents continuous creative development, and is responsible for the lack of a thread of ideas linking their work. Pieces of work are self-contained and unrelated to each other. Drawings tend to be small-scale representational drawings, usually in pencil, rather than investigations into space, light, form, texture, scale, composition, mood or emotion. Students do not use computers to generate or manipulate imagery. Most of their work is two-dimensional painting and drawing. Their knowledge of multi-cultural art is very limited. Thus students do not have any realistic view of how well they are doing relative to national standards, or how they might improve. Numbers in the Sixth Form are small. Only one student is following the course in Year 13, while there are four in Year 12.

229. There is good evidence that students can generate good, original ideas, but they depend heavily on their teachers to make progress in their studies. For example, they had made and decorated good quality Aboriginal didgeridoos as a result of the teacher directing them, rather than the natural direction of their studies. They do not develop the personal view of art that is necessary at this level nor can they make connections with the work of famous artists and their own work. They do not consider or discuss the emotions or the spiritual quality present in artwork. The quantity of work that AS Level students produce in class and in their own time is well below average. Too many students, including the AVCE student, prefer taking images from books rather than drawing from observation limiting their achievement to satisfactory. Those students who have special educational needs make unsatisfactory progress due to a general lack of confidence, due essentially to their ability to analyse and record their observation.

230. The quality of teaching and learning in art are satisfactory. Three lessons were seen during the inspection: two were very good and one was unsatisfactory. The work seen indicates that progress is often slow with an inconsistency in the way teachers deliver their lessons. The teaching of basic skills of art and design: drawing, investigation and experimentation and the use of a sketchbook, remain weak after being neglected lower down the school. The teachers' expectations are not consistently high. Two teachers teaching one group of students is not effective and interferes with continuity of learning. In a very good Year 12 lesson, students following the AS Level course were pleased to exhibit and review their work. Their teacher was particularly adept at building confidence and generating pride in her students, who, after some initial hesitation were pleased to both explain their work and listen to others explaining theirs. In an unsatisfactory lesson, these same Year 12 students arrived without sketchbooks or the beginnings of an idea of what they were going to do, even though their final examination was less than two weeks away. The lesson lacked any obvious plan or direction. The expectations of the teacher and students alike were low. One student brought two chocolate bars, a packet of crisps, and a can of juice, possibly to arrange a still life group to draw, but after some thought, decided to eat and drink them instead. Another student made a very weak drawing of his shoe, for no particular reason. The lesson was wasted.

231. While the department offers a good range of courses, including AS, A2 and AVCE in the Sixth Form, the curriculum in art is narrow and the main body of work is two dimensional painting and drawing. While guidance for students' academic development is satisfactory, there are gaps in the careers guidance they are offered.

232. The leadership and management of art are good. The recently appointed head of department is already bringing improvements. The subject documentation, including the schemes of work, is being improved. Strategies to improve the quality of education include the increased use of artists-in-residence and planned visits to galleries and cities with centres of artistic interest. The quality and quantity of pupils' work displayed around the school is disappointing.

233. Students continue to underachieve. Sketchbooks are not used consistently. Drawing remains weak and there remains a dependence on secondary source materials. Critical studies do not yet provide pupils with the expected breadth of knowledge or personal response. Teaching remains satisfactory. The management of the department has improved considerably and the direction of the department is much improved. The department is beginning to improve but much needs to be done to raise standards in the Sixth Form.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus for this inspection was on English language at A/AS Level.

English language

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

Strengths:

- The course is popular and challenging.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is being well developed through a range of stimulating materials.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of attainment.
- The range of teaching strategies to encourage and enable students to become more effective independent learners.

234. The new English language AS and A2 courses are popular choices for students and well suited to their abilities. The courses offer students good opportunities to investigate and discuss a wide variety of writing for a range of audiences and purposes as well as to develop their close critical skills. A2 will be examined for the first time this year.

235. Standards are below national expectations, but this represents satisfactory progress, given the levels at which students enter the Sixth Form. National comparisons for the 2001 AS results are unreliable, owing to the small number of students entered for the examination. Two students achieved C grades in the summer examination, and there were one D, four E and one unclassified grades. No comparisons with other years are available as this was the first time that Ferryhill students have taken this course and examination.

236. The standards of work seen during the inspection are below average, but broadly in line with students' English GCSE results, though the course is very different from the work done in Years 10 and 11. Students are able to identify key linguistic devices used by writers to persuade, instruct, advise, entertain and inform their readers. They can also understand and use terms such as lexis, pragmatics, phonology and discourse, though they are not good at commenting effectively upon their use. Although students clearly enjoy investigating the techniques used by writers, they sometimes fail to see the full effect of a whole text because they are too concerned with identifying its components. Neither in the limited opportunities in lessons for discussion between themselves nor in their written work do students examine the cumulative effect of persuasive and presentational devices or the power of rhetoric. The editing skills of the most able students are good, but the ability of all to write an effective critical commentary is limited because of their generalisations and assumptions about both writers and their audiences. For example, one student wrote, 'Byron wrote his poem to entertain his readers,' and offered no evidence to justify this doubtful assertion.

237. Students are very positive about the English language course and say that they enjoy it. They are attentive in lessons but passive and often content to let their teachers guide them. They are frequently reticent and lack confidence in their own opinions, particularly in Year 12, because they see their teachers in the role of experts, rather than as enablers and guides. The syllabus ensures that students study a wide range of fiction and non-fiction, and includes pre-twentieth century writing. There are many opportunities to develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness through their reading and discussions, especially in the section of the syllabus that deals with language and social change. One class was seen examining a facsimile of an anti-slavery poster, whilst another was analysing a satirical

contemporary report of a trial in a local newspaper. In such tasks, students tend to look for a formula that will guide them to an answer instead of looking closely at the purpose of the materials they are studying and how this is achieved. Sometimes, they cannot see the wood for the trees of critical terminology.

238. Teaching is at least satisfactory. Half of all lessons are good. In these lessons, pupils are challenged and their opinions sought. However, the emphasis is often on deconstructing texts rather than enjoying them or considering their effect upon readers and how it is achieved. In other lessons, students rely too much on their teachers to provide them with information and interpretations. They are not encouraged to do their own research, to take ownership of the materials or to ask questions. The most successful lesson seen was one in which the teacher allowed students to make their own decisions in small groups before justifying them to the rest of the class. Overall, there is a limited range of teaching strategies and opportunities for students to become independent learners. Teachers' marking of essays and investigations is usually helpful and positive, but poor expression and unsupported generalisations and assumptions are not always commented upon.

239. The subject is appropriately resourced and its introduction into the Sixth Form curriculum has been well managed.