

INSPECTION REPORT

QUEEN ELIZABETH HIGH SCHOOL

Hexham, Northumberland

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122356

Headteacher: Mr Tony Webster

Reporting inspector: Mrs Sylvia Richardson
OIN: 1038

Dates of inspection: 5th to 9th March 2001

Inspection number: 187400

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 13 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs C Moffatt

Date of previous inspection: March 1996

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	10
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	19
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	21
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	22

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Queen Elizabeth High School is a larger than average 13-18 secondary comprehensive school serving 1382 pupils and students from a widely spread semi-rural area. The school has very few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. There is a significant minority of pupils with special educational needs, but the number is below the national average. There is an average number of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs. Most pupils arrive at the school with average or good attainment, but a significant minority is below average. The vast majority of pupils stays on into the sixth form. The inspection of this school included a detailed evaluation of its provision for pupils with special educational needs.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Pupils and students at Queen Elizabeth High School reach high standards in tests and examinations. This is due to very good teaching, excellent leadership and the high levels of interest, motivation and co-operation of the pupils and students themselves. The school is very well managed and provides excellent value for money. It is a very effective school where pupils make very good progress.

What the school does well

- Examination and test results are high and rising. Teachers use assessment and target setting very well to raise pupils' and students' standards.
- There are very good opportunities for pupils and students of all abilities to develop their talents and interests, and all are valued as individuals.
- Pupils and students receive very good support from teachers. This is evident in the strong relationships between them, the very good work with the highest attainers, the high quality special needs provision, the ethos of the school and the vibrant out-of-class programme of activities.
- The school's use of information and communication technology is a strength. It enhances both teaching and learning. Computers are accessible to pupils and students and appropriately used.
- The headteacher's leadership is outstanding.
- Teaching is a strength and over half is very good or excellent. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and students.

What could be improved

- Long standing problems of poor accommodation for teaching and learning in The Hydro, although counterbalanced as far as possible by the efforts of staff, create extra work for all and unnecessary discomfort for pupils and students and teachers.
- The role of heads of department in consistently monitoring the quality of teaching in their subjects and sharing best teaching practice needs further development.
- Provision for religious education in the sixth form and for a daily act of collective worship for all do not meet statutory requirements.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1996, since when there has been a change of headteacher and a growth in the number of pupils and students, in the sixth form in particular. Although there remain concerns about the nature of some of the accommodation, this has not affected standards, which continue to rise in both national tests and public examinations. The attainment of boys has improved and the gap between the performance of boys and girls is about the same as in the country as a whole. Teaching has improved. There was no unsatisfactory teaching at all in this inspection. Overall, teaching is now very good. The curriculum has improved and there is good provision for pupils of all interests and all abilities, especially in the sixth form. The school checks on pupils' and students' progress in a very thorough way and makes use of the information to help them improve their work. Upgrading of science

accommodation, the provision of a new English teaching block and the considerable investment in computers have enhanced what the school can offer and have taken the pressure off accommodation in some areas of the school. The school has developed an extremely effective partnership with the other local schools, which eases the transition into this more adult environment and identifies early special educational needs so that help can be given. Monitoring has improved overall, with the establishment of school self-review involving staff, governors, pupils and students and their parents. There is, however, a further need for heads of department to monitor all the teaching in their subjects regularly.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
Key Stage 3 national tests	A	A	A	C	well above average A
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	C	above average B
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	na	average C
					below average D
					well below average E

This is a high performing comprehensive school where results are reliable year on year. Although the school did not quite meet its challenging GCSE targets in 2000, it significantly exceeded the results which were predicted from pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. Test, assessment and examination results are well above the national average in almost all subjects. At the end of Key Stage 3, when pupils have been in the school for little more than two terms, they achieve well above average standards in national tests in English, mathematics and science. In comparison with schools with a similar intake, assessed on the basis of the number of pupils eligible for free school meals, attainment is average in science and above average in English and mathematics. In the GCSE examinations, attainment is well above average, across the board, for pupils who achieve five or more GCSE passes at the higher grades of A* to C. In comparison with schools with similar intakes, attainment is above average when assessed in terms of the value added between Key Stages 3 and 4 and average when assessed on the basis of eligibility for free school meals. The trend of improvement in GCSE results over the last three to four years has been broadly in line with the national trend. The best results in GCSE examinations in 2000 apart from in English, mathematics and science were in business studies, design and technology, French, German and history. Results in A level examinations in 2000 recorded another increase and are well above the national average.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils work very well together and take a mature and responsible approach to lessons and out-of-class activities. They are enthusiastic about their life in school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very responsibly, caring for each other well. This is particularly notable on very narrow staircases in the Hydro building where their good behaviour makes for safe movement at the change of lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Very good – the excellent relationships promote learning and there is mutual respect between teachers and pupils. Pupils' work and views are valued.
Attendance	Very good in the week of the inspection, despite serious local difficulties caused by snow and the spread of foot and mouth disease.

The complete absence of permanent exclusions and the efforts the school makes to avoid exclusions are a feature of its style. There is virtually no unauthorised absence. Pupils contribute to the very positive ethos of the school by their purposeful approach to learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very good	Very good

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

Teaching is very good overall. Of the 88 lessons seen, 77 were good, very good or excellent and the remainder were satisfactory. In the sixth form, teaching is particularly good. An unusually high proportion of the teaching seen in the school (over half) was very good or excellent. Teaching in English was predominantly good or very good, with some excellent lessons seen. Half of the lessons in mathematics were very good or excellent. In science, eleven of the sixteen lessons seen were very good or excellent and the remainder was good. There was also excellent teaching in Latin, information and communication technology, music and business studies. Teachers' use of questioning to deepen learning and their very good subject knowledge are notable features of the best teaching. Teaching to promote literacy across the curriculum is well advanced. Subject teachers are aware of the need to contribute to the pupils' and students ability to write well. Pupils' and students' ability to use number across the curriculum is good and there are good opportunities for practice in mathematics, science and geography. The provision and teaching for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Pupils' and students' good concentration and their ability to research, think broadly and apply earlier learning enhance their progress. Where teaching is only satisfactory, this is due to a lack of breadth and depth and to slower pace in lessons.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Senior staff think deeply about pupils' and students' needs and this drives their interpretation of curriculum. Recent innovations have successfully opened the sixth form to students of all interests and aptitudes. The range of extra-curricular opportunities is impressive and take-up is very high.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Early and thorough identification of needs and sympathetic but rigorous organisation are very effective in ensuring that good progress is made.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is very well catered for. Opportunities for spiritual development are good but planning is not yet systematic.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils and students are secure in this environment and know they can question, that their views will be taken seriously and that they will be encouraged to follow up their interests.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a very wide range of opportunities at all ages. Extra-curriculum and out-of-class activities support the taught curriculum and provide additional stimulation. The provision of religious education (RE) in the sixth form does not meet statutory requirements. The school puts care and support for pupils and students at the forefront of its thinking. Parental support for and satisfaction with the school is high

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	There is outstanding leadership from the headteacher and very good teamwork at senior level. Some development is still needed in heads of departments' monitoring of teaching but, overall, subjects are well managed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are dedicated to the best interests of the school, have a good strategic overview and are in close touch with the views of parents. They fulfil all their statutory duties well and ensure that senior management is held fully to account for development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	School self-evaluation is well established. There is very good use of information about pupils' and students' progress in lessons to help to raise standards.
The strategic use of resources	Resources, though not plentiful, are well used. A major investment in computers is improving learning. The provision of technical support has improved. Despite a recent building programme, accommodation remains inadequate.

Leadership is a strength of the school. The ways in which the school manages its limited resources and achieves the best value are exemplary. Staffing levels are satisfactory and teachers' qualifications match the needs of pupils and students well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school's high expectations of what pupils and students can achieve Their children make good progress and results are good Teaching is good The school is approachable The headteacher's leadership and involvement with pupils The school helps their children to mature and become responsible in their work and behaviour The extra-curricular and out-of-class activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation Budget Regularity of homework and occasional coursework overload

The inspection team agrees with the generality of views expressed by parents. Many parents complained about the poor accommodation in major parts of the school and the inspection team agrees with them that there is an air of neglect, which the teachers' bright displays of work cannot properly hide. The budget is well spent and, although resources are not yet good, they are certainly adequate. The head is giving strong and effective educational leadership to the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Examination and test results are high and rising. Teachers use assessment and target-setting very well to raise pupils' and students' standards.

1. Trends in attainment at all levels throughout the school have been steadily rising since the time of the last inspection, when standards were good. This is a high performing comprehensive school where results are reliable year on year. Although the school did not quite meet its challenging high GCSE targets in 2000, it significantly exceeded the results which were predicted on the basis of pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. Test, assessment and examination results are well above the national average in almost all subjects. Contributing factors in all cases are very good pupil and student attitudes to their work and the high quality of teaching which produces very good learning. Good use of assessment information and special educational needs support also contribute to the impact on standards of effective target-setting and self-evaluation.
2. Attainment in English is supported, as in all the core subjects, by consistently good teaching. In 2000, seventy-nine per cent of the pupils in Year 11 gained the higher grade GCSE passes of A* to C. In English literature, the eighty per cent of higher grade passes is against the national trend. Both were well above the national average. This achievement is particularly notable because of the school's policy to enter as many pupils as possible for literature as well as language, which all pupils enter. These very good results show the extent of improvement between the tests at the end of Key Stage 3, when pupils have been in the school for a short time, and results in GCSE. Since the time of the last inspection, the gap in results between boys and girls has narrowed in English language, although girls continue to achieve better results. The very good support given to pupils and students with special educational needs means that they too make good progress and either succeed in obtaining a grade in the GCSE examinations or a certificate of achievement in literacy.
3. Results in A level English have greatly improved in the last three years, particularly between 1999 and 2000 in the highest grades. In 2000, forty-five per cent of candidates achieved an A grade, considerably in advance of the national average. This has been achieved through teachers' concentration on developing students' writing styles, writing to time and ability to analyse texts.
4. Overall attainment in mathematics on entry to the school is broadly in line with national expectations. By the time of the inspection, when pupils have been in school for under two terms, attainment in lessons is above expectations throughout the age range. Year 9 pupils can work with compound interest and can apply a generic formula to calculate it. Pupils in the Year 9 lower tier groups are able to follow instructions to work out the size of angles in a polygon, although they could not all deduce the generic formulae. The majority of pupils in Year 9 have good numerical skills, which are at least in line with national expectations, and for the majority, are above expectations. Pupils in Year 11 have good algebraic skills, for example, higher attaining pupils were able to solve complex equations, relating their answers to a sketch graph to illustrate the appropriate range of values for the solution they reached.
5. Attainment remains above expectation by the time pupils reach the age of 16 and through the sixth form. In 2000, in the national tests in mathematics, attainment as measured by the point score was well above the national average and also above the

average for similar schools. The percentage of pupils achieving both at least Levels 5 and 6 in tests at the age of 14 was well above the national average and above that of similar schools. Over the last three years, standards in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 have been rising. Over this period, the results of boys have been slightly better than those of girls. In 2000, over two thirds of pupils – sixty-nine per cent - reaching the age of 16 gained higher-grade passes in mathematics. This is twenty per cent above the national average. Girls' results were slightly better than those of the boys. Standards at A level in mathematics are impressive with more than half of the students of further mathematics gaining an A or B grade and seventy per cent of the students who were entered for the A level mathematics examinations gained these higher-grade passes.

6. Science results at the age of 14 are well above the national average and broadly in line with those achieved in similar schools. Results have been well above the national average since the previous inspection, with a thirteen per cent increase in pupils achieving Level 5 or above. The percentage of pupils achieving Level 6 or above has risen by nine percent since the previous inspection. The performance of boys was better than that of girls in 2000 at this stage.
7. Results in GCSE science in 2000 were well above the national average, with sixty-nine percent of pupils achieving the higher grade passes of A* to C, compared with the national average of forty-nine percent. Results have been well above the national average since the time of the last inspection, but have improved in all of the science subjects. For example, the percentage of pupils achieving the highest grades of A* and A has improved since the time of the last inspection and is now twenty-four per cent, compared with a national average of just under eleven percent. The performance of boys was better than that of girls in 2000. The percentage pass rate at A level in science was well above the national average in biology and chemistry and above in physics, with the proportion of the highest grades above average in all three. Boys perform better than girls in chemistry and physics and there is no significant difference in biology.
8. The contribution made to improved standards in science by the refurbishment of laboratories has been considerable, enabling teachers to broaden the curriculum and provide more access to investigation, give better access to computers and use more sophisticated equipment for experiments.
9. Standards in the humanities (history and geography) and languages are good in Key Stage 3. In the assessments at the end of Year 9 for the last three years, there has been a steady trend of improvement. Detailed schemes of work match National Curriculum requirements well. By the time pupils reach the age of 16, standards are very good and, in most of these subjects, GCSE results are well above the national averages. In the sixth form, standards are at least good in these subjects and in religious education, sociology and psychology. Results at A level are well above the national expectation. Class work is enhanced by good use of research and independent work. Teaching is sharply focused on examination techniques and the improvement of grades.

There are very good opportunities for pupils and students of all abilities to develop their talents and interests and all are valued as individuals.

10. In discussions with pupils and students, they expressed considerable appreciation of the range of opportunities staff provide for them to participate in activities which

otherwise might be difficult to arrange individually. Their satisfaction includes the curriculum and the opportunities for extra subjects and levels of examination course, the non-classroom activities such as music and drama, sport and clubs, particularly those geared to raising their standards, and the opportunity to share teachers' enthusiasms. Many pupils and students, especially in Year 11 and the sixth form, expressed regret that the pressure of course and homework prevents them from attending more extra classes than they already do. All the courses and out-of-class activities seen during the inspection week were well attended and of high quality, supporting learning and motivation well. They also contributed significantly to pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

11. The ways in which the school has developed its curriculum since the time of the last inspection are very valuable. Greater breadth and a better match of courses to pupils' and students' interests and aptitudes have been achieved through the introduction of NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) and GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualifications) courses at various levels. The addition of further courses for sixth formers with the recent introduction of AS levels as part of National Curriculum changes has also broadened students' access to new interests. In particular, the changes have enabled the introduction of some very good learning opportunities for students of all abilities, who gain in confidence and competence as the courses they can now undertake proceed. This was very evident in seeing the students on the NVQ catering course, whose confidence and style were amongst the highlights of the inspection. Sixth form students expressed satisfaction at being able to complete A level mathematics in one year, in order to continue studying for their qualification in further mathematics. This is an example of how the school endeavours to be flexible enough to meet students' individual interests and help them develop their talents.
12. Pupils and students described the revision clubs, designed to help prepare them for examinations, as of high quality and very helpful. One such session, an excellent example seen during the inspection, was an adjunct to the preparation for a Step examination for the highest attaining A level physics candidates. There, students and teachers worked together at a very high level to find the means to solve a problem related to the forces exerted on an umbrella by a heavy shower of rain. Well-planned materials combined with good teacher experience of this work to make for an excellent session. An open, non-hierarchical approach to problem solving and intellectual effort also made it very relevant to candidates for places at Oxford and Cambridge Universities and an excellent introduction to the symposium and tutorial methods they will encounter at university.
13. Another good example occurred with the regular Year 11 after-school mathematics revision session. Pupils opt to participate in extra lessons to help them tackle the higher level examinations. In particular, the regularity and reliability of these sessions gives pupils extra confidence that they can succeed.

14. The community life of the school also enables pupils and students to develop their interests and talents. The Youth Theatre group, which meets weekly, is an excellent example of the interaction of school and community to this end. A very well attended evening session – forty or more school pupils and students joined by three students from a local Mencap further education college - enjoyed a well balanced mixture of music and improvised drama. They were able to explore ideas through music, dance and both scripted and improvised drama and movement to create a mood of quiet reflection, when they faced up to a social problem raised in their consideration of the theme. Concentration, commitment to character, control of self and support of others locked pupils and students into the dramatic potential of the situation. This in turn resulted in them asking excellent questions and becoming more aware of the importance of the conventions of drama and the theatre.
15. Possibly the best example of caring for the individual combined with academic rigour and supported by close knowledge of pupils' learning needs occurred in relation to the significant number of pupils and students who were prevented from attending school during this period because they live on farms affected by foot and mouth disease. Parcels of work were quickly got together in the week preceding the inspection, and by the time of the inspection, a two-way flow of work completed and new work was established.
16. Pupils and students make very good use of what is available to pursue individual interests, for example by using the computers in the library at lunchtime. Recent investment within the school has improved pupils' and students' access to appropriate computer programmes for their subjects and use is good. Pupils in Years 9 to 11 expressed their satisfaction with this development. However, sixth form students found that the shortage of study areas and a dedicated suite of computers was still a problem. The inspection evidence supports this view.

Pupils and students receive very good support from teachers. This is evident in the strong relationships between them, the very good work with the highest attainers, the high quality special needs provision, the ethos of the school and the vibrant out-of-class programme of activities.

17. A feature of the vast majority of the teaching is the high quality of support, academic and personal, which teachers provide for pupils and students of all ages in the school. This is evident in lessons, in the wide range of out-of-class activities provided and in the marking of pupils' work and other feedback which they receive to help them to raise their own standards.
18. Procedures for monitoring and supporting academic progress are very good. The school has an extensive assessment information system available to check on how well they are doing. It is well used to track progress and helps to ensure that targets agreed with pupils and students in all their subjects are challenging. The strategies for guiding pupils and students towards achieving these targets are very thorough. In the sixth form, tutor time focuses on support for the progress files and the preparation of applications for university, which students greatly appreciate.

19. Relationships between pupils and students and teachers are very good throughout the school. Pupils comment on the benefits of being treated as adults. The positive relationships they enjoy with their teachers clearly foster interest in the work and a sense of purpose in class. In a Year 12 mathematics lesson, students had the confidence to use discussion as the means to explore an issue and learn from each other. In a Year 10 music lesson, mutual respect and enthusiasm for the task accelerated progress. Teachers and pupils pool their efforts and expertise in science practicals and together give good support to lower attaining pupils in geography.
20. The support for pupils and students who have particular aptitude or talent is very good. In English, for example, as a result of the encouragement and personal attention they receive, many perform better than their predicted grades would indicate. In a religious education lesson for Year 10 pupils, extensive work on the topic of Christian beliefs on life after death stretched them in terms of articulating emotions and using artefacts such as paintings to stimulate discussion. Similarly, a Year 9 science class undertook a 'brainstorming' activity to create a mind-map about genetics. Having completed this, the higher attaining pupils, working in groups with pupils of all abilities, shared and respected the ideas of others. In some classes, gifted pupils are catered for simply by being clear that the teacher expects them to do more, go further, go deeper, and good relationships ensure that this is well understood without becoming a source of pressure. An excellent example of this occurred in a music lesson, where a Year 10 pupil was being encouraged to conduct the class in their music making and analyse the effects the conductor can create.
21. The support for pupils with special educational needs occurs in many forms. The advice, assessment and individual support available is of high quality. Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need are linked to individual studies tutors who devise with them effective individual education plans (IEPS). Subject teachers back these with simple individual learning plans (ILPs) for the subject. The combination is very worthwhile and represents continued development in systems for support since the time of the last inspection.

The school's use of information and communication technology (ICT) is a strength, and it enhances both teaching and learning. Computers are accessible to pupils and students and appropriately used.

22. At the time of the last inspection, the provision for information and communication technology was inadequate and there were too few computers for pupils' use. The situation has completely reversed and the provision of hardware and software is now good. Moreover, the planning and teaching of this subject is a strength of the school. Pupils and students use ICT at home and at school to improve the quality of their work, use word processing, illustration and spreadsheets to enhance coursework and make reference to a wide range of sites for research on the Internet. School use is greatly enhanced by home use of computers with the vast majority of homes providing access to a computer. The school has ensured through its policy of ease of access in clubs and lunchtimes that pupils who do not have a computer at home are not disadvantaged.

23. In order to ensure that there is good use of the investment in the computer stock, there is a regular audit of subjects. Use is high in English, languages, history and design and technology, for example, in Year 9. In the sixth form, the heaviest use is in design and technology, health and social care, physics and psychology, but all subjects make some use of computers. The school also monitors the use of computers in the library. In the inspection week, these were very well used by pupils and students from a range of year groups who were, in the main, completing coursework.
24. The ICT curriculum has significantly changed since the time of the last inspection, with provision in Years 9, 10 and 11 for lessons to improve pupils' skills in ICT. Although these courses do not lead to certification, pupils produce very good personal statements for their own progress files. Assessment is formal and well recorded so that teachers are aware of which skills are strengths and which weaknesses for individual pupils. Courses and clubs are adapted as needed. ICT also leads some of the developments within the partnership group of schools in the catchment area, where the development plan for the partners has resulted in shared training and improved curriculum links.
25. Pupils and students are confident and competent in their use of ICT. This is evidenced by the ease with which class and teacher discuss the use of the school's internal network (Intranet) to support their revision for a Latin GCSE.
26. Teaching in ICT as a separate subject is very good and sometimes excellent, leading to very high quality learning. In a Year 13 ICT lesson, for example, the teachers' excellent subject knowledge enables students to be questioned in a challenging but helpful way, allowing them to explore the complexities of their chosen topics. The result of this individualised working is that students have developed very good independent skills in using spreadsheets and forms to set up real-life responses to real-life management problems. For example, one student was completing a project on how to record all the aspects of the work of a technical department and another to record, detail and print invoices for a small business. A third had undertaken a task on behalf of his father's work in project management.
27. Within subject teaching, as seen in folders and books, teachers are using ICT well. In the NVQ catering course, written work is very well presented and a large amount is word-processed. Pupils and students use graphs, spreadsheets and word processing with fluency.

The headteacher's leadership is outstanding

28. The headteacher provides a model of dedication to the school. Excellent knowledge of staff and pupils and students individually, well developed skills in teaching and management and very good working relationships enable him to provide leadership of very high quality to staff and pupils. He is held in very high regard by all, as emerged at the pre-inspection parents' evening, and in particular by his governors and senior colleagues who work most closely with him.

29. There is a very strong partnership with the governors which enables them to be genuinely involved in policy making. This contributes to the effective development of shared values between governors and school. For example, governors attribute great importance to the extra-curricular activities in the school as a means of personal development, which should be accessible to all pupils and students. Headteacher and governors made it very clear that they value this more highly than increasing opportunities for some pupils to take ten or more subjects at GCSE level.
30. The leadership team also benefits from the head's influence, as seen in their developing work patterns. The team is clearly increasing its capability by specialising in areas of management. Not only does this make them very good at their jobs, but also levels of job satisfaction have increased. Senior managers take great pride in their work and continue to push out the boundaries of what can be achieved by providing appropriate and timely support to other teachers and pupils and students. Three developments in particular show the ways in which their specialisms are increasing the effectiveness of the school. A very thorough pupil and student progress tracking system to support planning of teaching, pupil achievement and school self-evaluation is now in place. The partnership with other schools in the catchment area is growing in significance as far as curriculum progression, teaching and learning are concerned. Finally, the effectiveness of planning more comprehensively to manage change in the sixth form is very good.
31. The headteacher has been instrumental in building a strong partnership with other local schools. Part of his vision for the future lies in the provision of an integrated curriculum supported by shared use and development of ICT. The partnership is well on the way to seeing this vision into reality, with the development of an Intranet, shared technical support for ICT and a shared community education programme. Curriculum progression has improved and the risk of repetition in the work offered in Year 9 has diminished as a result of better communications between the middle and high schools.
32. Since the time of the last inspection, monitoring has improved and it is a high priority for the headteacher and governors. Together they have worked out new systems, such as linking governors to subjects, in order that policy, management and teaching are known to be all pulling in the same direction. This is now beginning to bear fruit and teachers are becoming more used to lesson observation and accountability. The school also has accepted the head's lead in establishing self-review as a regular feature of its development planning. This has involved increasing staff awareness of the importance of assessment data to improve performance. Monitoring as a result has a clearer overall rationale and coherence.

Teaching is a strength and over half is very good or excellent. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and students.

33. Over half of the 88 lessons seen were judged to be very well or excellently taught. This is an improvement since the time of the last inspection. It is now an unusually high proportion to be judged thus. There was no unsatisfactory or weak teaching in this inspection. Teaching is very good overall. In summary, 77 lessons were at least good, and 57 of these very good or excellent. The remainder was satisfactory. In the sixth form, teaching is particularly consistent, whether in class, in non-classroom activities or in the community programme.
34. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which equips them well to prepare students for university entrance examinations as well as to convey a love of

scholarship for all students to share. A very good example of the quality of teaching for the sixth form, which successfully used the teachers' subject expertise to the full, was seen in an AS level English class where the class was studying the poetry of Donne and Marvell. Both teaching and learning were outstanding because pupils were inspired to search the text (Twickenham Gardens) to find the motivation for the poet writing as he did. The ability for perceptive analysis was developed through the sample of poetry used. Students were secure in the knowledge that their views would be tried and tested, questioned for clarity, analysed for authority of their statements and quality of contribution to discussion.

35. Teachers' very good subject knowledge also helps younger pupils. The notion of causation in history was very well explained. Approaching practical investigations on the synthesis of an organic compound was well supported by good explanation and background knowledge. An ensemble lesson on Baroque musical forms resulted in very high standards, excellent pace of learning and very good instrumental progress. These would have been impossible to achieve on a one-off basis, as pupils drew on a combination of mutual support and confidence in the teaching to reach this standard.
36. A great deal of care goes into preparing high quality course materials. In the Year 9 personal and social education course, for example, issues about planning for options are very well and graphically explained, so that pupils can make the best choices for themselves. A booklet on the First World War in history and another called 'Talk about Talk' in English are all good examples of how teachers support pupils' learning by creating materials to interest them and meet their learning needs.
37. Teachers use questioning well. In a Year 13 GNVQ class in business education, the teacher very effectively balanced opportunities for reflection with rigorous questioning to break down the learning into small steps, with the result that students grasped sophisticated concepts quickly. In a very good Year 9 science lesson on physical processes, the value of questioning was demonstrated by work with lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs. Very subtle changes in the form of questions used and the encouragement to expand on answers given helped these pupils to make gains in their knowledge and understanding. In an excellent Year 10 business studies lesson, pupils were challenged to come up with reasons why another supermarket should open up in Hexham. High expectations and the celebration of good answers made pupils very responsive to probing questions and a sustained session which required them to generate a range of original ideas.
38. Support for pupils with special educational needs in lessons is good. Where they have targeted assistance, it is very good. A good example was seen in a Year 11 geography lesson on earthquakes and volcanic activity, with successful efforts to ensure that all pupils could write accurately about the topic. In a Year 10 RE lesson, a session in which groups of pupils explained their views for the class helped the lower attaining pupils to crystallise their own ideas. Support for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs is very good indeed, with very good analysis of needs and support for mainstream class work given in a quiet atmosphere which bolsters self-esteem.
39. A feature of the best teaching is the way teachers are effectively exploring with their pupils and students the scope of the hardware and software available to them. In a Year 12 mathematics lesson, the use of a computerised function plotter to demonstrate wavelengths was particularly helpful.
40. Particular progress by boys occurs in Years 11 and 12 in English as a result of the very

good use of talk about language and gender and the very good outcomes in terms of the boys' lively responses, which were skilfully handled by the teacher in an excellent lesson seen. Teachers generally show considerable awareness of the need to encourage boys to talk well before they endeavour to write well. This is having some effect on improvement in standards of writing, as seen in a sample of written work from all year groups.

41. No teaching was unsatisfactory. A minority, however, is sketchily planned on a routine lesson basis. Although this does not materially affect the learning and progress pupils' and students make, it may have a limiting effect cumulatively. In one lesson, there was over-dependence on too narrowly defined a lesson plan. In this case, the teacher did not adapt the plan although pupils made it clear that it was inappropriate. This resulted in repetitive work and a lack of pace.
42. Pupils' and students' work is generally very well marked and feedback is informative and personalised. Comments guide them towards improvement whilst encouraging them with judicious praise. This contributes to sustained progress over time. Target-setting is another way in which teachers' overview of pupils' and students' written work helps them to improve; good guidance links naturally with the development of pupils' own increased expectations of themselves. Comments such as ' Very good; now let's target certain constructions more precisely...', followed by detailed suggestions, were not uncommon.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Poor accommodation for teaching and learning in The Hydro, although counterbalanced as far as possible by the efforts of staff, creates extra work for all and unnecessary discomfort for pupils and students and teachers.

43. Most of the school's accommodation meets the school's basic needs and some newer additions to the building stock are of good quality, providing some much-needed specialist facilities. However, the older parts of the school and in particular The Hydro, although providing sufficient accommodation, are in poor condition and some rooms are cramped and quite inadequate for teaching purposes. This was true, for instance, for a Year 9 history class of 27 who could barely fit into the room allocated to them.
44. The school has budgeted very well, given limited resources, to refurbish most of the science rooms and to decorate parts of The Hydro, since it received the responsibility for its budget from the LEA in 1999. However, the extent of refurbishment required to bring all the accommodation to an appropriate standard and provide all classes with suitable learning spaces is quite beyond the budget currently available to the school. In particular, the remaining science accommodation, the design and technology spaces and the art and food rooms at the top of The Hydro need significant expenditure to make them appropriate and safe working environments in which the full National Curriculum and sixth form course requirements can be met. The playing fields are in a poor condition and frequently, in wet weather, are unusable, affecting the physical education programme considerably.
45. Teachers ensure that all teaching spaces contain displays of pupils' and students' work and other relevant materials which stimulate them to evaluate their own work realistically. Much effort is put in to display in most subject classrooms. The library / learning resource base, for example, although far too small for a school of this size covering this age range, is lively and attractive. This takes a significant amount of time and thought, for example in languages rooms where there are prominent roof trusses. These result in teachers needing to group pupils and students very carefully to have sight of the whiteboard and to mark the beams with display so that pupils and students are not at risk of hitting their heads. Much ingenuity has gone into making these rooms welcoming and stimulating.
46. The school has very thorough health and safety procedures, which are necessary in the context described above. The outcomes of health and safety audits have been clearly conveyed to the Local Education Authority. Governors contribute significantly to the school's analyses of its accommodation needs. All school staff are clearly well versed in health and safety procedures and dedicated to improving the current accommodation as quickly as they can.

The role of heads of department in consistently monitoring the quality of teaching in their subjects and sharing best teaching practice needs further development.

47. There is a strong sense of direction for subject departments throughout the school. All departments are well focused on raising standards and their management is generally good and often very good. In some cases, it is excellent. Departmental development plans are geared towards raising attainment and providing broad opportunities within and beyond subject studies. In English, there is a comprehensive policy for securing progress across each year group. Regular analysis based on checks on pupils' and students' progress ensures that planning and teaching strategies meet needs well.

Effective teamwork in science similarly makes good use of available information about pupils. In mathematics, teamwork focuses the teaching team on the effectiveness of their work. The departmental development plan for mathematics shows that the department has carefully analysed its own strengths and weaknesses and plans well to maximise strengths and minimise weaknesses. In the humanities subjects, lesson planning is very good, with particular attention paid to giving good support to non-specialist teachers.

48. This is the context in which the school has developed its practices for monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness. Senior managers' and governors' priorities since the time of the last inspection have been to ensure that the school development plan, which is simple, appropriate and clear, conveys key messages to be picked up by heads of departments. This is done very effectively in most areas of monitoring. However, heads of department do not generally have a systematic programme of lesson observation to identify any areas of teaching expertise requiring further development, although they support new teachers very well, including through constructive criticism of lessons observed. They do not extend this to more experienced teachers to ensure that the challenges of recent changes have been equally well met by all.

Provision for religious education (RE) for all in the sixth form and for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils do not meet statutory requirements.

49. Assemblies are lively, thought-provoking and interesting, raising social and moral issues in a very careful and considered way. Religious themes are broached, with poetry, story, music and talk supporting them most effectively, and sometimes movingly, so that pupils and students can reflect further on these ideas. Their response in all the assemblies seen was good. However, for those not attending an assembly, there is usually no other access to these themes in tutor time, where the teachers concentrate on matters of pupils' personal organisation. The school therefore still breaches the requirement to hold a collective act of worship each day for all pupils.
50. The sixth form does not have a programme of religious education. Some religious themes are used in assemblies and in aspects of the study students undertake, but this does not meet requirements. Religious, spiritual and moral themes are addressed in some lessons, but are not systematically planned to provide the core experience of RE which is required. For example, some very important related ideas were aired on the question of research into genetics in an A level French lesson.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

51. In order to continue to improve the quality of this already very good school, headteacher, governors and staff should consider the following points and devise further effective strategies to take the school forward:

- (1) link with the LEA and other external agencies to improve the accommodation and movement around the buildings. In particular,
 - ◆ identify more space for sixth form private study;
 - ◆ refurbish accommodation for design and technology, ensuring that it meets health and safety requirements;
 - ◆ look to means of improving the art and food technology accommodation on the top floor of the Hydro;

(See Paragraphs 43, 44 and 45)

- (2) involve heads of department in a planned programme to monitor teaching in their departments. Ensure that they are in a position to report to governors and make this part of the whole school self evaluation system;

(See Paragraphs 47, 48)

- (3) take action, as recommended in the last inspection report, to develop a policy on collective worship and put it in place. Make sure that all sixth formers have access to experience of religious education.

(See paragraphs 49, 50)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	88
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	28

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9	41	27	10	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	899	483
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	39	

Special educational needs

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	117	18

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	25

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7
National comparative data	6.3

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.4

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	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	151	150	301

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	119	125	124
	Girls	134	119	115
	Total	253	244	239
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	84 (83)	82 (81)	80 (79)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (41)	62 (53)	48 (42)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	113	133	120
	Girls	127	127	117
	Total	240	260	237
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	80 (80)	87 (88)	79 (75)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	49 (46)	68 (66)	50 (40)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2000	148	151	299

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	102	142	148
	Girls	104	151	152
	Total	206	293	300
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	69 (72)	98 (98)	100 (100)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	46
	National	38.4

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 pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	na
	National		na

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
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	2000	97	105	202

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	20.7	21.2	21 (20)	2.0	4.1	3.5 (2.7)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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 pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	62 (46)	68(89)
	National		72.9

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	2
White	891
Any other minority ethnic group	4

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	28	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	85.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	404

Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.2
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Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.2
Key Stage 4	20.7

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	3,342,101
Total expenditure	3,324, 314
Expenditure per pupil	2404
Balance brought forward from previous year	-109,098
Balance carried forward to next year	-91,311

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1382
Number of questionnaires returned	312

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	50	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	49	45	3	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	51	7	2	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	51	16	3	3
The teaching is good.	37	54	3	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	48	13	3	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	37	4	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	36	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	30	47	15	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	48	38	4	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	45	4	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	41	3	1	5