

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE JOHN HENRY NEWMAN SCHOOL**

Stevenage

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117585

Headteacher: Mr M J Kelly

Reporting inspector: Mr I Benson

Dates of inspection: 5 – 9 November 2001

Inspection number: 189658

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:	Voluntary Aided Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Hitchin Road Stevenage Hertfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Biggs
Date of previous inspection:	October 1996

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2739	Mr I Benson	<i>Registered inspector</i>		How high are standards? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students? How well does the school care for its pupils or students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? How well is the school led and managed?
9931	Mrs M J Kerry	<i>Lay inspector</i>		How high are standards? How well are pupils or students taught? All aspects in the Sixth Form
22958	Mr T Bailess	<i>Team inspector</i>	English.	
30743	Mr N Cowell	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Geography; Special educational needs.	
12885	Mr J Hunt	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Information and communication technology.	
30996	Mrs A Higginbotham	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	
23246	Mr J Mitchell	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science; Physics.	
4922	Mr M Driver	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science; Biology.	
31981	Mr E Forster	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art; Design.	
8859	Mr T Dodd	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
30114	Mrs A Kenward	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography.	
19152	Mr R Merryfield	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	
15396	Mr R Bulman	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern languages; Equal opportunities.	
7926	Mr J Bowden	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education; Special educational needs.	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The John Henry Newman School is an over-subscribed, mixed, 11 to 18 Roman Catholic Voluntary-Aided School for 1134 pupils. It serves a widespread area and, although many pupils travel long distances to it, about 40 per cent come from Stevenage. The majority of pupils are white. The pupil population includes a below average proportion who are: from minority ethnic backgrounds (5.4 per cent); on the school's Register of special education needs (13.3 per cent) and have Statements (0.8 per cent); eligible for free school meals (5.3 per cent); have English as an additional language (1.8 per cent). None of the pupils in this latter category are in the early stages of language acquisition. Pupils' attainment on entry is above average.

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

This is a very good school, where consistently good teaching enables pupils to reach high standards. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, senior management team and governing body provide a clear direction for the school's work, and have established an ethos that encourages pupils to grow effectively as learners and people. The school resources are very well used, and, as a result of the excellent application of the principles of best value, it provides very good value for money.

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

- Pupils reach high standards at 14, 16 and in the Sixth Form in their academic work and personal development.
- Teaching and learning is consistently good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the Sixth Form and enables pupils to make good progress.
- The leadership and management of the headteacher, senior staff and governing body is of outstanding quality: it promotes and values excellence in all aspects of pupil achievement.
- The clear Catholic mission, aims, values and expectations provide a very robust frame of reference within which the school can operate effectively.
- The school has an excellent partnership with its parents: they have a high commitment to the school and provide considerable support for pupils' learning.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to school, and are nurtured in their growth as learners and as people by high quality support and guidance and by an inclusive and accepting ethos.

### **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

- There are no major weaknesses. In the context of the school's many strengths, the items listed below as areas for growth, development and improvement, should be considered by governors and the senior management team. Pupils' learning should be further improved through:
- better co-ordination of and provision for information and communications technology (ICT).
  - raising standards of attainment and improving the quality of provision in physical education.
  - providing further support for lower attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 in English.
  - formalising the identification of and support for gifted and talented pupils.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since its last inspection in October 1996. Both the governors and staff have a very high commitment to school improvement. Good progress has been made in dealing with the key issues raised at the last inspection: improving monitoring by middle managers; more effective curriculum planning for progression and continuity; making better provision for the use of ICT; better co-ordination of special educational needs; improving marking and assessment. The school has addressed all of these matters successfully, and has also ensured that these developments contribute to the raising standards and the improvement of teaching and learning. In addition the school has: constructed a new building, the result of a successful Basic Needs Bid; broadened the 16 to 19 curriculum; adopted even more rigorous procedures for the appointment of new staff; developed a highly effective programme for the induction of newly qualified and appointed staff; implemented more effective and widespread use of data collection and analysis in monitoring and tracking pupils' attainment and progress. This focus on school improvement has required the careful identification of priorities in the development plan and has been supported by planning for the effective use of the school's resources.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-Levels	A	A	A	N/A

<b>Key</b>	
<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

Standards attained at ages 14, 16 and Post 16 are well above average. Results at age 14, which are not included in the table above, are well above average in English, mathematics and science, with results in mathematics being particularly strong. This is the case in both 2000 and 2001. The school has sustained high performance throughout the whole of Years 7 to 13 for the last three years. Although the average points score for GCSE fell in 2000, this was due to a change in entry policy, not to declining performance. Work seen during inspection supports the picture given by results. The achievement of pupils is good, and for students in the Sixth Form it is very good. When average points score is compared with that of similar schools at age 14 and age 16, achievement is respectively well above and above average, and this is supported by the school's own value added data. In the Sixth Form value added data confirms very good achievement. All pupils make at least good progress across almost the entire curriculum: progress is only satisfactory in PE and ICT. Gifted and talented pupils make very good progress, and those who have special needs make good progress. Boys and girls achieve well: on occasions there is less disparity in their performance than that seen nationally. Standards of literacy and numeracy are very good. Targets are realistic and increasingly challenging.



## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very good attitudes to school. They are well motivated, considerate and self-disciplined and take pride in their membership of the school community. Pupils are eager to benefit from the school's provision, as well as to contribute to its success. They take responsibility with maturity and enthusiasm.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good: pupils, including those from minority ethnic groups, have confidence in the school to deal swiftly with unacceptable behaviour. Exclusions are used only in exceptional circumstances and after considerable attempts to help offending pupils.
Personal development and relationships	Very good support is provided for pupils to grow as learners and people. There are many opportunities to take responsibility and to contribute to the school. Relationships, between pupils and with adults, are excellent.
Attendance	Attendance is above average and authorised and unauthorised absence is below average. Parents recognise that pupils' attainment and progress benefits from good attendance.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	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.*

The quality of teaching is good, and in the Sixth Form it is very good. The great majority of the teaching was good or better; in only one of the 196 lessons observed was teaching unsatisfactory. Examples of excellence were seen both in the main school and in Post 16 classes. Teaching was good or very good in all subjects except PE where it was satisfactory. In English, mathematics and science teaching was good. Pupils in the main school make sustained efforts in their learning and make gains at a good pace. The skills of literacy and numeracy are very effectively taught, and these support achievement across all subjects. Overall, satisfactory use is made of ICT, but this is an area that needs to be improved in several subject areas. The teaching of pupils who have SEN enables them to make good progress, although the targets in some individual education plans are too broad. Being placed in small groups generally supports these pupils well. Teaching in the Sixth Form courses inspected and sampled was good or very good. The great majority of it was good or better, and a substantial proportion was very good or excellent. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. There are good arrangements for teaching key skills. Pupils structure their Sixth Form work well, have a mature and competent approach and offer thoughtful analysis in discussion. As a result of the regular feedback they receive, students are very well aware of what they are learning and how to improve.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is of good quality. Pupils are provided with a wide range of learning opportunities: these are complemented by extra-curricular activities and opportunities for wider learning. Course choices for Years 10 and 11 are good and meet the needs of the vast majority of pupils. They include opportunities for pre-vocational study and work experience. Within tutorial work there is good provision for sex, health, drugs and careers education. Pupils need to be offered more opportunities to use computers to support their learning.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good and includes in-class support as well as some support when pupils are withdrawn from class. Lower attaining pupils in English in Years 7 to 9 need more help to improve attainment and progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils who have English as an additional language are fluent in reading and writing, achieve well and make good progress. None are in the early stages of language acquisition.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision is very good. Excellent support is provided for pupils' spiritual and moral development; for social development it is very good; and it is good for cultural development. The daily expression of an inclusive ethos is founded in a clear mission and aims and strong Catholic values.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very effective processes are used to support pupils' academic and personal development and to provide for their health, safety and welfare. Progress is carefully tracked and pupils are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils receive good quality support and guidance.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school enjoys excellent relationships with its parents. Every opportunity is taken to ensure that they receive high quality information about their child's progress and events within school, and are consulted about major changes. The school values the working partnership with parents and their support for pupils' learning. Parents are committed to the school, involved in its life and work and contribute to its success.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, senior staff and the governing body provide the school with outstanding leadership. The clear Catholic mission and statements of aims provide a strong ethical and very robust frame of reference within which the school can operate effectively. Middle managers provide good leadership, and continue to develop rigorous practices for monitoring and improving teaching and learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are a highly committed and effective group and contribute much to the school's success. They know the school well, visit regularly and have considerable insights into its life and work. They are fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	A rigorous monitoring and evaluation process now informs the identification of priorities in the school's development plan. Self-evaluation is used increasingly by subject areas as an important tool to reflect on what they do and what impact it has on pupils' attainment and progress.
The strategic use of resources	There is very effective use of the school's resources. Planning is of very good quality. It has ensured that there are sufficient staff to meet the needs of the current curriculum and that all have access to high quality professional development; that accommodation is good, although that for music and business studies is inadequate; and that the provision for learning resources is satisfactory. The library provides good support for pupils' learning.
The extent to which the school applies the principles of best value	The excellent use of these principles has ensured that financial decisions are always well informed. The school ensures that learning outcomes are compared with national benchmarks, and that competition and consultation is used in making key decisions, all of which are subject to challenge, especially by the finance committee and the full governing body. This process ensures that very good value for money is obtained.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school's high expectations of its pupils.</li> <li>• The high quality leadership of the headteacher.</li> <li>• Almost every area of the school's work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased provision for extra-curricular activities.</li> <li>• Improved information about pupils' progress.</li> <li>• More regular setting of homework.</li> </ul>

Inspection evidence firmly supports parents' positive views about the school and its work. It is clear that the school has a satisfactory programme of extra-curricular provision but it lacks sufficient provision for boys' sport. On the other hand, the inspection found that school reports are of good quality. They include appropriate detail about pupils' progress and compare well with those provided in other schools. It was found that homework is set regularly and provides good opportunities to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of topics studied in school.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Sixth Form of this 11 to 18 Catholic comprehensive school has 185 students. It is gradually expanding. There are a small number of students from ethnic minority backgrounds, and roughly equal proportions of male and female students. The Sixth Form provides a wide range of subject and vocational courses leading to GCE Advanced Level and AVCE qualifications. Recently introduced courses include theatre studies, psychology and modern history. A high proportion of students stay on from Year 11, and a few join from other schools. A small group of students stay on to re-sit GCSE examinations. There are clear entry criteria; these depend on which programme of courses is to be studied. The Post 16 examination results are well above average.

## HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a highly successful Sixth Form, which is very cost effective. Students achieve well and attain well above average results in examinations. This high performance has been sustained over the last three years. There is very effective support for academic progress. The quality of teaching and learning is very good across the curriculum, with students making very good progress in their courses: retention rates are very high. Support for personal development is very effective, and students are able to play an important part in the life of the school as a whole. The leadership and management of the Sixth Form is outstanding.

## STRENGTHS

- The high quality of teaching means that students make very good progress, learn in depth, and achieve well above average standards.
- Students are mature and capable learners, with a keen interest in their work and progress.
- The school's ethos and the quality of personal relationships enable students to develop as informed, committed and compassionate citizens.
- The quality of leadership and management ensures that there is coherent planning of a broad curriculum meeting a range of needs, rigorous monitoring of progress, and very good preparation for the next stage of education.

## WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Some aspects of tutorial time could meet students' needs better.
- The opportunities for sport within the enrichment activities are too limited.
- Individual support on career choices is limited.

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

## THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Results are above average, although a low proportion of students gain the highest A or B grades. Teaching is mainly good with some very good. Progress of the majority of students is satisfactory. Students are highly motivated and the provision is well managed
Biology	Good. In the last two years results have improved significantly and are above average. Teaching is good and students have a good grasp of concepts. Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
Physics	Very good. Standards are well above national expectations, and most students achieve better results than those predicted by their GCSE grades. Teaching is good and students show substantial capacity for hard work and perseverance.
Design and technology	Very good. Standards in design and technology and food technology are high. Teaching is very good. Behaviour and motivation of pupils is very good.
Business Studies	Very good. Standards in AVCE Business are very high; teachers have strong subject knowledge and teaching is good.
Art and Design	Very good. Standards and attainment are above average due to the high expectations of teachers, the quality of guidance provided and the mature response by students.
Geography	Very good. Results are well above average and there is a 100 per cent pass rate. Teaching is very good, and the experience gained in fieldwork is very well used to develop students' understanding.
English	Good. Students make good progress in their courses and achieve grades at or beyond those predicated. Teachers communicate enthusiasm for their subject well.
French	Very good. A Level results are well above the national average. The quality of teaching is at least good and most is very good. Students are diligent. They use ICT regularly to research and present topics.

Work was also sampled in chemistry, history, German, music, psychology, sociology and economics. In the lessons seen, teaching was at least good, except in GCSE Year 12 history where it was satisfactory. In music, teaching was very good and in the one lesson of German seen it was excellent.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	There is very good quality support and guidance, starting with the thorough induction prior to entry, and continuing with regular monitoring of progress and good support for future choices. Tutorial time is well used to guide and monitor students, but some of the taught aspects of it could be improved.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Sixth Form	Leadership and management of the Sixth Form are excellent. Development planning is perceptive, and clearly identifies what needs to be done to improve. Very good use is made of value added data to monitor and improve performance. The senior management and the governing body have an exceptionally coherent approach, which enables the Sixth Form to focus on its own distinctive issues whilst remaining very much part of the whole school.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the Sixth Form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students appreciate the generous amount of time staff members give to helping with difficulties.</li> <li>• Students think that teaching is good, and that independent study and research are well supported.</li> <li>• Students enjoy the Sixth Form, and think that they had a good choice of suitable courses, even where these may not have been their first choice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is significant concern about individual advice on careers, and the taught aspects of the tutorial programme.</li> <li>• Students feel the range of extra-curricular activities, especially sport, is too narrow.</li> <li>• Some are dissatisfied with information on their progress.</li> <li>• A minority feel that their views are not sufficiently taken into account.</li> </ul>

Students, despite some critical comments in specific areas, are overwhelmingly positive about their Sixth Form experience. The vast majority would recommend the Sixth Form. The strengths identified focus on the high quality teaching and broad curriculum, coupled with effective guidance. Inspection evidence fully supported these positive views. Evidence also partly supported two of the concerns. The provision for extra-curricular sport is too limited: although the school has tried to address this, a successful outcome has not yet been achieved. Individual advice on careers is limited, following a change in the service provided, but access to literature and other information is good. Whilst advice and preparation for university application is very strong, the taught aspects of tutorial time are less successful and could be improved. Inspection evidence did not support the concerns on information about students' progress, which was found to be provided frequently, and was specific and supportive. There are channels whereby Sixth Form views can be represented, and Sixth Formers themselves are in the process of strengthening these by reforming the school council.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

#### **The school's results and pupils' achievements**

1. Pupils achieve well at this school. They reach well above average standards across the great majority of the curriculum. Achievement in the Sixth Form is particularly good.
2. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment is above average. A range of evidence, including band profiles from value added projects, Key Stage 2 results and profiles from diagnostic testing on entry indicate an intake that comprises the whole range of attainment. Within this, whilst there is a weighting towards higher attaining pupils, there is no lack of lower attaining pupils. There is some fluctuation year on year.
3. At age 14, pupils are reaching well above average standards, as shown by their results in Key Stage 3 tests in both 2000 and 2001. Average points score is well above average, as it has been for the last four years. It is rising broadly in line with the national trend. Standards of work seen during the inspection confirm this picture, with standards in all subjects being above or well above average, except in ICT and physical education (PE) where standards were satisfactory.
4. Pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9, and their achievement is good. The high quality teaching, observed in almost all subjects, supports this achievement. In English, mathematics, science, art and modern foreign languages (MFL), achievement is very good. The school's own value added data and comparisons with similar schools confirm the view of good achievement. Value added results show positive residuals, especially in mathematics. Average points score is well above similar schools, with that for mathematics being very high. Both boys and girls achieve well. In several subjects the disparity between boys' and girls' performance is less than that found nationally.
5. At age 16, pupils are maintaining standards that are well above average. Both average points score and the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades are well above average. This performance has been sustained over the last three years. Although the school's average points score fell in 2000, this was due to a change in the examination entry policy, rather than to declining performance.
6. In 2000, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A\* to G grades was described as above average, and the percentage of pupils gaining one or more A\* to G grades as in line with the average. In terms of actual results for that cohort of Year 11 pupils, nearly all gained five or more A\* to G, and all gained one or more A\* to G grades. Both girls and boys performed well above average after taking into account the national picture.
7. Standards of work seen in scrutiny and in classrooms in Years 10 and 11 confirm the standards achieved in examinations. In the majority of subjects, including all the core subjects, standards were well above average. They were above average in design and technology (DT), history and business studies, and in line in ICT and PE. In the case of history, geography and ICT, this is an improvement since the last inspection when standards in these subjects were judged unsatisfactory overall.
8. Observation during inspection shows that achievement at the end of Year 11 is good. In art, DT, business and MFL it is very good, and in PE and ICT it is satisfactory. This is supported by value added data that again shows pupils achieving more than might have been expected. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades is above average compared to similar schools. When the results of the whole cohort are taken into account, the average points score is also above average compared to similar schools.

9. Pupils identified as having special educational needs (SEN) make good progress in the majority of subjects and achieve well in relation to their capabilities. This is due to them usually being in the smaller bottom sets and because of effective planning for the range of attainment by most teachers. Although there is currently no specific policy for identifying and making provision for the gifted and talented, they make very good progress because most teachers plan well for their needs.

10. Pupils' literacy skills are very good throughout the school. Speaking and listening skills are very good in most subjects. The great majority of pupils, including lower attaining pupils in Year 7, show confidence in answering teachers' questions. Teachers also use questioning techniques effectively to develop pupils' response. A very good feature throughout the school is that pupils answer in complete sentences rather than single words or phrases. By Year 9, answers employing several complex sentences are usual. Teachers introduce technical terms well so that pupils use them with understanding. In geography for example, pupils in the lowest attaining groups use terms like 'canopy' and 'prevailing wind' with assurance.

11. Pupils listen very well to teachers and to their peers. Their response shows that they value and respect each other's contributions. In a Year 10 drama lesson boys and girls spoke particularly well and expressively. They also listened closely to each other's comments and explanations, and were able to articulate their understanding of the scene they had performed using vocabulary such as 'tension' and 'purposeful' with precision.

12. Reading is very well developed by the attention given to it throughout the school, particularly in English lessons. Pupils have good experience of reading from a range of texts and for a wide variety of purposes. The importance of independent research, using the school library and new technologies, is emphasised in a number of subjects including English, geography, music and art. Pupils have a good introduction to the school library during their first term. They use the computerised catalogue with confidence to locate books on the topics of their choice. Pupils value the library, and show enjoyment and application in their reading when spending time there. In all years pupils read aloud to the class without embarrassment. Teachers create opportunities for them to practice, and give them good support and encouragement in this work. Pupils are also taught to describe and analyse styles of writing, and understand the conventions and techniques suited to writing for different purposes and audiences.

13. Writing is also very good. Handwriting is generally neat and most pupils take considerable care over the presentation of work. Spelling is generally sound and good attention is given to accurate punctuation. Pupils have opportunities to write in a variety of styles in a range of subjects. They also have good opportunities to research, draft and write for a variety of purposes. Extended personal and creative writing is a strength in English.

14. Standards of numeracy for the majority of pupils are very good. The development of pupils' numerical skills forms an increasing aspect of the mathematics curriculum. This is particularly so for the mathematics classes in Year 7, where lessons frequently involve starter activities with the pupils undertaking mental arithmetic exercises. Several of these are timed, and pupils show good levels of confidence and skills with number when undertaking them.

15. Pupils also make good use of number in a range of subjects. For example in science they are able to rearrange formulae and undertake calculations confidently and accurately. In DT good use of number is made in measurements and weighing. Use is also made in this subject of charts and shapes. Standards of numeracy are also good in ICT where pupils make use of spreadsheets and databases. In geography, good use is made of number in graphs, charts and scaling when working with measurements on maps. It is planned that all staff in the school will be involved in development activities relating to numeracy for one day during February 2002.



## Sixth Form

16. Students in the Sixth Form reach well above average standards. The average points score for those doing two or more GCE Advanced Level subjects, and for those doing Advanced GNVQ courses, has been well above average for the last three years. Results in the Advanced GNVQ have been especially strong. In 2001, in the first set of results following changed vocational course requirements, the proportion of distinctions obtained was less than previously, but results were still above the national average.

17. When the school's overall results are compared with all maintained school Sixth Forms, and with all Post 16 providers, they are once again well above average. In so far as comparison with small samples are valid, the group of Sixth Form students who are re-sitting GCSE courses also reach very good standards compared to national averages.

18. Examples of work seen in work scrutiny and during lessons confirmed a picture of well above average attainment. Of the courses inspected in detail, standards in English, mathematics, science (biology and physics), art, geography and French were well above average. In DT and business studies, standards were above average. Sampling of other subjects through lessons and work scrutiny was undertaken in chemistry, AVCE science, psychology, sociology, economics, history and music. Observations indicated above average standards being achieved. In ICT, standards were in line with course expectations, as they were for Year 12 students in psychology.

19. Achievement in the Sixth Form is very good. It is particularly good in art, DT, geography, French and business studies. The high quality teaching combined with very good quality support and guidance, means that students make very good progress through their courses. Retention rates are very high with only one or two pupils leaving each year. This is a tribute to the thorough induction programme and good quality guidance on to courses. Value added data confirms that students achieve very well compared with their starting points. A high percentage of pupils go on to higher education.

20. Students reach good levels of competence in key skills, including study skills, working with others and problem solving. These are evident in their Sixth Form lessons, where the skills that they have are more than adequate to support them in their courses of study. Good quality note taking and strong collaborative working were seen, for example in sociology.

21. Students, presenting their work on a recent twentieth century novel, showed highly developed literacy and social skills. They worked effectively together in small group discussions, and listened well to each other, observing the conventions of discussion and debate closely. They are confident in talking to their peers and their teacher and in taking on different roles in the group when presenting, questioning or chairing. The majority speak purposefully, with a good sense of structure in what they say. They use apt vocabulary and lively intonation, as well as emphasis and eye contact, pace and humour to enhance peer understanding and enliven presentations. All students use standard forms of English well.

22. The school operates a key skills programme in ICT for GCE AS and AVCE students during Year 12. The majority of students on this course are currently working towards the Level 2 of the key skills qualification. Teaching and learning for the class seen were both very good. Students were working on an individual basis on computers, undertaking a mail-merge activity. They were very well motivated, and standards of attainment were at the expected level for the stage of the programme.

## **Whole school evaluation**

23. Overall, the school has succeeded in maintaining and further improving the high standards reported at the last inspection, both in the main school and the Sixth Form. Standards in some subjects which were unsatisfactory, for example history, geography and ICT, have shown improvement; in the case of history and geography, there was much improvement. Standards in other subjects, such as science, art, DT, French, business studies and English and music at age 14 have also improved. Currently, standards in PE are lagging behind those in other disciplines.

24. Attainment is well above average, and achievement is good throughout the school. Achievement is particularly good in the Sixth Form. These high standards are clearly linked with the good quality teaching observed across almost all the curriculum, especially in the Sixth Form.

25. The school sets itself targets that are increasingly being refined by the use of value added data. Usually performance is close to these targets, indicating that they are realistic but also challenging.

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

26. Pupils are well motivated, considerate and self-disciplined. They are proud to belong to the school community, and eager not just to benefit from its provision but also to contribute to its effectiveness. Trust is vested in them from the time they are enrolled in the school. As a result, they take on responsibility with maturity and enthusiasm. Many make impressive gains in their development, both as learners and people, as they progress through the school.

27. Attitudes to learning are very good. In over nine-tenths of lessons pupils' attitudes were at least good, and they were consistently high in English, mathematics, DT, geography, modern languages, art and music. Pupils are eager learners, concentrate and work with commitment and respond very enthusiastically to the challenges they are offered. Pupils' relationships with peers and their teachers are excellent. Within lessons they work well on their own, in pairs and small groups, show respect for their learning partners and become engaged in well-conducted and structured discussions. Pupils take responsibility for their learning in the majority of lessons. They are well organised, relish active participation in question and answer sessions and benefit from framing questions and hypotheses that help them to clarify or extend their understanding of topics being studied. Where problem-solving opportunities are provided, pupils often provide interesting and elegant solutions. There are, however, a very small number of lessons where pupils are passive learners. For example, in one science lesson, copying from a worksheet slowed the pace of pupils' learning and progress.

28. Pupils know and understand how well they are doing, and are confident about what they need to do to improve their performance. They find written and oral comments on their work helpful in defining personal targets for improvement. Even when their work has not reached a sufficiently high standard, pupils are generally keen to take up the challenge to improve the standard and quality of their work.

29. Many pupils are enthusiastic about the support provided for their development as learners and people. They use self-evaluation in order to set themselves realistic targets for improvement. In Year 10, for example, pupils set themselves target grades using comparative data from the OFSTED Autumn Package. Pupils also value the opportunities to review their progress, especially when making decisions, for example about subject choices for the GCSE or the Sixth Form. In lessons where pupils who have a Statement of SEN receive extra help, all pupils show a positive attitude and willingly ask for help themselves.

30. Pupils are highly committed to the school, and benefit from its inclusive and accepting ethos. They value what it provides, the wide range of learning experiences it offers and the success it has in nurturing and supporting them as they progress through each stage of their school life. Their involvement in the life of the school is very high. They take an active part in a range of activities,

such as school visits, journeys and exchanges, instrumental music ensembles, choirs and drama, subject workshops, charity fund-raising, working with younger pupils and showing visitors around the school. All of these contribute positively to pupils' personal development.

31. Pupils benefit from the strong Catholic ethos that pervades all aspects of the school's work. They show compassion for each other, offering support to those that need to be cheered and visiting sick or hospital-bound pupils. They welcome and befriend new pupils, and willingly offer to help staff members in whatever capacity the situation demands. They know the head teacher and senior managers, and respond to them warmly, sharing with them the time of day, and their highlights and concerns.

32. The ethos also encourages pupils to be reflective, especially in relation to spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. The school Mass on All Saints' Day challenged pupils to reflect on the characteristics of a saint. Also, in a Year 9 assembly, pupils were invited to think about the tragic events in New York, the war in the Middle East and the recent death of the school's librarian, and from these to draw lessons of hope for the future as Christians move towards Advent and Christmas. There were poignant moments of spiritual significance for them as they summed up their thoughts in The School Prayer.

33. Behaviour is very good both in lessons and in the public areas of the school. Both at break and lunchtimes, pupils have concern for others and relationships are very good humoured as they wait for or eat their snack or meal. Pupils show their maturity and self-discipline as they move quickly and safely between lessons across the range of buildings, and by arriving on time so that they are prepared for work right from the start of the lesson. At break and lunchtimes, out-door play is occasionally boisterous, but any poor behaviour, potential aggressiveness or bullying are dealt with effectively. Pupils have confidence in the school to deal swiftly with unacceptable behaviour. The few pupils from ethnic minorities and those who are from traveller families feel that they have every opportunity to be members of the school community and to benefit from its ethos and provision.

34. Exclusion is used sparingly as part of a whole school behaviour management strategy. Those who give concern are monitored, and appropriate strategies are used to help them improve their behaviour. Some are the subject of regular target setting and a review of their behaviour, whilst others have external help. The local authority's behaviour management advisory teacher counsels such pupils, and, in consultation with the pupil and parents, agrees approach to improve the situation. It is only for very serious or persistently poor behaviour that other approaches are considered, including exclusion. It is the school's clear intention to keep pupils within the school wherever possible. Governors are involved when it is appropriate.

35. Relations across the school are of high quality, and benefit from the fact that each pupil is known and valued as an individual. Parents value greatly the high commitment that staff members have for each individual pupil. The regular communications with parents about a pupil's achievements or current concerns are greatly valued. Such an approach within the classroom enables many pupils to become better learners who have the confidence to explore sensitive issues in a well-managed lesson.

36. Attendance is very good and is above average. Both authorised and unauthorised absence is below the national average. The authorisation of absence is rigorously and consistently carried out across Years 7 to 11. Registration is effectively and efficiently carried out. Given the nature of the site, internal truancy is carefully monitored and occurrences are rare. There were few occasions when pupils were late for lessons during the inspection: those pupils that were had justifiable apologies and reasons to offer their teacher.

## Sixth Form

37. Students in the Sixth Form are mature, responsible and sensible young people, who take pleasure and pride in their academic study and have a strong commitment to their school community. They work extremely hard in their lessons and assignments, and are thoughtful and perceptive in discussions. Their attitudes to both life and work are very mature. Attendance is very good.

38. Relationships are excellent with each other and with staff. This was especially evident in the Year 13 assembly in which the Head of Sixth Form discussed the use of value added data with students: a serious topic which was treated by students as such, but where time was also found for humour. Students take their progress very seriously, and are eager for information on how well they are doing. Many have clear aspirations of what they wish to do in future.

39. Post 16 students see themselves as very much part of the whole school community, and regard this as an advantage of a school Sixth Form. They are very committed to helping younger pupils, through mentoring for example, and to serving the wider community through training for work as commissioned Eucharistic Ministers within the parishes. Many are willing to take responsibility through the School Council or structured roles, and they are eager to take the initiative in reforming the role of the Council into something of wider significance. They are not passive recipients of education, but have a clear voice that they use to express balanced views of the school community of which each of them is a member.

## HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

40. The quality of teaching is good, and in the Sixth Form it is very good. Four fifths of the teaching observed was good or better and one third was very good or excellent. There was virtually no unsatisfactory teaching – only in one lesson. High quality teaching, including examples of excellence, was seen both in the main school and in Post 16 classes. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection when 11 per cent of teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory. The low expectations mentioned as a weakness at the last inspection are certainly not apparent now.

41. Teaching is of good quality across the curriculum. It is good or very good in all subjects, except in PE where it is satisfactory. Teaching is of very good quality in art, DT, geography, MFL and music: in all three of the core subjects, English, mathematics and science, it is good.

42. In the main school, teaching in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 is characterised by teachers having secure subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils' academic effort, presentation, commitment, behaviour and contribution to their own learning and that of the class as a whole. Staff are skilled at providing a wide range of activities and using a variety of strategies which ensure that all pupils are enabled to learn and make good progress. Pupils' response to this strong methodology is to make sustained effort throughout the lesson. Where teachers have sufficient access to ICT, it is well used to support pupils' learning in, for example, music. Particularly good use is made of homework to extend what has been learned in class, and the very effective communication with parents through homework diaries adds a valuable extra dimension to the support pupils receive in extending their research and independent study skills.

43. The management of pupils is also a significant strength of the teaching. As well as normal classroom organisation, collaborative and group work is well managed and pupils respond by working readily with each other when called upon to do so. No time is wasted in forming working groups, and learning proceeds briskly with pupils listening well to each other and exchanging ideas. In most lessons independent learning is well promoted also, but occasionally this could be given more emphasis. As a result of the feedback they receive from staff, both in lessons and through monitoring of progress, pupils are well aware of what they are learning, why, and what the next step is for them.

44. Other than support from learning support assistants (LSAs) as part of pupils' Statements of SEN, there is no extra adult support for other pupils on the school's register of special needs. In order to support these pupils, the school uses extra resources effectively to ensure bottom sets are smaller. Teachers can thus focus more attention on working with pupils identified as having special educational needs. However, in Years 7 to 9, there is still need for extra adult help to support further the literacy needs of pupils. Sometimes, in English for example, there is insufficient planning and organisation to meet the range of learning needs within the bottom sets. In music, however, smaller numbers allow for high levels of individual attention thus enabling pupils to make very good progress and achieve very well. Where there is support from LSAs this can be very effective. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 8, supportive and thoughtful questioning enabled a pupil with a Statement of SEN to make good progress. The LSA was also able to give effective help and advice to other pupils in the class.

45. Most departments produce subject specific individual education plans (IEPs) for pupils at Stage 2 and above on the school's SEN Register. Teachers produce these both for groups of pupils as well as individuals. This helps guide their planning of work for these pupils. There is some good quality target setting on these IEPs – they are clear, concise and challenging – but in other cases, targets can be a little broad and lacking in specificity. This means that they are not easily attainable for pupils. Nevertheless, the progress of pupils identified as having SEN is good across Years 7 to 11 and in the majority of subjects.

46. A whole school initiative introducing the national strategy for literacy, in Years 7 to 9, and techniques for developing language across the curriculum is already resulting in improved teaching of literacy. Good practice was seen in a range of subjects during the inspection. Effective strategies include the use of writing frames, to help pupils develop their ideas logically, in English, science, geography and history. Pupils also keep glossaries of technical terms in science, DT and music. Teachers create classroom displays of key words in most subjects, including art, modern foreign languages and music. Written work is marked thoroughly, with the requirement for corrections generally observed.

47. The teaching of numeracy skills is very good, with many subject areas planning work that will develop and use these skills. Good examples were seen in a number of subjects, including science, geography and ICT.

## **Sixth Form**

48. Sixth Form teaching is of very high quality. In the teaching observed, more than nine out of ten lessons had teaching that was good or better. One third of the teaching was very good or excellent. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching was good or very good in all the courses inspected in detail, and also in the sampled subjects of sociology, psychology, economics, music and history. The teaching of ICT key skills was also of good quality.

49. Teachers demonstrate command of their subjects, and also teach in a way that enables students to extend their learning skills through, for example, effective note taking, and in-depth discussion. There is often probing questioning which challenges pupils to provide clear analysis, as in a Year 12 psychology lesson where pupils were learning about research methodology and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of Asch's approach to the study of social influence. Again, in Year 12 sociology, the questioning and discussion enabled pupils to identify patterns of social change concerning marriage, and to offer explanations drawing on their own experience as well as what they had learned from the subject. Teachers' clear expositions mean that students are well aware of when notes need to be taken, and how to structure these for future reference. This good quality, in-depth, challenging teaching was evident across all the Sixth Form work inspected.

50. A particularly effective feature of Sixth Form teaching is the regular feedback that students receive about their work. The detailed marking of assignments mean that pupils are well aware of what standards they are reaching and how they might improve. This affords them both reassurance and further challenge. It is an integral part of the high quality support and guidance received by Sixth Form students.

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

51. The school's curriculum policy statement offers a clear view of the governors' intention to enable all pupils to benefit from the highest possible quality of education it can provide. The range of learning opportunities within the taught curriculum are to be complemented by extra-curricular experiences that will enhance pupils as learners and people and enable them to benefit from the Catholic ethos, values and attitudes that are integral to the school community. The curriculum provided is, therefore, required not only to meet statutory requirements and provide access for all pupils, but also to meet their individual learning needs. This is achieved through offering a broad range of subjects, both within the arrangements made by the school for learning as well as beyond the school day.

52. The curriculum is broad and balanced, is generally of good quality and meets statutory requirements. For pupils in Years 7 to 9 all of the subjects of the National Curriculum are taught as well as religious education (RE). In Year 7 there is discrete provision for ICT, but in Years 8 and 9 this is taught through English, mathematics and technology. As pupils move through Years 8 and 9, they can also study a second modern language. Throughout these three years, an increasing use of setting enables pupils to benefit from provision that meets their individual learning needs. However, some lower attaining pupils in English would benefit from further support to enable better progress to be made.

53. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 also have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The core provision, of English, mathematics, science and RE, also includes PE and a selection of subjects from a range of option groups. The option groups provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their interests and talents as well as to extend their previous learning. All Year 9 pupils receive individual counselling prior to making decisions about courses they wish to follow in Years 10 and 11. Imaginative planning enables pupils to take one of three different routes to GCSE certification in science – including single and dual award as well as three separate science subjects. Similar arrangements to meet individual pupil's needs are available in making option choices. However, the principles upon which choices can be made are clear, and include provision for modern languages and technology. Further choices are made from a series of programmes to take account of interests and talents as well maintaining breadth of study for career purposes. Options include a mixture of GCSE long and short courses, and the higher attaining pupils may be involved in accelerated learning for entry at the end of Year 10. This generous provision, which is pupil-led and includes pre-vocational courses, meets the majority of learning needs of each cohort. The criteria in the new arrangements, for lifting normal curriculum requirements in some subjects, are rigorously applied following detailed discussions involving pupils and their parents.

54. The provision for pupils who have SEN is good. Where pupils are disapplied from the National Curriculum as a requirement of their Statement of SEN, alternative and appropriate provision is available. Subject departments have delegated formal responsibilities for provision for pupils with SEN. This ensures pupils' learning needs are addressed within the mainstream curriculum. In Years 10 and 11, the structure of one of the curriculum options on offer helps address further the needs of those pupils identified as having SEN. The school's practice of in-class support for pupils with statements ensures that these pupils have access to the whole curriculum.

55. Within the taught curriculum, a number of cross-curricular skills are taught. There is good

provision for the teaching of literacy, and very good provision for the teaching and application of number. Within ICT, even though provision is satisfactory, there are fewer opportunities to develop and apply skills in subjects such as geography and modern languages.

56. In addition, for Years 7 to 11 there is an extensive tutorial programme that includes personal, social and health education, and regular careers education provision from Year 9 onwards; in Year 10 all pupils have work experience. The tutorial programme is comprehensive and includes statutory provision for sex and drugs education, but also addresses matters of the human condition that are relevant to young adults. An important aspect of this programme is the opportunity it offers for monitoring pupils' personal development, and exploring matters at key points when they need to make decisions or move into the next phase of learning.

57. The programme of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory, and includes a considerable range of opportunities for participation in a variety of instrumental and choral music ensembles as well as other cultural and intellectually challenging experiences. The provision for sport for boys is somewhat limited. However, the current total range of activities make positive contributions to pupils' learning.

58. This school serves a very diverse area and a widespread Catholic community. The relationships it nurtures with the parishes from which children come enriches the school and supports pupils in their learning and personal development. The prayer and liturgical life of the school, and the provision for RE, is strong and plays an important part in defining the nature, values and ethos of the school, as well as putting its values into action and in supporting pupils' learning.

59. Relations with partner institutions are outstandingly good. Pupils' progression and continuity in learning is greatly enhanced by these strong links – to the benefit of both primary and secondary partners. The headteacher and his senior colleagues regularly visit partner primary schools, and work tirelessly to ensure that the transfer of pupils to secondary school is a positive experience and that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning. The Year 7 parents' and pupils' handbooks strongly support this process. The school also has extensive links with local industry and commerce, many of which provide support for pupils' learning through the Education-Business Partnership and Neighbourhood Engineers, for example, or through sponsorship of events and awards.

60. There is a small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. These pupils are full and valued members of the school community; they experience no language problems and achieve similar success to their peers. The school has made substantial efforts to introduce and sustain multicultural elements in its curriculum. English, languages, history, music and RE all play their part. School assemblies serve to highlight the school's strong involvement with developing countries overseas. The few travellers on roll are well catered for and make good progress.

61. This school makes very good provision to support pupils in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. True spirituality lies at the heart of all that the school does and the way in which it does it. The headteacher, who is clearly the school's spiritual, as well as its educational leader, defines spirituality as being "loved for who I am", and it is this vision that the school seeks to realise in its life and work. The school exhibits a very strong sense of community that is guided by the frequent repetition of the Christian message of respect for others and oneself. Preparations for inclusion within this community are begun through the very close links with partner schools, and are confirmed through the enrolment service in which all Year 7 pupils take part. Discussions with pupils during the inspection revealed that they believed the school successfully translated its Catholic values into reality, and many welcomed the opportunity of organising their own assemblies.

62. The school meets the requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship through its daily prayers; there are regular year and whole school assemblies, and Mass is celebrated on feast days and additionally on every Thursday lunchtime for those who wish to attend. The liturgical life of the school is strong, and encourages pupils and staff to contribute to, as well as benefit from, this important aspect of the school's community life. In this regard, as part of their spiritual commitment, some Sixth Form students have been trained and commissioned as Eucharistic Ministers to assist in school and parish Masses. Grieving over the recent death of a member of staff has brought the school community together in recognising the love and service freely given by a departed friend. It has also enabled the school to celebrate and reflect on life and death and its spiritual significance to those who are Roman Catholics as well as Christians. Provision to support pupils' spiritual development through the subject curriculum is strong in subjects such as art, music, modern languages and RE. Overall the school makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual development of its pupils.

63. The school makes excellent provision to support pupils' moral development. It has a clearly thought out code of conduct, written by pupils and followed by all members of the school community. The need to respect others, and to recognise the impact of poor behaviour on others and their learning are important principles with which all who transgress the code are confronted. The headteacher and staff members are highly convincing role models. Assemblies also provide good opportunities to publicly affirm the school's values and its moral code. Moral issues are addressed very well in many subject areas; in English the interplay of good and evil is explored in *Macbeth*, as are the roles of fidelity and infidelity in marriage in Chaucer. In art, the political aspects of a wide range of art movements, such as Picasso and the Spanish Civil War and the constructivists and the Russian Revolution are discussed. In history, topics such as the Nazi treatment of the Jews, the Slave Trade and the opium wars with China provide very good opportunities for confronting moral issues. The school's active Amnesty group campaigns for the release of prisoners of conscience. In summary the school's provision to support the moral development of its pupils is outstanding.

64. The school makes a very strong contribution to the social development of its pupils and supports it in many ways. Even before the Year 7 pupils arrive at the school they are made aware of the schools aims and values and, in particular, the importance of caring for others. The "Smartie Tube" project effectively involves them in the school's charitable work from their first day. This strong emphasis is maintained throughout the school, through the links with schools in Uganda and Peru and many other charities. Pupils are encouraged to be socially responsible; in lessons they are given many opportunities to collaborate in pairs and groups; in PE they learn to work well in teams and the department organises inter-school competitive events; on open days and other occasions, pupils volunteer to guide parents and visitors around the school. The school council and the mentoring of Year 7 pupils by Sixth Form students provide further very effective ways of developing the pupils' and students' sense of social responsibility. The home-school agreement, which the pupils sign, strongly relates to their responsibility as individuals and learners. Social skills are also very well developed through a wide range of school trips and educational visits. Examples of these are the art department's visits to art galleries, residential field trips organized by the geography department, overseas tours undertaken by the school's instrumental music groups and exchanges with partner schools in Europe. Overall provision to support pupils' social development is very good.

65. The school makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities including exchanges with partner schools in France, Germany and Spain. Pupils are made aware of differing cultures through their work in such subjects as music, where they study music from India and South America. In design technology they encounter different styles of ethnic cooking and use stimuli from various ethnic cultures for design projects. Ethnic writers are featured in the Year 10 and 11 English curriculum and the English cultural tradition is explored throughout the school through the works of such writers as Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens and such poets as Coleridge, Blake and Tennyson. In their artwork, pupils are exposed to a wide range of representations and artefacts from other cultures, for example Aboriginal dream painting in Years 7 to 9. The science department organizes a range of



visits to places of interest such as the Science Museum; the history and art departments have organized very productive joint trips to the National Gallery and to Russia. Over the past few years, a number of staff and sixth-form students have been privileged to visit the school in Uganda that the school supports and sponsors. The previous head girl, accompanied by the head boy, visited last summer and she gave a moving account of their visit to the school at a full assembly during inspection week.

## **Sixth Form**

66. The Post 16 curriculum is of very good quality. It meets statutory requirements for the provision of RE and collective worship. There is a broad range of courses including both GCE Advanced Level and AVCE, and these courses meet students' needs and aspirations well. Students recognise that, where their first preference is not met, often the courses they take meet their needs better than their initial choice.

67. The curriculum is skilfully geared towards allowing students to progress to higher education. There is also good quality provision for those students needing to re-take GCSE examinations. These GCSE re-sit courses enable access to the higher-level courses for those students who might not otherwise be able to attain it. This inclusive curriculum is very much in tune with the school's mission and aims.

68. The curriculum is carefully and coherently planned. The school pays attention to other local providers as well as to student and parental choice. It is responsive in starting new courses when these will enhance the overall quality of the curriculum and be viable within a reasonable timescale. There is a good programme of enrichment activities, even though the time for these has been affected by the new curriculum arrangements, as has the amount of individual study time. Although enrichment as a whole is good, there is a lack of extra-curricular sport for Post 16 students. Sixth Formers themselves provide extra-curricular activities for younger pupils, such as a drama club.

69. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is of the same high quality as in the rest of the school. Its impact was evident when students discussed the growth of secularisation in a Year 13 sociology lesson. They showed very good understanding of the impact religious belief has on ways of life, and of the fact that religious faith may lead a person to take quite different views from the majority of people in society. The tutorial programme is satisfactory.

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

70. The school has very effective processes for supporting pupils' academic and personal development. In the last three years more effective use has been made of performance data at whole school, subject and individual pupil levels, using comparisons with local, national and similar schools measures. Pupils in all year groups are now more keenly aware of how well they are doing in each of their courses.

71. Overall, educational and personal support and guidance for pupils is very good. Currently, the school and subject departments make good use of a range of statistical data to monitor pupils' academic performance. At whole school level, a variety of data analysis projects are used to offer measures of added value and to propose predictions for individual pupils' performance at 14, 16 and 18 years of age. This whole-school approach to the use of data enables careful monitoring of the performance of each cohort of pupils, and the setting of overall targets for them as they move through the school. Annual reports to parents are well informed by the wide range of data available, and provide them with clear information about the attainment and progress of their sons or daughters.

72. At departmental level, performance data is used for setting purposes and for monitoring individual performance against well-established benchmarks. Regular assessment is undertaken in all subject areas and accurate records are kept. The consistent use of both sets of data has certainly assisted the school and subject departments monitor their own performance. It has also helped monitor progress and set targets for individual pupils to improve their standards of work.

73. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good. This area of the school's work has improved significantly since the last inspection when it was found to be unsatisfactory. There is now a considerable reservoir of good practice across the school with all subjects having at least satisfactory procedures, except in PE where it remains unsatisfactory. Where practice is at least good, in English, mathematics, science, art, DT, modern languages and music for example, the tracking of individual pupils' performance is highly systematic and teachers are clear about what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. The quality of marking has improved and in most subjects pupils find helpful written comments provide a basis for improvement targets. The formal target setting process is improving as both staff and pupils become more skilled in defining areas for improvement.

74. The progress of pupils who have SEN is carefully monitored, in most cases against their IEPs and the contents of Statements. Currently, subject-specific targets with IEPs are tracked within departments. However, in a number of cases targets are not sufficiently specific to enable progress to be measured.

75. The use of assessment outcomes to inform curriculum planning is good. It is particularly influential at whole school level and within the mathematics, science, art, DT, history, modern languages, music and business studies departments. In the latter case, for instance, the analysis of GCSE results and the assessment outcomes from work during this term have already informed a decision to change the GCSE course. Most importantly, in all departments where there is good practice, pupils have been beneficiaries of the planning of teaching and learning to improve on previous lesson delivery.

76. Within the tutorial programme, very good procedures are in place for monitoring and improving attendance, promoting good behaviour and eliminating oppressive behaviour. There are clear guidelines relating to attendance and behaviour, and these are explored within the tutorial programme in relation to personal rights and responsibilities. Form tutors, heads of year and of upper and lower school play significant roles in ensuring that pupils have appropriate support and guidance regarding their attendance and behaviour. Both are systematically monitored, and pupils are helped to face the results of their misdemeanours. In some cases targets are used to provide a framework for monitoring personal development.

77. In addition to curriculum booklets, pupils receive very clear guidance in making decisions about, for instance, the subjects they will study in Years 10 and 11 or in the Sixth Form. The senior staff team invest considerable time in these processes to ensure that, in co-operation with the careers service, each individual pupil receives the best possible guidance.

78. Very good procedures are in place to ensure pupils' safety and welfare. The governing body's health and safety committee are fully involved in reviewing the effectiveness of the school's policy. Annual inspections are fully reported to governors although currently there is no internal health and safety officer to advise on matters relating to repairs or risk assessments. Appropriate procedures are operating for first aid and for dealing with sick children. The school's child protection policy is well defined and provides detailed guidance in cases of a disclosure. All newly qualified and appointed staff members have a unit in their induction programme on child protection, provided by the assistant headteacher. In order to ensure that the new Sixth Form mentors are well informed, training on child protection is being provided for them. All other teaching and support staff are up to date on training, understand the role of the area child protection committee and are aware of the identity of the named member of staff. The "at risk" register is fully maintained.

### **Sixth Form**

## **Assessment**

79. There is regular and detailed assessment of students' work in all subjects and courses inspected. In MFL the quality of information given to students is excellent. Value added data is imaginatively used with students, both to help them understand their achievements and to help them identify the characteristics and strategies which lead to success. Students value highly the effective individual guidance on achievement and progress they receive from form tutors in regular progress checks. These checks are well informed by data collected from individual subjects. Subject teachers also give very good feedback on students' performance. Reporting to both students and parents is full, following the same format as for the main school.

## **Advice, support and guidance**

80. The very well conceived induction programme, which all students attend prior to Sixth Form entry, ensures that they make a confident start to their Sixth Form career. The well structured and well informed system of support and guidance continues once students have embarked on their courses. The monitoring of all students is thorough, and the different needs of those doing GCSE re-sit courses are very well catered for. The relationships that underlie support and guidance in the Sixth Form are excellent, and play a central part in the quality of experience that students have.

81. Careers guidance is good overall; students have access to relevant materials and the Internet. There are opportunities for a drop-in session with the careers adviser, but individual interviews are no longer part of the service provided. This is a major concern for students, which the Sixth Form development plan recognises. Tutorial time is extremely well used by form tutors to provide individual support and guidance, and this is a significant strength. Advice and help on university applications is also a strong feature. The less successful aspect of tutor time is the delivery of taught elements such as study skills. Although the content of these units is relevant and useful, the way in which it is made available to students needs to be tailored more to young adults. Assemblies are creatively used to provide academic support whilst not neglecting spiritual development.

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

82. Parents are deeply committed to the school, its mission, aims and values, and are highly supportive of all its work. They are fully involved in its work through good communication, for example in pupils' diaries and through the very good information they receive on pupils' progress. The overall quality of information that parents receive is very good, and there is also a strong emphasis on the school explaining and demonstrating to parents what they are doing across a wide range of issues.

83. Through the questionnaire and parents' meeting, those responding identified almost all areas of the work of the school as the school's strengths. Their views from both sources were highly consistent. An exceptionally high proportion of parents strongly agreed that the school's expectations of its pupils and the quality of its leadership and management were both major strengths.

84. A small minority of parents expressed concern about three matters: the lack of extra-curricular provision in some areas; the quality of information they receive about pupils' progress; the regularity with which homework is set. Regarding extra-curricular provision, inspection evidence shows that there is a satisfactory range of activities that are enhanced by a variety of subject and other provision. However, when compared with provision for girls, there is a clear lack of sporting activities for boys. The information parents receive about pupils' progress is good. Current annual reports meet statutory requirements and provide good quality information about both attainment and progress. Parents can discuss progress in subjects on consultation evenings, or seek an appointment to do so. As far as homework is concerned, evidence shows it is set regularly, with tasks that consolidate and extend learning predominating. Most pupils said they are

able to organise time well to meet homework demands. Evidence in some of their diaries showed regular setting of homework, even though, occasionally, the detail of the task was incomplete. Overall, inspection evidence showed that homework was regularly set and used well to extend pupils' learning.

85. The school is fortunate in having a high level of committed parents with whom it can work. Many parents take on roles as members of the governing body and within the parents' association, as well as supporting their children as learners. For instance, one parent agreed to speak to the Sixth Form about life as a Roman Catholic in today's world; others provide support for activities such as for those involved in supporting school entries for The Great North Run. Parents are highly committed to the school's values and ethos, in spite of living at a distance from the school. They feel involved through, for example, their relationship with the school through the home-school agreement; and they recognise the importance of their commitment to working with the school through the Year 7 enrolment ceremony.

86. The quality of information provided for parents is very good. The prospectus is a lively document, and expresses clearly the school's view of itself as a community. A booklet of supplementary information accompanies the prospectus. Both have clear and detailed information and are a statement of school's mission, aims and values. The governors' annual report to parents also takes particular care to explain and expand on the work of governors. Detailed information, for instance about finance, is made accessible through the use of pie charts. There are some omissions, related for example to the need for national comparative data for test and examination results and more detailed information about the school's SEN policy.

87. The annual reports that parents receive about their children's progress are of very good quality. They provide details of grades for attainment, effort, homework, behaviour, coursework and examinations. Levels of attendance and punctuality are also reported. Each subject has a target, sometimes rather general, but in each subject it is specific to improvement in pupils' attainment and progress. There are similar reports for Sixth Form students. During term time, many parents and teachers use the pupil diaries to communicate with each other. This has ensured that concerns from home and school are dealt with quickly and provide very good support for pupils as learners. From a parental perspective, all of these reports and communications provide very good information about pupils.

88. Parents also make a strong financial contribution to the school by covenanting, supporting the school's many social and charitable activities and meeting the costs of some materials in subjects such as DT.

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

89. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, senior management team and governing body provides the school with a sense of purpose and a clear direction for its work. The clear Catholic mission and statement of aims, values and expectations provide a strong ethical and very robust frame of reference within which the school can operate effectively. They are a source of inspiration and guidance to both the governing body and the senior management team, in discussions and in the making of strategic and operational decisions.

90. The highly committed governing body is ambitious for the school, and aspires to enable all pupils to benefit from the highest quality of education that can be provided within an ethos that is underpinned by gospel values. The governing body is extremely well informed, meets regularly, is very well organised and managed and is highly effective in meeting its statutory requirements.

Much of the governing body's detailed work is undertaken by a series of appropriately constituted committees that have clear terms of reference and which report to full meetings of the governing body. The full board also acts as the curriculum committee. Governors know the school well, visit regularly and have real insight into its life and work.

91. The governing body's contribution to the school's effectiveness is considerable. They receive detailed information weekly about the school and its work, have regular contact with the headteacher and his senior colleagues, have a cycle of review of their own work and that of the school and receive detailed presentations from staff about their areas of work.

92. Governors are fully aware of the school's major strengths and areas in need of further improvement. Their five-year development plan is well founded, and the agreed priorities and costs are carefully defined and monitored during implementation. The school's development plan is comprehensive in nature and supports further planning for staff development, the curriculum and the strategic use of resources. The governing body is highly committed to school improvement. Through their explicit aims, well-defined policies and strategic planning the governing body promotes, values and celebrates excellence across a broad range of achievements.

93. The headteacher combines intellectual rigour, integrity and Christian commitment with a sensitive, thoughtful and perceptive approach to the leadership of the school: he is an excellent role model for the staff and pupils. Respect for his leadership extends beyond the confines of the school and its parents. Through his leadership colleagues at all levels are enabled to take up their roles, take initiative and become involved in the development of whole school approaches to meeting pupils' learning needs. His insights and tenacity provide confidence for governors and staff in effecting further improvement to the school's standards and quality of education. The headteacher and his senior colleagues have formed a purposeful partnership with the governing body to develop further and promote excellence.

94. The headteacher has outstanding support from a well-managed team, with a range of complementary skills, the membership of which includes deputy and assistant headteachers and the head of the Sixth Form. Together they have established a positive learning ethos that includes an unusual combination of high expectations and rigour on the one hand and, on the other, of understanding and support based on close concern for pupils as individuals. The highly competent senior management team has carefully translated the governing body's strategic aims into highly effective operational practices. Senior staff members are extremely purposeful in managing the implementation of the development planning priorities and in monitoring the effectiveness of the school's work, the quality of teaching and learning and the achievement of its annual targets. The school's senior managers work closely with heads of teams and their staff in ensuring the highest quality provision is made for all pupils.

95. The quality of leadership at middle management level varies, although in most instances it is at least good. In a number of areas, some very good management practices are already well developed, some by established and some by newly appointed heads of subject. Outstanding leadership was found in modern languages and music; very good practice was also found in subjects such as mathematics, science, art, DT, geography, history and business studies. Currently, further attention is needed to the management of PE and to the co-ordination and implementation of the school's strategy for ICT.

96. The monitoring of teaching and learning is a well-established process, with lesson observation being integral to the process in a number of areas. However, most subjects are moving forward with a formal programme of regular curriculum review that includes lesson observation. The recent implementation of performance management has been influential in developing this aspect of the school's work. In a large number of curriculum areas, assessment outcomes and, increasingly, monitoring of teaching and learning are informing curriculum planning.

97. The school makes very effective use of all the resources available to it, with a clear focus on school improvement – and that includes the raising of standards. Financial planning and

management are very good. The governors' strategic view is presented in the development plan, and financial plans ensure that there is very clear targeting of resources to support the implementation of the school's priorities as well as to meet annual budget expenditure. The governing body receives excellent management information, and as a result its prudent financial decisions are very well informed.

98. The governing body's finance and general purposes committee monitor the planned provision monthly, and a detailed quarterly review ensures that major projects and detailed expenditure meet their targets. The chairman of the finance committee undertakes the responsible officer role and ensures that all systems are operated efficiently. The school manages its finances very well. Systems are robust and external auditors praise their effectiveness.

99. Specific grants are used to support the pupils for whom they are intended. In the case of SEN and support for traveller pupils, the governing body's expenditure exceeds the income provided. In the case of pupils who have SEN, this is done in order to make good quality provision within the curriculum for lower attaining pupils. However, the need for additional support for lower attaining pupils in the lower sets in English in Years 7 to 9 would provide further help to raise standards.

100. Overall, there is good provision for staffing, accommodation and learning resources. There is a good match of teaching and support staff to the curriculum and they are well deployed. The employment of 17 specialist part-time teachers ensures that curriculum breadth is maintained and new subjects are well taught. As a result, no teachers are expected to teach outside of their specialist areas. There are small but strong teams of support, clerical and technical staff. The small team of support staff are carefully deployed to meet the specific needs of those with Statements. The technical staff team is well deployed, although some science in-class teaching and support work effectively reduces the time available to service the curriculum. The clerical staff team is small, but has become skilled at managing competing priorities very efficiently.

101. There is a comprehensive programme of staff development – for all teachers and support teams as well as newly qualified and appointed teachers – and this is complemented by the development of whole school themes on non-pupil days. The school's planning priorities and the identified needs of individuals inform the choice of opportunities for further training and development or the gaining of knowledge and skills. For instance, the use of performance data, the school's literacy strategy and the improvement of teaching and learning were the focus of much development work over the past two years.

102. There is a programme of outstanding quality for both newly qualified and newly appointed teachers. The units on teaching and learning and child protection are especially well devised to help new staff take up their roles. The well structured programme of departmental and year team meetings also contribute positively to staff development. In curriculum areas, the focus on teaching and learning and sharing good practice are important features that have contributed to improvement in classroom practice.

103. Accommodation is of good quality and includes buildings of a range of ages and styles. The recent addition of new accommodation, the result of a successful Basic Need Bid to the Department for Education and Skills [DfES], has ensured well-planned accommodation for a range of subjects including modern languages, religious education and science, and complements that found in other buildings. Those pupils who have special needs and find mobility difficult have access to most of the accommodation. However, despite this improvement the current accommodation for music and business education is inadequate to meet current curriculum needs.

104. There is a satisfactory level of learning resources. Since the last inspection there have been improvements in the levels of funding available for the development of ICT. However, the increasing curriculum need has resulted in the current provision of hardware being over-stretched and computer suites being at a premium. Many pupils use ICT facilities before, during and after school in order to keep abreast of their work: this includes Sixth Form students who have two dedicated rooms for their use. Some subjects have dedicated machines, and others have adjacent suites that can be booked. However, in spite of expressed intentions in schemes of work, there is still insufficient access to ICT in some subjects, for example in geography and MFL. The well-appointed library is increasing in its effectiveness, and provides good support for pupils' learning needs. In many curriculum areas there is a good range of learning resources for some topics being studied, but, in spite of careful planning, there is insufficient capitation to supplement texts and other materials for other topics.

105. The school does not talk about applying the principles of best value: excellence lies in the fact that they are a rigorous and integral aspect of its practice. The school has highly effective systems for comparing its performance against local and national benchmarks. The outcomes of such work informs curriculum planning at whole school level and development within departments. The highly effective financial management system compares costs for goods and services with those available locally and against national data. Competitive quotations are well used to ensure effective expenditure and to secure high quality work against agreed specifications. The governors' finance committee ensure that value for money is gained through market testing or, where it is highly beneficial, to award the contract to an in-house bid or to employ a permanent multi-skilled maintenance worker.

106. The school consults extensively about the effectiveness of its work or when it proposes any major changes that affect its work. Parents are always consulted on major issues relating to the curriculum, changes to the structure of the school day and on school reports, for example. Pupils also contribute to the consultation process over such matters as the code of conduct, school uniform, the diary and toilets, and this process often involves the school council. A variety of groups are involved in reviewing matters – staff, governors, pupils and parents as well as the archdiocese education service.

## **Sixth Form**

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

107. The leadership and management of the Sixth Form are outstanding. The attention to detail and the perceptive analysis and energetic approach by the Head of Sixth Form ensures that the provision is of high quality. He is well supported by his tutor team, and by the headteacher and senior management team. There is a coherent management approach to whole school issues, whilst recognising the distinctive role of the Sixth Form. The governing body has a clear vision for the role of the Sixth Form both as a place of serious study and as part of the wider life of the school.

108. Monitoring of performance in the Sixth Form is rigorous, with very good use being made of value added data to explore results and to try to identify the underlying factors that affect performance. The Sixth Form development plan shows a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve, and a strong commitment to make that improvement a reality. It identifies highly relevant areas for improvement such as careers advice, the widening of enrichment activities in response to the changes experienced in the curriculum, and the enhancing of some aspects of tutor time.

## **Resources**

109. There is no imbalance of expenditure on staffing between the Sixth Form and the main school. The school is successful in making very good quality provision within this constraint. The principles of best value are embedded in all decisions, including the major ones relating to curriculum and staffing. There is good consultation of students and parents on, for example, the curriculum on offer. More formal consultation through the school council is being strengthened. The cost effectiveness of the Sixth Form is very good.

110. There is good accommodation for the Sixth Form, including a large common room and two dedicated computer rooms. There is good support for Sixth Form study in the library. The resources provided for Sixth Form courses are satisfactory with no especial strengths or weaknesses. Staff members are well qualified for the courses they teach. The arrangements for professional development that apply to the main school are equally effective in the Sixth Form. The newly appointed Assistant Head of Sixth Form is being well inducted into the role.

## **Whole school**

111. Overall, this is a highly effective school that provides a very good quality of education. Pupils experience good quality teaching and learning and make good progress. Taking account of the school's unit costs, the high quality of its financial planning, the governing body's very high commitment to school improvement and the very effective strategic use of resources and its social context, the school provides very good value for money.



## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

112. There are no major weaknesses. In the context of the school's many strengths, the items listed below as areas for growth, development and improvement, should be considered by governors and the senior management team as they implement the priorities in the school's development plan.

### Main school

- Further improve pupils learning through:
  - \* better co-ordination of, and provision for, ICT;
  - \* raising standards of attainment and improving the quality of provision in physical education;
  - \* providing further support for lower attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 in English;
  - \* formalising the identification of and support for gifted and talented pupils.

### Sixth Form

- Improve provision to ensure that:
  - \* the review of aspects of tutorial time ensures that students' needs can be more appropriately met;
  - \* opportunitiesstudents greater opportunities to explore career choices.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	<b>Years 7 – 11</b>	137
	<b>Sixth Form</b>	59
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		78

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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#### Years 7 – 11

<b>Number</b>	11	32	60	32	1	0	0
<b>Percentage</b>	8	23	44	23	1	0	0

#### Sixth Form

<b>Number</b>	2	19	33	5	0	0	0
<b>Percentage</b>	3	32	56	8	0	0	0

**(NB Some of the percentages do not add up to 100)**

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

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	949	185
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	58	4

#### Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	9	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	151	1

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	20

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	7.7

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	<b>Year</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
	2000	78	100	178

<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	<b>Boys</b>	56	66	64
	<b>Girls</b>	83	80	71
	<b>Total</b>	139	146	135
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	<b>School</b>	78 (89)	82 (88)	76 (78)
	<b>National</b>	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	<b>School</b>	46 (47)	63 (67)	47 (40)
	<b>National</b>	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	<b>Boys</b>	53	72	64
	<b>Girls</b>	87	87	77
	<b>Total</b>	140	159	141
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	<b>School</b>	79 (82)	89 (89)	79 (80)
	<b>National</b>	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	<b>School</b>	43 (44)	54 (61)	48 (44)
	<b>National</b>	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 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year:	<b>Year</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
	2000	98	79	177

<b>GCSE results</b>		<b>5 or more grades A* to C</b>	<b>5 or more grades A*-G</b>	<b>1 or more grades A*-G</b>
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	<b>Boys</b>	59	98	98
	<b>Girls</b>	52	78	79
	<b>Total</b>	111	176	177
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	<b>School</b>	63 (69)	99 (98)	100 (98)
	<b>National</b>	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

<b>GCSE results</b>		<b>GCSE point score</b>
Average point score per pupil	School	45.4 (48.8)
	National	38.4 (38)

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

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

**Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	9
Black – African heritage	7
Black – other	8
Indian	8
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	6
White	981
Any other minority ethnic group	21

**Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	2	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	54	3
Other minority ethnic groups	5	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:**

**Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	70.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.8

**Education support staff:**

**Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	70

**Deployment of teachers:**

**Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.9
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**Average teaching group size:**

**Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	23.5
Key Stage 4	21.2

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Financial information**

Financial year	<b>2000-2001</b>
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	£
Total income	3,160,521.00
Total expenditure	3,145,687.00
Expenditure per pupil	2,754.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	25,595.00
Balance carried forward to next year	40,429.00

**Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years (FTE)	19.3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years (FTE)	24.0
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2.3
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.3
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

1250
431

### Percentage of responses in each category

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
My child likes school.	54	42	3	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	57	38	3	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	47	48	3	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	36	50	11	3	0
The teaching is good.	45	52	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	46	6	2	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	31	4	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	85	14	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	50	37	8	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	76	22	1	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	63	34	2	1	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	28	42	8	3	19

**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 very good.

**Strengths:**

- The results of national tests and examinations are well above average.
- Teaching is good throughout the school, with high expectations for pupil achievement.
- Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good. They respond well in lessons and show high levels of interest and concentration.

**Areas for improvement:**

- Detailed schemes of work should be finalised, to support a consistency of approach in teaching and to support pupils' progress.
- More attention could be given to the differing learning needs of lower attaining pupils, including those who have special educational needs.
- Further development of the use of new technology in lessons.

113. The profile of attainment in English when pupils enter the school is above the national average. In 2000, the results of the national tests taken at age 14 were well above the national average for pupils reaching Level 5 and above, the expected level. They were also well above average for similar schools. At the higher levels, Level 6 and above, results were again well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. The proportion of pupils who gained Level 7 was particularly high. In recent years, results have improved consistently. They were around the national average at the time of the last inspection. There was a further, significant rise in the 2001 results. Results in English are similar to those in science, although pupils do a little better in mathematics than in the other two subjects. Girls outperform boys, but the difference is less than that seen nationally.

114. The proportion of pupils gaining A\* to C grade passes in GCSE English in 2000 was well above the national average, and well above the average for similar schools. All pupils gained passes with A\* to G grades, which is again above the national average. The results at higher grades in English Literature were well above the national average, but only a small number were entered for the examination. The subject has been optional at the GCSE for the last two years, but the school's policy on this is currently under review. Pupils may also choose to do GCSE Drama. Results in this subject were also well above the national average. Within the school, pupils do better in GCSE English than in most other subjects. The proportion of pupils gaining higher grade passes in English has varied over the last three years. In part, this is explained by differences in the profile of ability in each year group; but results have been consistently well above average in the subject, as they have in English Literature and Drama. There was a further improvement in results for all three subjects in 2001. In English, girls again do better than boys, but the difference is broadly in line with national figures.

115. Given that standards in English on entry to the school are above average, achievement by individual pupils is good overall in Years 7 to 9. In 2000, comparison with national value-added analyses of test results at age 14 shows that achievement by higher and some middle attaining pupils is very good. They exceed rates of progress made by pupils in similar schools. In contrast, whilst progress is generally satisfactory for lower attaining groups, some under-achievement is indicated. Achievement is also good in Years 10 and 11. National statistics show that pupils make above average progress compared with others who start their GCSE course at broadly the same level of attainment. This is particularly marked for higher attaining pupils, where the proportion gaining A\* and A grades is much higher than that seen in comparable schools. Once

more, there is some under-achievement in lower attaining groups. This trend was confirmed in some lesson observations during the inspection. However, most pupils with special educational needs make good progress by the end of Year 11. All such pupils gained at least a G grade pass in GCSE English in 2000 and 2001. This represents a good level of achievement overall.

116. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good. They pay close attention to teachers and are clearly interested and engaged by tasks set. This makes an important contribution to learning in the subject. Teachers, in turn, emphasise the need to respect others and to listen carefully to views expressed. With only a few exceptions, listening skills are very good throughout the school. Pupils are also willing to make constructive contributions to discussions in a range of contexts, including whole class, paired and small group work. Speaking skills are good. In Year 7, pupils of all abilities show confidence in answering teachers' questions. In a lesson on the conventions of story telling, pupils were able speak to the whole class with some fluency and originality. In Years 10 and 11, pupils across the ability range are able to put forward and develop ideas, justifying their opinions when challenged. In a Year 10 drama lesson, pupils improvised dialogue expressively in small group work. They also contributed perceptively to whole class discussion, making detailed points clearly when reviewing their own and others' performances.

117. Standards of reading are very good. In Years 7 to 9, pupils have regular lesson time in the library, and are encouraged to establish sound habits of wider personal reading. The library is well managed and a good range of fiction for this age group is available. In one Year 7 library lesson, pupils were guided well by their teacher and classroom assistants in learning about the library. Most were quickly absorbed in their own choice of reading. By Year 9, the great majority of pupils are secure, independent readers. Two Year 9 groups, studying the short story '*Journey by Night*' by the Caribbean author Undine Giuseppi, commented with understanding and some insight on how the author's choice of words and background detail created a sense of fear and tension. They responded well to the story, and were able to support their ideas with detailed textual evidence. In Years 10 and 11, reading skills are developed further through the study of prose, drama and poetry specified for the GCSE course. Higher and middle attaining pupils in particular make significant progress in developing analytical, close-reading skills. These are demonstrated to a high level in many GCSE coursework essays.

118. Standards in written work are also very good through the school. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are provided with regular opportunities to write for a range of purposes and audiences: narrative essays, autobiography, letters and writing for information. More extended, personal and creative writing is a strong area of the work. Higher and middle attaining pupils use words imaginatively and structure their essays well. Spelling and punctuation are generally accurate. Teachers use a good range of strategies to improve basic skills. These include displays of key words and grammatical points in teaching rooms and the use of writing frames to help pupils develop their ideas logically. Proof reading and redrafting is encouraged from Year 7 onwards. In one Year 8 lesson, pupils wrote stories modelled on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, using the viewpoint of a narrator. They understood the importance of reflecting on their work and questioning what they had already produced. They were able to criticise their own and others' writing constructively. Work is marked regularly, using the school grading system. National Curriculum Levels are given for key pieces of work.

119. By Year 11, all pupils make further progress. Skills in personal and imaginative writing are consolidated and developed. Most pupils are able to write intelligently about literature studied. Essays are usually developed in sufficient depth, with good use of textual detail to substantiate arguments. Throughout the school, handwriting and presentation skills are good. Most pupils take considerable trouble to present work neatly and carefully, especially GCSE coursework. Examples of word-processed work were seen in pupils' folders and classroom displays, but they have only limited access to computers during lessons. No ICT lessons in English were seen during the inspection. There could be further development here to help pupils use new technology still more effectively in their work.



120. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' social, moral and cultural development. In particular, very good examples of social co-operation were seen in English and drama lessons. Moral conflicts were also well explored in responses to literature studied, for example in written coursework on *'Macbeth'* and discussion of character motivation in Stevenson's *'Jekyll and Hyde'* in Year 11. Literature from other cultures is an integral part of the GCSE course. Pupils also develop a good awareness of the English literary heritage, through study of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens and a range of other major authors, poets and dramatists.

121. The quality of teaching is good throughout the school. Some very good teaching was seen, but, in one lesson, it was unsatisfactory. Teachers manage pupils very well in most classes, and constructive relationships are forged. They have high expectations of pace and productivity, for higher attaining pupils in particular. Strengths are also seen in teachers' good subject knowledge and use of a range of organisational strategies to generate interest. One Year 9 lesson, preparing stories for entry to a national writing competition, was well-paced and varied with a mixture of whole class and paired discussions, individual reflection and writing. Pupils were clearly engaged by the work, and helped by the variety of approach; but these strengths were not seen consistently. In a minority of less effective lessons, objectives were not communicated clearly and there were inconsistencies in pupil management. The level of difficulty in tasks was also wrongly pitched, and was sometimes too demanding for lower attaining groups. There was not enough difference in the work expected from these groups. Teaching here could be more closely linked to pupils' needs. Additional support and resources were also needed, in some cases for pupils with special educational needs, to help them learn more effectively.

122. Overall, good teaching in the school helps promote good levels of learning. Most pupils are conscientious and try hard to improve their work. Teachers could help them further by ensuring that all understand the process of assessment as fully as possible, and by using assessment criteria more explicitly to inform lessons. This would focus pupils' efforts more clearly and improve evaluation of their own achievement. More consistent setting of subject-specific targets for improved attainment would also help pupils to understand their own learning better.

123. Leadership and management of English in the school are satisfactory. The strength of the management style is in encouraging informal team working and sharing of best practice. Members of staff are well supported at a personal level. Clear and relevant objectives for future development are set in the department's action plan. Long term planning to ensure curriculum coverage is effective and in place, but detailed schemes of work have not been finalised. This must be an important priority to support staff, in particular those who are new to the school and less experienced, in coming to terms with changing curriculum requirements and to ensure that pupils continue to make progress. Currently, there are no extra-curricular activities in English except for a drama club for younger pupils, which is led by Sixth Form students. Some opportunities to involve and engage pupils are therefore lost.

124. Nevertheless, the department has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards of attainment have risen in National Curriculum tests at age 14, and well above average results have been maintained at GCSE Level. There were further significant improvements in results in 2001. If the best teaching practice can be developed consistently, the department is well placed to make further improvements in standards of teaching and learning in future. The completion of detailed schemes of work should be a key step towards promoting this. More attention could also be given to promoting the achievement of lower attaining pupils, by focusing more closely on their learning needs.

## MATHEMATICS

125. Overall the quality of the provision for mathematics is very good.

### Main strengths:

- Standards of attainment of the majority of 14 and 16 year old pupils are well above the national average.
- The majority of pupils make good progress.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Pupils have very good attitudes and behaviour.
- The department is well managed.

### Areas for improvement:

- Increase the proportion of pupils who gain the highest grades in the GCSE.
- Improve the opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support their learning.

126. By the age of 14, standards of attainment of the majority of pupils are well above the national average. Test results at the end of Year 9 in 2001 show that approaching nine-tenths of pupils reached Level 5 or above in mathematics and nearly three-quarters Level 6 or above. These are considerably above national average levels for 2000. When compared to similar schools, these results are very high. Pupils enter the school with above average attainment in mathematics. Achievement of the majority of pupils between the ages of 11 and 14 is good. Pupils with SEN also make good progress. Boys and girls perform equally well at this stage.

127. By the age of 16, standards of attainment are well above the national average. Over two-thirds of the GCSE candidates over the last two years have achieved grades in the range A\* to C. This is significantly above the national average for 2000. However, in the previous year almost four-fifths of those entered gained grades in this range. Over the last three years all pupils entered for GCSE mathematics have achieved a grade. Boys and girls perform equally well at this stage. Achievement and progress of the majority of pupils is good. Although in 2000 the percentage of pupils gaining the highest grade of A\* was high and about twice the national average, in 2001 only relatively few pupils gained this grade.

128. Standards of work seen in lessons and pupils' exercise books during the inspection are well above the expected levels for the majority of pupils aged 14 and 16. For example pupils in a high attaining Year 9 group were initially set a challenge relating to the relative size of numbers. This led to a discussion about the representation of numbers in standard form. Pupils quickly understood the basic principles involved and were able to undertake examples from a textbook towards the end of the lesson, largely on an independent basis. The majority of pupils are able to work at high standards across the requirements including those relating to algebra, shape, space and measures. For example, pupils in a Year 11 class were confident in undertaking problems from a textbook concerning angle properties of a circle. They were able to undertake the examples after a brief introduction by the teacher. Pupils are also able to use mathematics in a variety of contexts. Standards in numeracy are very high, with the majority of pupils being confident in using number in a range of contexts. Mental arithmetic skills are also very good.

129. Teaching is good, sometimes very good and occasionally outstanding. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. All lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives that are frequently shared with the pupils. Lessons contain an appropriate range of activities, with pupils working as a group and on an individual basis. Teachers make effective use of questioning during the group work, and pupils are encouraged and able to explain their answers and solutions to the rest of the class. Good support is given to the pupils when they are undertaking work on an individual basis. Many teachers show great enthusiasm for the subject. Homework is regularly set, marked and returned to the pupils. Where appropriate teachers indicate in the marking how the pupils' work may be improved. Teachers keep good records of individual pupils' progress. In

most classes, the pace of work is well matched to the needs of the pupils. However there was evidence in a few classes of the pace being insufficiently challenging for the higher attaining groups. Pupils have a very positive attitude to their work in mathematics. At the start of lessons they quickly settle down to work. Behaviour is always very good and pupils answer fully the frequent questions that are asked of them during the group work. Relationships between pupils and with the teacher are very good. With a few exceptions, pupils respond fully to the regular homework that is set.

130. The mathematics department is well managed. The teachers involved meet on a regular basis and are working well as a team. Lesson observations are undertaken, and exercise books, homework set and marking are also checked on a regular basis. Targets are set and agreed with individual members of staff. Meetings with the deputy head teacher take place to review examination and test results, though there are no formally documented outcomes for these meetings. Teachers are well qualified and have a secure grasp of the subject and its requirements. The mathematics curriculum is appropriate and meets the statutory requirements. Schemes of work have been developed and these lead to continuity and progression for individual pupils across the requirements. Numeracy now forms an important aspect of the mathematics curriculum and work during Year 7 particularly emphasises this aspect. Although some good use is made of information and communications technology to support the mathematics work, particularly with the lower attaining classes, other opportunities are missed and there is potential for greater use in aspects of the work. There is also limited evidence of pupils in the lower school undertaking work involving investigations. Pupils are encouraged to participate in a number of extra-curricular activities including Master Classes and the Mathematics Challenge. Revision classes are also held close to examinations.

131. There have been a number of improvements since the last inspection. High standards of work have been maintained with the majority of pupils at the ages of 14 and 16 attaining well above the national average. Achievement and progress of pupils is good. Although at the time of the last inspection there was a limited amount of unsatisfactory teaching, now all teaching is satisfactory and much of it is good. Lower attaining pupils are now presented with appropriate work, and they now make satisfactory and in some cases good progress.

## SCIENCE

132. Overall, the provision for science is very good.

### Strengths:

- Standards are well above the national average for all pupils up to and including the age of 16.
- The gains pupils make between the ages of 11 and 16 in their scientific knowledge, understanding and practical skills are above average.
- Teaching is good particularly in respect of the high expectations teachers have of their pupils.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good with a strong commitment to raise standards.

### Areas for improvement:

- There is some inconsistency in the guidance which schemes of work give to inform teaching, and the use of ICT is not sufficiently well embedded into the teaching and learning programmes.
- The administrative burden on the head of science is excessive.

133. By the age of 14, attainment is well above national averages. The proportion of pupils reaching at least Level 5 and at least Level 6 in the 2000 national tests are both well above the national average for all schools and compared with those schools that have pupils from similar social backgrounds. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Results had been broadly static in recent years up to 2000, but improved substantially at all levels in 2001.



134. The standard of pupils' work is well above average. Pupils with high attainment show very good, and, in some cases, excellent knowledge and understanding across a wide range of topics. For example high attaining pupils in Year 9 showed excellent understanding of the distinctions between physical and chemical changes, and of the process of thermal decomposition. Some girls and boys with relatively low attainment, and some of those with special educational needs, produce work of a standard close to, and in some cases above, national expectations. Some competent work was seen, for example, in describing the processes of heat conduction. Some of the project work done by Year 8 pupils on topics such as photosynthesis and the planets is well above expectations.

135. For pupils aged 16 years, the GCSE examination results for the year 2000 show that attainment is well above the national average. Performance in 2001 was even better, with a quarter of all the grades achieved in the three courses offered being at grade A or A\*. All the low attaining pupils taking single award science in 2000 achieved at least grade G. Results for this small group in 2001 were very similar to 2000, and most achieve good grades relative to their prior attainment. In 2000, boys achieved better results in double award science than girls but the gap had virtually disappeared in 2001. There has been progressive improvement in GCSE examination results in recent years.

136. The standards of work seen in school for all pupils between the ages of 14 and 16 are in line with those shown by examination results. In particular, there is no discernible difference in the standard of work seen from boys and girls. Pupils following a course leading to separate GCSE grades in biology, chemistry and physics demonstrate a uniformly high standard of attainment across all three subjects and in their experimental and investigative work. They show very good understanding of, for example, osmosis, mutation and covalent bonding, and have very good numerical skills in handling calculations in electricity. Pupils with lower attainment show less understanding, but can solve simple problems using Ohm's law. In scientific investigations, they have difficulty in supporting their predictions with appropriate scientific knowledge.

137. The achievement of all pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 is above that to be expected from their prior attainment. Overall, they achieve better results in national tests at 14 than those predicted at the age of 11. Similarly, GCSE results overall are better than expected from similar predictions at the age of 14. Pupils with high prior attainment achieve particularly well in progressively building on their knowledge of science and the understanding of its important concepts. This good achievement arises from a combination of very high expectations that teachers have of their pupils coupled with the very high expectations pupils have of themselves and the interest, concentration and capacity for hard work that they bring to their lessons and work at home. In addition, the good quality assessment data in the hands of teachers is a powerful tool in tracking achievement between the ages of 11 and 16.

138. Teaching is good for all pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. The majority of lessons seen were good, with a few being very good and a few satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. The main characteristics of the teaching include the very high expectations teachers have of their pupils, secure subject knowledge, well-structured soundly organised lessons and extremely good relationships between teachers and pupils.

139. Learning is correspondingly good overall. In lessons in which learning is good or very good, pupils develop a very good knowledge of the language of science because of teachers' persistent attention to its development in the large majority of lessons seen. The learning of new facts and the development of understanding of concepts are secured because lessons have a coherent structure that progressively builds on prior knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils in Year 10 had good opportunities to develop their understanding of circulation in the human body in a lesson in which a clear introduction was followed by a well-chosen video from which pupils had to make their own notes. They were then able to use their ideas to write answers to questions that probed their understanding of the video content.

140. Resources such as textbooks, and experimental work are effectively used to underpin ideas being developed in lessons and to promote pupils' ability to think for themselves about their work. Good use of homework, with tasks relevant to the lessons, gives pupils opportunity to reinforce their learning at home. Marking is good overall. It is done regularly by all teachers, and is generally informative, although some teachers are better than others at giving pupils guidance on how to improve their work.

141. Teachers know their pupils well and lessons are tailored to meet their needs. All teachers are provided with good attainment records of all pupils and so can plan accordingly. Lesson planning takes account of the targets for pupils with SEN that allows this group to learn as effectively as the rest. Pupils of all ages and levels of attainment benefit from the good use of questions at various points within lessons which is directed to give teachers information about current knowledge or understanding and to promote pupils to think and push onwards to new understanding. For example, questions at the end of a Year 7 lesson on classification not only checked what had been learned from the lesson, but pupils' answers were often turned back on them to develop further understanding or to give additional support for difficult points.

142. In a few lessons, learning proceeds more slowly, because the teacher spends too much time on a single activity; there is therefore little time at the end to review progress. In one or two instances, pupils spend time unnecessarily copying questions from a worksheet, which gives them less time to answer them.

143. Pupils enjoy their science lessons. Boys and girls of all ages and levels of prior attainment make a very significant contribution to their own learning. They have uniformly high expectations of themselves, arrive at lessons promptly, well equipped and ready to work and show very good qualities of concentration and perseverance. There is a very strong sense of mutual respect between pupils and their teachers that consistently promotes a positive atmosphere for learning in the laboratory. Experimental science is an enjoyable experience throughout the school, and pupils work safely with apparatus, paying very good attention to their own safety and to that of others. High standards of numeracy and literacy in the context of science make good contributions to pupils' ability to learn.

144. The curriculum provides well-balanced courses leading both up to the age of 14 and to the GCSE. In the latter case, high attaining pupils are given the opportunity to study for three separate GCSE qualifications in biology, chemistry and physics. However, there is some inconsistency in the quality of guidance given by schemes of work in different years and across biology, chemistry and physics. The range of learning opportunities for the use of ICT is limited.

145. Leadership and management in science are very good. There is a strong ethos for success in the department, and a determination to continue to raise standards. The head of science is a very good role model, particularly in respect of high expectations and capacity for hard work. Other subject leaders give good support in the organisation of their subject areas, but do not have significant whole school responsibilities. Assessment is well managed, and there is some analysis of the results of tests and examinations leading to modifications in approaches to teaching and learning. For example, identification of underperformance of girls in the 2000 GCSE examinations led directly to action being taken to target the Grade C/D borderline for a specific group. The hard-working technical staff provide good support for the work of the department, although the fact that some of them teach in the Sixth Form on vocational courses reduces time they have for supporting science generally. Teaching resources and the accommodation are adequate and are efficiently managed. There are good displays of pupils' work in some areas, but the approach to this is not consistent.

146. Progress since the last inspection is very good. Standards reached by the ages of 14 and 16 have risen significantly. There has been marked improvement in teaching and the clear educational direction referred to during the last inspection is now clearly established. The use of ICT has improved, but it is not yet fully integrated into teaching and learning.

147. In order to improve further, the department needs to develop schemes of work to give more consistent guidance to teachers, including the fuller integration of the use of ICT in teaching and learning. Opportunities should be taken to develop whole-school management responsibilities for the other post-holders within the department.

## ART AND DESIGN

148. Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

### Strengths:

- The teachers are an effective team, and have high expectations of pupils.
- Pupils apply their very high standards of craft skills creatively.
- Progress is promoted by the regular self-assessment notation system.

### Areas for improvement:

- Co-ordination of strategies to promote a better use of an art vocabulary.
- The use of display facilities.
- Computing facilities, which should be upgraded.

149. Standards and achievement are above average due to the very high expectations of the teaching team, the very well planned programme of study, the very good teaching of essential craft skills and the effective ongoing self-assessment practice by pupils whose attitude and behaviour is consistently very positive. In the 2000 teacher assessment at age 14, the percentage of both boys and girls attaining Level 5 and above, exceeded the national average. In the most recent tests at age 14 this figure improved.

150. In the 2000 GCSE art examination, the percentage of pupils achieving grades A\* to C was well above the national average for all pupils, with boys achieving significantly better results than the national average for boys. In the most recent GCSE art examination there was improvement: all pupils achieved grades A\* to C. In the GCSE short course for art the greater majority of pupils achieved grades A\* to C, with girls achieving more of the higher grades. In the most recent GCSE graphic design examination, almost all pupils achieved grades A\* to C. In GCSE graphic design short course, girls achieved most of the higher grades.

151. Standards by age 14 are above average. Pupils' folders show that they arrive with a typical range of average skills and knowledge. They quickly learn to use the essential elements of line, tone, colour, pattern, texture, shape, form and space with a very good standard of craft skill. They acquire a good knowledge of art and design from looking at, and working in, the style of established artists. Their work has strength in closely observed two-dimensional drawing and painting, and in three-dimensional studies where they explore rhythms in shapes derived from organic forms in low-relief paper sculpture. Group work is demonstrated well in large-scale paper and card sculpture of 'liquorice allsorts', after studying the works of Claes Oldenburg. They are successfully introduced to art forms of other cultures, such as Australian Aborigine dream painting. They paint imaginatively in such styles and express their own thoughts and opinions in their writing. The standards demonstrated in graphic design, where typefaces are used with great finesse, are well above average. These are comparable with a much higher stage, due to the high expectations of the teaching, the enthusiasm and joy for the subject communicated, and the very good guidance and practical support provided.

152. Achievement is very good overall. All pupils make very good progress, and achieve standards consistently above average at all ability levels. The setting of pupils by artistic capability in Year 9 works well in helping all pupils to improve the standard of their work.

153. Standards by age 16 are above average. Pupils build on their previous knowledge and make very good progress in acquiring new skills in the GCSE full and short art and graphic design courses that are provided to meet individual needs. In these options, pupils develop a deeper knowledge of the work of a range of artists such as Georgia O’Keeffe, and of designers such as Lucienne Day. They rapidly acquire new craft techniques such as when a work by Matisse is reinterpreted in bold, vibrant pastel work. Opportunities to work on a larger scale are seized in the smaller groups. In graphic tasks pupils combine traditional craft skills of typographic collage with computer scanning to create imaginative design solutions. Pupils demonstrate growing independent learning skills, taking responsibility for developing a body of work in depth. The quality of this work is matched by an above average amount of work in art folders; this is due to pupils’ consistent hard work in all lessons. The very good practice of regular self-assessment by making analytical notes about their work is instrumental in raising pupils’ awareness of how well they are doing, and in identifying clearly what needs to be done to improve.

154. Achievement is very good. Pupils continue to make progress at an above average rate. Strategies to promote individual expression and judgement in writing are applied well, as are strategies to promote measuring skills which pupils demonstrate in scaling-up of work. Strategies to promote a good use of an appropriate art vocabulary are, however, not uniformly understood or applied. Pupils show confident speaking skills when they read out the homework tasks to the class, but this is less evident when identifying what they see or think. In work seen in lessons, there is no significant difference in standards demonstrated by boys or girls. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress due to teachers’ close attention to individual needs. Pre-printed homework notes are proving to be an effective, efficient and helpful tool in this area.

155. Teaching is never less than satisfactory, generally very good and at times outstanding. All lessons are notable for the very effective use of time with reference to deadlines to create a sense of urgency and purpose. Resources are used very well. Exemplar work displayed is used as an effective teaching aid in stimulating pupils to achieve. Homework is regularly used to further classroom learning, and is effective in establishing a culture of independent research. Assessment and recording of achievement is done well and pupils are well informed of how well they are doing. Reports to parents clearly identify what pupils need to do in order to improve.

156. This is a well-managed department that provides good opportunities for extra-curricular activity. Regular visits to art galleries throughout Years 7 to 11 are raising pupils’ awareness of a range of historical and contemporary artwork. Understanding of how an artist works would be better if the good practice of working alongside an artist-in-residence in the 6th form could be extended to this level. Display of artwork is good, but facilities to celebrate justifiably the pupils’ extensive and wide-ranging achievements are inadequate.

157. There has been a considerable improvement since the previous report. The revised scheme of work is now providing all pupils with an equitable, balanced and broad-based experience. Attainment is now consistently above average for all ability levels. Pupils now have knowledge of a range of artists and designers due to the well-resourced book stock, the in-house produced artists’ booklets and the regular homework research tasks. Formal and experimental sketchbook work is now common practice. Storage has improved but accommodation continues to be very cramped for the larger classes and that restricts the scale of some of the examination work in Year 11. Computers are now provided in the department. These are used very creatively, although learning would be less frustrated if more powerful machines were available to cope with the sophisticated imagery produced.



## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

158. Overall, the quality of the provision for design and technology is very good.

### Strengths:

- The quality of teaching is very good, and lessons and support for learning are very well managed
- Standards have improved and the proportion of pupils gaining grades A\* to C is above average.
- Accommodation is of good quality.
- Assessment procedures are detailed and provide important tracking and diagnostic information.
- Competent technicians make an important contribution to the running of the departments.
- Pupil attitudes towards study are positive; behaviour and relationships are very good.

### Areas for development:

- The breadth of the curriculum base, the provision for ICT in food technology and the place of CAD/CAM in DT
- The role of graphics in Years 7 to 9 in meeting the demands of the National Curriculum.

159. DT and food technology exist as two different departments, but there is considerable overlap between them in operational terms. The two departments introduce Year 7 to 9 pupils to DT and food technology through a series of modules across the three years. There are three GCSE courses available: food technology, child development and resistant materials in Years 10 and 11. Pupils in the Sixth Form may follow a GCE Advanced Level course in food technology or DT.

160. In GCSE examinations last year, in both full and short courses, nearly four-fifths of pupils gained higher grades A\* to C in DT. In food technology over three-fifths of pupils entered gained GCSE grades in the A\* - C range; in child development just under three-quarters of the pupils gained these higher grades. These results are all well above the national average for these subjects.

161. Attainment in lessons is good, and pupils respond positively to well-planned tasks and assignments. Pupils are well motivated and are keen to succeed. In Years 7, 8 and 9, pupils build up a folder of work that provides evidence of the range of work they undertake in both subject departments. In addition, pupils pursue a series of design assignments through which they also develop important practical and planning skills. Folders are of a good standard, and reflect the nature of the progressive programme through which pupils develop understanding and knowledge about the subject. They use a variety of opportunities to generate and develop ideas in different design contexts. There is some variation in the quality of graphics, but in general terms work is of a good standard. There is evidence of the use of a range of ICT skills. Scrutiny of completed work, at the time of the inspection, indicated that pupils had experienced a variety of design activities including more general work in health and safety, planning systems, evaluation of products and project organisation. Pupils have developed a good standard of practical skill in the making and manufacture of products. Food products are carefully made and appropriately presented, and photographic records are kept. There is also an attractive display of models/products manufactured in a range of materials. The quality of construction and the finish is of a good standard. Pupils are clear about assessment criteria and they know how to improve their work.

162. In Years 10 and 11, pupils build on the work of previous design assignments and they develop products, in a more open-ended context, which reflect personal styles and interests. Pupils work to a common framework, and they respond well to a carefully structured programme. They are well motivated, and many pupils show evidence of developing study skills. Design folders provide evidence of innovative approaches, and an increasing use of ICT and other presentational techniques. Assessment criteria are made clear, and pupils gain much from the detail and feedback provided for them. Standards of work in design folders are high and there is evidence of meticulous planning. Presentation is good and ICT and other graphical techniques are combined

to produce high quality, attractive design work. Practical work is good and pupils take care to produce good quality products. In food technology great attention is paid to the production of healthy, nutritious dishes that also excite the taste buds. Overall, the level of achievement of these pupils is good.

163. The good behaviour of pupils is an outstanding feature and is a major contributory factor to the high standards of work achieved. Attitudes are positive and pupils appear to enjoy their studies. Health and safety matters are given high profile and pupils observe codes of conduct in specialist rooms and workshops. They use equipment and machinery sensibly and confidently. Relationships reflect mutual respect and pupils work easily in pairs and groups. Pupils with special educational needs are clearly identified by staff and provided with appropriate support, and their work is periodically assessed. The circumstances created enable these pupils to make good progress.

164. The quality of teaching overall is very good, and many good lessons seen during the inspection had pace, expectation, structure and purpose. Good records of pupil achievements are kept centrally together with supporting photographic evidence of completed work. The teaching teams are stable, experienced and committed to high standards. Teachers work hard, manage lessons well and provide a good selection of challenging tasks for their pupils. Homework is integral to coursework, and good use is made of exemplar and display materials. Pupils are provided with well-planned support within which deadlines, performance and responsibility are required. Teachers emphasise the importance of assessment in support of pupil learning and they provide much useful feedback. Relationships are good and there is an easy dialogue between pupils and staff. The two teams are well supported by three competent technicians who make a significant contribution to the smooth running of the departments.

165. Two effective, able and enthusiastic teachers lead these departments. Administrative procedures are exemplary and documentation is excellent. Management of both departments is very good and is reflected in the many improvements that have taken place since the last inspection, not least the upward trend in examination performance and teaching quality. Further curriculum development in both departments is dependent on improving ICT provision. In food technology more up-to-date software and an increase in computers are high priorities. In design and technology the aim should be to introduce CAD/CAM.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

166. Overall, the quality of provision for geography is very good.

### **Strengths:**

- Standards, which have improved considerably since the last inspection
- The quality of the teaching.
- The positive attitudes of the pupils and relationships with their teachers.
- The quality of the accommodation provided for the department.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- The attainment and progress of pupils by the time they reach ages 14 and 16.
- Opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support their learning.
- Procedures for monitoring of teaching and pupil progress to help raise standards.

167. Teacher assessment shows pupil attainment in geography at age 14 to be average, with over two-thirds of Year 9 pupils gaining Level 5 or above. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 included good or very good teaching skills being used in most lessons with higher attaining pupils. The best teaching showed a keen awareness of how pupils learn most easily. For example, teaching was structured to enhance the development of skills in a Year 7 lesson revising map work and, in another instance, in a Year 9 lesson on industrial development. All lessons were linked to earlier work for consolidation, at times to the point of repetition. Progress and achievement for lower

attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 is less good than that of others and is not always sufficiently well supported by a range of suitable resources.

168. In Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to consolidate their geographical skills and use specific technical geographical terminology accurately. Their teachers generally show good or very good skills to ensure they have understanding of both human and physical topics. For example, in a lesson on waterfall formation pupils worked together to test their understanding with a sequential puzzle, whilst another class watched a video extract of the volcanic eruption on Monserrat before writing an empathetic account. Pupils' work is generally characterised by diligence but there are few opportunities for independent learning.

169. In the GCSE examination in 2001, just over three-fifths of pupils entered for either the full or short course examination gained an A\* to C grade, an above average result. The boys' pass rate was notably above the national figure; in the previous year a greater proportion of girls gained higher grades. These achievements are good considering pupils' attainment on entry to the course.

170. The department is well led and managed. The geography teachers work well as a team, and are committed to improve standards in the subject. Units of investigative enquiry have been introduced and the department organises a residential field course for all GCSE students. However, they are hampered by a shortage of resources within the department. GCSE students are not able to take a text - book home and pupils share books in all lessons. Currently there is only the most occasional access to computers to support learning of aspects of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study. While pupil work is consistently assessed with a grade and a comment this data is not always used to influence curriculum change and development, or to provide individual targets for pupil progress. Attention to these factors, and arrangements to monitor teaching, are essential if the department is to build on its strong foundations. The head of department has already recognised these priorities, which are included in the current development plan and need to be implemented.

171. Progress since the last inspection is good. To improve further the department needs to focus on its own performance through monitoring, mutual observation and sharing of good practice. Pupil progress should also be analysed more rigorously with targets set so that each individual is more likely to reach his or her potential. These changes will require additional resources for independent learning and more access to computers.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths:

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Attitudes and relationships are never less than good.
- Monitoring and support of pupils is good.

### Areas for improvement:

- The consistent integration of ICT opportunities across the curriculum.
- The balance of the curriculum.
- The grading system for day-to-day marking.

173. In the last two years' GCSE examinations, nearly three-quarters of pupils achieved grades A\*-C, some ten to fifteen percentage points above national averages. In 2000, the most recent year for which national figures are available, pupils did better in history than in the combined average of all their other subjects, and outperformed their counterparts nationally by a whole grade. Higher attaining pupils also did very well, with over two-fifths of them obtaining the highest grades,

and although this figure fell back a little in the current year, the proportion gaining grades in the highest grades was still significantly above average. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls was much less than it is nationally.

174. In 2000, overall attainment as measured by teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 was exactly in line with expectations, although girls did rather better and boys rather worse than their national counterparts. In 2001 three-quarters of pupils reached the expected level: a considerable improvement on the previous year.

175. Numbers opting to study history at GCE Advanced Level have been very small or non-existent for most years since the last inspection, so comparisons with national trends are invalid. In 2001 all candidates entered gained pass grades at GCE Advanced Level, which is above course averages, but the proportion gaining A and B grades was below average.

176. By the age of 14, pupils' attainment is above average. The vast majority of pupils have completed a good quantity of well presented and technically accurate written work in which they take an evident pride. A wide variety of teaching and learning styles enables all pupils, including those with SEN, to make good progress. A notable feature is the amount of extended writing undertaken, as for example when Year 9 pupils refer to the work of Pasteur and Koch in assessing the extent of changes in public health and medicine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They also demonstrate empathy and creativity in imaginative reports of the trial of a nineteenth century factory owner. In Years 7 to 9, pupils interpret sources well but do not yet regularly refer to their provenance as a necessary part of evaluating reliability. As a result of present curriculum arrangements, pupils have a more extensive knowledge of religious and cultural aspects of medieval history than they do of Elizabeth's problems with Spain and the poor, or the dynamics of the Industrial Revolution.

177. Attainment at the age of 16 is above average. At GCSE Level pupils acquire a detailed knowledge and understanding of the complexities of the problems in Northern Ireland, which challenges them to confront a number of moral dilemmas. The most able pupils support their lines of argument and conclusions well with historical evidence, and appreciate the necessity of seeing both sides of a question. Lower attaining pupils are apt to make errors in their written English and their explanations sometimes reflect muddle and confusion. Pupils with SEN are well supported by class teachers, and all pupils make good progress in acquiring a detailed knowledge of the effects of the Versailles Treaty on Weimar Germany. Pupils analyse and evaluate sources well and many Year 11 pupils offer quite sophisticated analyses for the ebb and flow of the tide of Nazi fortunes during the 1920's and 1930's. Work seen during the inspection indicates that attainment in next year's examinations should continue to be above national expectations.

178. The quality of teaching plays a vital role in the standards achieved, and is good in the lower school, at GCSE Level and in the Sixth Form. There was no unsatisfactory teaching, and over half of lessons seen were good and very good. In all years very good teacher-pupil relationships and classroom management result in an atmosphere that is highly conducive to learning. Teachers' good and often very good subject knowledge enables them to challenge pupils and students to justify their arguments and conclusions by presenting them with contradictory evidence. Lessons regularly include paired and group work, reading aloud, oral presentations and individual research; in addition to establishing a secure base for studying the subject further, as increasing numbers are now opting to do, this makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development. Resources are well chosen to support and extend learning, although during the inspection many lessons made use of monochromatic worksheets that can deprive pupils of valuable historical clues. In a minority of lessons where learning was less than good, teachers chose resources that were insufficiently varied to stretch pupils of different levels of attainment or were over didactic in their approach.

179. The good behaviour and very good attitudes evident in classrooms means that teachers can make good use of humour to encourage pupils to give of their best. Pupils clearly enjoy the subject as may be demonstrated by the increasing take-up of the subject at GCSE Level and in the Sixth Form. Enthusiasm and respect for themselves, their peers and their teachers is a very evident feature of history lessons and these are significant factors in the good learning that takes place.

180. The subject makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils in a number of ways. These include the study of topics such as the Nazis treatment of the Jews and the slave trade as well as the opium wars with China and the indigenous peoples of North America. The frequency of paired and group work, reading aloud and oral presentations offers pupils valuable experience of working with others.

181. Good leadership and management have played an important part in establishing collaborative relationships, raising the subject's profile and achieving very good progress since the last inspection.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

182. Overall, the quality of provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is unsatisfactory.

### **Main strengths:**

- The quality of teaching is satisfactory or good.
- There is good use of ICT in a number of subjects including art, DT and music.
- There has been considerable improvement in the provision of hardware since the last inspection.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- There is a wide range of ICT skills levels of pupils at the ages of 14 and 16.
- The limited discrete provision for ICT which, together with that provided through subjects does not satisfactorily develop the ICT skills of the pupils.
- There is limited use of ICT in a number of subjects.
- There is poor access to computer resources in several subjects.
- The management arrangements are unclear.
- There is a poor level of coordination across the staff involved in the teaching.

183. Standards of attainment of the majority of pupils at the ages of 14 and 16 in ICT are satisfactory. However they vary from being very restricted and well below average for some pupils to advanced and well above average for others. Attainment of individual pupils depends largely on a range of factors, including: the interest and motivation of the individual pupil; access to appropriate computer resources including those that are home-based; subjects followed and the teachers who teach them. Teacher assessments carried out by the school at the end of Year 9 indicate that over the last three years about nine-tenths of the pupils have achieved Level 5 or above with over one half of the total pupils reaching Level 6 or above. These are significantly above the national average levels. Such high standards were not confirmed by this inspection. The school has not offered a GCSE in information technology until recently with the first cohort of pupils following the option currently being in Year 11. It did operate a GCSE short course until 1999 and has recently recommenced operating it as an option for Year 10 and 11 pupils. Although boys and girls perform differently from year to year there is not a consistent pattern.

184. Standards of work seen in classes are at the expected level for the majority of pupils. Since pupils only cover a very restricted amount of information and communications technology work as a discrete subject, mainly in Year 7, their skills depend largely on those developed either at home or within other subjects. For example several Year 7 classes were undertaking computer-based

exercises using word processing software. Although overall skills were generally at the expected level, there was a wide variation both above and below this. A few pupils were confident computer users and had good keyboard skills, whilst others were hesitant, had restricted skills and relied heavily on the teacher for support. Additionally a Year 8 class undertaking a short course designed to reinforce word processing skills as part of their English provision also exhibited a very wide range of skills from basic to reasonably proficient. Pupils in another Year 11 class were working towards the GCSE full course in information technology. The pupils were completing a series of tasks, which contribute to their final award. Whilst overall standards of attainment of the majority were at the expected level individual pupils' standards of work varied widely both above and below this level. Several of the pupils were unlikely to meet the deadline for submission of the completed tasks.

185. Teaching varies from satisfactory to very good although mainly it is good. As a result of the fragmented nature of the provision, particularly during Years 7, 8 and 9, learning is less secure and pupils' progress over time is barely satisfactory. Lessons covering the discrete provision for ICT are well planned, and contain an appropriate range of activities including group and individual work. Clear explanations are given during group work, and pupils receive good support from the teacher when they are undertaking practical work at computers. Teachers frequently use detailed handouts to support aspects of the work. As there is a need for pupils to share computers with the larger groups in Year 7, this has an adverse effect on pupils' learning. Also although schemes of work have been developed for the various aspects of provision, not all teachers who are involved adhere to them.

186. There are a number of weaknesses in the management and coordination of ICT in the school. Individual roles and responsibilities are not clearly understood by all of the staff. All of teachers of this subject spend more time working in other curriculum areas than they do in ICT. Effective co-ordination, including meetings of those involved, is therefore difficult. As a consequence of these factors, there is evidence of poor or limited communications between those staff who undertake the teaching. Agreed schemes of work are not always shared with all staff. The current ratio of pupils to modern computers in the school is approximately 10:1. This is higher than found in many similar schools elsewhere. This level of resources leads to the requirement for pupils in the larger classes to share, and to inadequate access to the resources in a number of subjects.

187. Although statutory requirements are met, the limited discrete provision made, together with that provided through subjects, does not satisfactorily develop the ICT skills of the pupils. The current arrangements include, in addition to the discrete provision made during Year 7, responsibility for English, mathematics, science and DT to cover further aspects of the requirements. Although good use is made in a number of subjects, including DT and music, in other subjects there is less use. There is currently restricted use in history and geography with pupils in Years 7 to 11. Overall, pupils' experience of pupils of ICT is fragmented and lacks coherence.

188. Although a number of weaknesses remain, the school has made some improvements since the last inspection. At the time of the last inspection, standards of attainment were variable but generally unsatisfactory. Although standards continue to be variable, they are now mainly satisfactory. Discrete provision has been increased particularly during Year 7, though overall it continues to be very restricted. Some subjects now make increased use of ICT and as teachers gain confidence and skills in using computers to support pupils' learning. A coordinator for ICT has been appointed since the last inspection.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

189. Overall, the quality of the provision for modern languages is very good.

### Strengths:

- GCSE and GCE Advanced Level results in French and German are well above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- The curriculum offered is extensive and varied.
- Pupils are enthusiastic and very well motivated to succeed
- The standards of speaking and listening are very good.
- The management of the department is excellent.

### Points for improvement:

- There is insufficient use in school of ICT to support the teaching of modern foreign languages.
- The use of individual targets for pupils is insufficiently developed.

## French

190. In 2001, GCSE results in French at A\*-C and A\*-G were well above the national average, and higher than in the previous year. Girls achieved higher results than boys, although the difference was less than that found nationally. Both boys and girls performed better than in most other school subjects. The recent GCSE results in French represent continuous improvement since the last inspection.

191. Attainment in Years 7 to 9 in French is very good. Within a few weeks of starting to learn the language in Years 7 or 8, pupils have very good listening skills and follow lessons taught entirely in French. Most extract significant detail from short recordings or listen with interest and understanding when their classmates are speaking. During their first year of study the large majority of boys and girls achieve high standards of fluency. They make short, informative presentations on their home and school life, leisure pursuits and interests. Many pupils project their own personalities into statements of likes, dislikes and preferences in sport and school subjects, giving reasons for their opinions. By the end of Year 8 or early in Year 9, most pupils use past tenses to talk and write about recent events such as weekend activities. Higher attaining pupils express their intentions using the future tense and infinitive constructions. They adapt their written work progressively to encompass scripts for paired speaking and short informal letters. In their teachers' most recent assessment at the end of Year 9, pupil's attainment was higher than the national average.

192. Pupils' attainment in Years 10 and 11 is very good. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, attain high levels of speaking and listening. Most pupils can state their ideas and opinions, often simply but quite frequently in detail. Pupils write in various styles, ranging from formal and informal letters to discursive essays on the environment. The highest attaining pupils gain detailed and accurate knowledge of grammar and their good use of idiom often promotes clear and effective personal expression. Lower attaining pupils acquit themselves well in simulating everyday situations such as retrieving lost property. Pupils of all abilities read well, whether the texts are simple captions and notices or articles from teenage magazines.

193. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory, and most is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They are fluent and clear in French, adapting the language to make it challenging or accessible to suit pupil's abilities. Their use of tape recorders adds further opportunities to hear and record good quality French. Lessons are very well planned to contain short, varied activities to engage and sustain pupils' interest. There is logical progression towards specific aims as well as a strong emphasis on practical activities and the involvement of pupils in presentations. Pupils are accustomed to learning in partnership with classmates, and benefit from

the exchange of ideas and listening to different people speak. Humour and well-established routines feature regularly in lessons, so pupils' enjoyment and confidence is usually evident. Occasionally, when activities continue too long, the interest of a few pupils wanes and the quality of their learning is reduced. Relations in class are always positive and productive. The pride that pupils take in their achievements is evident in their ready responses and contributions, irrespective of age, gender, or ability. The bright and varied wall displays in the classroom and corridor areas indicate satisfaction in producing polished and attractive work.

## German

194. GCSE results in German in 2001, at A\* to C and A\* to G were also well above the national average and in line with those attained in 2000. Girls gained higher results than boys although the difference was less than the national one. Both boys and girls achieved higher results than they did in other school subjects.

195. In teachers' assessments in German at the end of Year 9, pupils gained results higher than the national average. Boys' attainment is lower than girls', but with less discrepancy than that found nationally.

196. Attainment in Years 7-9 in German is very good. Within half a term of starting to study the language, pupils have well developed listening skills and follow lessons taught entirely in fluent German. Most understand the gist and detail of tape recordings, and enjoy listening to their classmates speak. By age 14 most boys and girls become fluent in German. They speak briefly, with good intonation and accent, about themselves, their families and the German exchange programme. Many express their personal likes, dislikes and preferences in school, life and leisure, giving reasons for their opinions. By age 13, most pupils use past tenses to talk and write about recent events such as holidays, and subordinate clauses when deciding on where to spend the evening. They use different styles in Year 9 to write and enact scripts about eating out or asking directions, as well as composing short informal letters to partners in Germany.

197. Pupils aged 14 to 16 years produce work of very good quality. They understand and participate in lessons that are based on authentic texts and recordings, and taught in uncompromising German. The most able linguists attain an excellent level of proficiency, writing and speaking creatively and with personal expression. They express their thoughts and opinions in detail on teenage interests and concerns, ranging from birthday parties to education. They create formal letters booking accommodation and applying for jobs. Most pupils present some of their work using computers. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs consolidate work done earlier and acquire basic fluency in the language needed for travelling and living abroad.

198. The quality of teaching is very good. Pupils have a very good model to copy from teachers' total fluency in German. They appreciate and enjoy conversing with the teacher, and their partners. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, eliciting prompt, coherent answers and imaginative written work. They are skilled in a variety of teaching techniques that strike a profitable balance between the presentation of new material and its consolidation or development through rehearsed presentations. A minority of teaching is confined to the predictable exploitation of conventional resources. Many lessons, whether concerned with personal appearance or teenage anxieties, have an originality and drive that motivates virtually all boys and girls to work hard and enjoy their learning. Teachers capably organise interesting work around simple resources such as flashcards, worksheets or textbooks. They make skilled use of audio-visual aids, but rarely use computer technology. Whether teaching about the weather or places to live, they elicit confident spoken responses and insist on co-operative, productive use of the time in class. Most pupils work hard, though inevitably, a few have lower levels of concentration and receptivity after a long day in class. Teachers' tracking of attainment and progress is continuous and thorough, and they are increasingly engaging the pupils themselves. The rapid pace of



lessons and the high level of interaction between pupils produce many good opportunities to appraise the quality of their learning. The small amount of writing in class is usually carefully done, and supported by the teachers' constructive comments. Bright and exemplary wall displays serve as models of style and content that all pupils can emulate. Teachers make appropriate use of homework to supplement learning in class.

## **Spanish**

199. Attainment in Spanish at the end of Year 9 and in Year 11 is higher than the national average. Boys' attainment is similar to that of girls in the mixed ability classes.

200. Attainment in Years 7 to 9 is very good. Pupils quickly develop very good listening skills and understand continuous spoken or taped Spanish. They are patient, attentive and appreciative when their classmates speak. During their first years of study both boys and girls learn to use simple Spanish fluently and confidently in speech and writing. They ask and answer questions, describing their daily routine and their homes, or talking about Spanish-speaking countries. Many are keen to state and demonstrate how they get to school, or what sports and hobbies they are interested in. By the end of Year 9, most pupils are familiar with past and future tenses. They write creatively in different styles, making posters, writing letters or producing short dialogues with a partner.

201. At Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils work as a class, or independently, on linked activities developing the skills they need in their examination, or for living abroad. Other pupils start Spanish from scratch and make rapid progress, benefiting from previously acquired language learning skills. Pupils speak and write in various styles, ranging from classroom surveys and sending invitations to detailed descriptions of an ideal school uniform. The opinions they express cover a wide range of topics such as holidays or uses for pocket money. They read and write confidently, drawing inferences from the context where the language is unfamiliar and interpreting statistical evidence about social issues.

202. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers are well qualified, experienced and fluent in Spanish. They judiciously modify the challenge or accessibility to suit their students' ability or special educational needs. Teachers plan their lessons very well. They state their aims clearly, expecting students to summarise later what they have learned. They teach grammar in Spanish, in discrete sections of their lessons, often through illustration and example. Students acquire a strong sense of the rhythm and pattern of infinitive and question forms. Teachers use time intensively, using writing exercises for assessment and individual support. Planning is usually very good, with a productive blend of presentations and independent or paired work exercising different skills. Teachers develop the content of previous lessons about friends' appearances or life at home into long conversations or creative writing. They move smoothly from introducing or explaining new language to managing students' independent learning. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds are well integrated.

203. Teachers' relations with the students are cordial, often humorous but invariably businesslike. A strong sense of common purpose is evident in most classes, as students respond to novelty and variety, as well as firmly established routines. Teachers use games, puzzles, quizzes, songs and mime to give scope for creativity and imagination. Students illustrate their books attractively and produce attractive posters and advertisements for display. Teachers use conventional audio-visual aids effectively, providing a range of stimuli to promote different ways of learning. They produce helpful worksheets and transparencies, supplementing texts in the course books. Teachers have well-developed computer skills, and allow pupils occasional opportunities to personalise their work using ICT. They set homework regularly to supplement lessons and encourage independent study. They assess students' work continuously, eliciting individual and choral responses, or setting short tests to check grammar and vocabulary.

204. Longer assessments give teachers, students and parents an accurate picture of attainment related to national expectations. Marking is regular and thorough, and is reinforced with helpful comments and advice. Students are becoming increasingly more involved in appraising their own and their partners' achievements, tracing their development on simple charts.

## **Overall**

205. The leadership and management of the department are excellent, reflecting a positive and enthusiastic team spirit. Much hard work goes into preparing and monitoring the learning of pupils and students. The department provides an extensive and varied curriculum, responsive to many needs and aptitudes. The very high standards achieved in class are complemented through a vigorous programme of support, and enrichment through extra-curricular travel, a school exchange and work experience in Germany. Meetings are regular and productive, school managers show interest and involvement, and responsibilities are suitably delegated. Since the last inspection, shortcomings in teaching have been largely eliminated through monitoring, evaluation and professional development. There is no longer much evidence of underachievement, and most pupils and students attain high standards. Enrichment through personal reading remains underdeveloped, and the introduction of the new technology has been slow. Teachers have been successful in matching boys' attainment more closely to that of girls', although more will be achieved in French and German with newer, more stimulating textbooks. Assessment is becoming more individually focused, and much will be achieved when teachers and pupils regularly analyse performance and set targets to maximise attainment.

## **MUSIC**

206. Overall the quality of provision in music is very good.

### **Strengths:**

- Very good teaching.
- Very good examination results.
- High standard of extra-curricular work.
- Very effective use of ICT.
- Very high participation level for instrumental teaching and the GCSE.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- The accommodation in relation to the current curriculum.
- The use of staff notation in composition work.
- Consistency in marking systems in Years 7 to 9.

207. GCSE results in 2001 are well above national averages with all pupils entered gaining passes graded B or above. Teacher assessments for pupils aged 14 in 2001 indicate above average standards of attainment.

208. Current standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9 are above average. The pupils listen and respond well to music and can describe and analyse what they hear, using musical vocabulary. The quality of their singing is good and they can hold independent parts. Ensemble skills are well developed; for example a Year 8 class effectively performed a piece for percussion, which involved four independent parts. The pupils control keyboards well and most are using simple fingering systems by the end of Year 9. They are also familiar with graphic and staff notation, and use it well to identify notes on the keyboard. When composing, the pupils produce well-structured melodies and are able to start simple improvisations. Their group compositions show a good feeling for the use of timbre and rhythmic texture. There is very good use of ICT both for composing and performing. All groups of pupils perform well in relation to their prior attainment and there are no significant differences in the attainment of boys and girls or of pupils from different ethnic groups.

209. In Years 10 and 11 the skills and knowledge acquired in Years 7 to 9 are developed to a higher level and standards are well above average. The pupils read music fluently with a good level of accuracy and the level of instrumental performance is very high. When composing, the pupils demonstrate very good use of rhythm and tone colour. They are able to use sophisticated software to create well-shaped compositions. There is little use of conventional staff notation in the compositions although this does not affect the quality of the compositions. Ensemble standards are very high, and this is demonstrated in the very high level of performance achieved by extra-curricular groups, such as the school wind band. Overall, the level of achievement from Years 7 to 11 is good.

210. The pupils have a very good attitude to music; they are highly motivated and keen to learn, and their behaviour in lessons reflects this and is very good. Relationships are very good and pupils collaborate well in class. A very high proportion of pupils take up instrumental tuition and extra-curricular activities are very well supported. The number of pupils opting for GCSE music is well above the national average.

211. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. Almost half of lessons are very good or excellent, almost half are good and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. In Years 7 to 9 the teaching and learning is good. The teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and use it effectively to illustrate and demonstrate in both class and instrumental lessons. Lessons are well planned and give good progression. Teachers' expectations are high; they set challenging tasks and, as a result, all groups of pupils make good progress. The tasks set are well structured to allow pupils to achieve at different levels and this, along with a high level of individual attention, is particularly helpful to those pupils with special needs, enabling them to make good progress. However more use could be made of tasks matched to the individual needs of the pupils, particularly the higher attaining pupils. The teachers make very good use of a wide variety of resources, both acoustic and electronic, and this, combined with very effective use of ICT, maintains pupils' interest and concentration.

212. The management and control of pupils is very good, and ensures productive working and completion of set tasks. Organization is effective, and there is a strong emphasis on working in groups and pairs resulting in a good standard of independent learning and collaboration. The use of homework to support the pupils' learning is very effective and contributes well to the good standards of listening and writing. Pupils' work is marked conscientiously and thoroughly; however there is a need to ensure more consistency in the marking systems used in Years 7 to 9, with more reference to National Curriculum Levels of attainment. In Years 10 and 11 the quality of teaching and learning is very good. The good practices used in Years 7 to 9 are continued, expectations are even higher and work is closely matched to the pupils' prior attainment. There is more use of ICT and a higher level of individual attention keeps pupils well informed of their progress.

213. The head of department provides excellent leadership with clear aims and direction, which well reflect the school's aims and values. He leads a hard-working and highly committed team, including a large number of instrumental teachers who are well co-coordinated by a part-time administrator. The department flourishes in spite of difficulties caused by the unsatisfactory accommodation. Although the department has an adequate number of spaces, they are small and particularly restrict the number of pupils who can be taught instruments. During the external examinations period the work of the department is severely constrained by the noise restrictions that have to be imposed and the loss of use of the main hall.

214. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. The standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9 have been improved, very high GCSE standards have been maintained, pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved, schemes of work are now more varied, and there are more pupils learning instruments. Overall, the music provision is very good and is a strong area of the school's work.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

215. Overall, the quality of provision is unsatisfactory.

### **Strengths:**

- The positive attitudes and very good behaviour of pupils in lessons helps to promote a positive learning atmosphere.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is enhanced by the provision of both full and short courses in GCSE physical education.
- The very good quality and range of accommodation enables a broad range of activities to be taught throughout the year.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- Improve standards in the full course GCSE PE and achievement core PE lessons in Years 7 to 11.
- The involvement of pupils in aspects of planning and evaluating performance in practical lessons.
- Curriculum balance in Years 7 to 9, by improving provision for dance.
- Improve provision for extra-curricular activities, especially for boys, in Years 7 to 11.
- Schemes of work to help fully meet the requirements of National Curriculum 2000.
- Implementation of assessment procedures for the course that all pupils follow in Years 7 to 9.
- The quality of leadership and management of the subject.

216. In lessons, standards at the end of Year 9 are average, with most pupils achieving appropriate levels for their age. In the course that all pupils take in Years 10 and 11, standards are typical for their age. Overall, standards have been maintained since the last inspection.

217. By age 14, achievement is, on balance, satisfactory for all groups of pupils in relation to their physical capabilities. For example, in rugby union lessons, all pupils are improving their all-round individual skills, and the more talented display secure tactical awareness in conditioned games. In their gymnastics lessons, all girls have developed some well-constructed group balance sequences and make sensitive and sensible comments on the performance of group balances. By age 16, achievement is also satisfactory. Boys have continued to refine and improve their skills and techniques in rugby union. The more talented run and support each other well in the full game, but the less confident have a tendency to panic under pressure, consequently the accuracy of their passing suffers. In netball lessons, most girls utilise a good range of passing techniques with appropriate movement. A few, though, still find it difficult to use the overhead pass with accuracy or appropriate technique.

218. Across all years pupils have a secure grasp of the principles and procedures of warm-up and many, for example, suggest appropriate stretches and know the muscle groups being used. Pupils are not always as fully involved in warm-up as they could be because teachers tend to direct the pupils in this activity in many lessons. Pupils identified as having special educational needs are appropriately supported and integrated, and make satisfactory progress. Teachers generally organise their classes well, and so all pupils make appropriate progress. Physically talented pupils are provided with further opportunities through taking part in school teams.

219. The GCSE full course in physical education is an optional subject taken by some pupils. The proportion of pupils achieving A\* to C grade passes in the GCSE has declined since 1999, when it was well above the national average. In 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving A\* to C grade passes fell but remained above the national average, and fell still further in 2001.

Unconfirmed data suggests that standards are now only broadly in line with the national average. Groups of pupils also took the GCSE short course in physical education in 1999 and 2001. The proportion achieving higher grades was higher in 2001 than in 1999. Comparisons between boys and girls are not possible because of the small numbers of girls who take the course.

220. The quality of teaching overall is satisfactory. There are no significant differences in teaching quality between Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed: this is an improvement since the last inspection. However, no very good or excellent teaching and learning was observed, which was not the case at the time of the last inspection. Teachers have high expectations in terms of discipline and behaviour and in the ability of pupils to work to their best. They manage their classes well. Pupils' response to this is good, which helps to promote a positive learning atmosphere in lessons and enables all to make progress. For example, they work well as pairs and small groups and show clear respect for the capabilities of one another. In Year 9 lessons, for example, boys worked well together in groups developing their line-out tactics in rugby union, and girls' evaluative comments of others' work in a gymnastics lesson were both sensitive and developmental. In all lessons, clear instructions, together with effective breakdown and demonstration of skills, ensures pupils are aware of what is expected of them and what they have to do to make progress. However, as at the time of the last inspection, insufficient opportunities for pupils to observe and evaluate the performance of one another, particularly in games lessons, means they are not adapting, refining and improving their own practice as much as they could be.

221. A variety of structured activities in lessons help ensure pupils stay motivated. In a Year 7 mixed gymnastics lesson, for example, pupils were involved in planning simple sequences involving rolls. In a Year 10 trampoline lesson, however, this worked very well for the group of more talented girls but much less so for the less physically capable because the task set for them was limited and lacked progressive challenge and the teacher did not provide sufficient individual guidance for them. Pupils are generally made aware of their capabilities because teachers circulate well and offer praise and constructive criticism. Non-participants are not always as fully involved as they should be; for example, they are not always made part of the group for demonstrations or involved in coaching and evaluative activities. Sometimes, at the end of lessons, there is a tendency for the teacher to provide all the evaluation rather than to also ask pupils for their responses as to what they feel they have achieved. The quality of the marking of pupils' theory work is inconsistent. Pupils are, therefore, not being made aware of what they need to do to improve their knowledge and understanding.

222. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and has been extended in Years 10 and 11 with GCSE PE long and short courses. However, in the course that all pupils follow, there is different provision for boys and girls in Years 7 to 9 and, in Years 10 and 11, the two groups of pupils have different opportunities because of unequal staffing levels. In Years 10 and 11 it is not clear which activities pupils are following in-depth. Schemes of work do not reflect the requirements of the National Curriculum or offer sufficient guidance to teachers in planning their lessons. As a result there is insufficient progress being made by pupils in some lessons. There is a lack of vibrancy in the subject particularly in the provision of extra-curricular recreational activities for boys; thus the subject is not making the impact on school life that one would expect. There are opportunities for pupils to take part in inter-school competitive fixtures throughout the year. As a result of this, seven pupils have achieved representative honours at district level and three have achieved county representative honours. Year 7 girls are under-13 district netball champions.

223. In the course that all follow, pupils are not being made aware as to how they are being assessed, because the department currently has no assessment procedures in place. There is, therefore, no assessment data to help guide curriculum planning in the subject. The very good quality and range of accommodation, particularly outdoors, allows for a very good breadth of activities to be taught throughout the year.

224. Leadership and management of the subject are poor. Departmental leadership lacks coherence and as a result of this there is no clear educational direction for the subject. There are no formal procedures for the monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching and learning and

no sense of purposeful development planning to inform and guide the work of the department. There is a lack of commitment to improving provision in the subject and because of this progress since the last inspection has been poor.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

225. Overall, the quality of provision in business education (11-16) is good.

### **Strengths:**

- The most recent GCSE business results are well above the national average results.
- Teacher knowledge and planning are very good.
- Management of the learning is well organised and expectations of pupils are high.
- Very positive relationships and attitudes observed in the classroom between pupils and with teachers.
- Pupils make good progress and are enthusiastic about the subject.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- Establishing a dedicated suite of teaching rooms for Years 10 and 11, to support a business focused learning environment.
- Provision of greater access to ICT.

226. At the age of 16, pupils' standards of attainment are above average. In 2001 over four-fifths of those entered gained A\*-C grades, an improvement on 2000 when half gained A\* to C grades. These results are the best ones for several years. Just over an eighth of pupils gained the highest grade, which is well above the national average. Girls achieved slightly better than boys, although four-fifths of pupils on the course were boys. This is a trend, as increasingly more boys than girls have taken the subject in recent years.

227. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of pupils' work confirm that standards are above average and they are improving. By the end of Year 11 pupils make good progress in business. Pupils develop a wide range of skills, including the ability to analyse the different types of production and the advantages and disadvantages of partnerships, to differentiate between horizontal, lateral and vertical mergers and to analyse video material covering human resource recruitment. They are able to produce charts, make effective notes, develop their writing to give extended reasons for a business development and they can work most effectively in small groups, planning and making business decisions. Pupils have a sound understanding of key terms and concepts such as conglomerates, job specification, adding value and supply and demand. Pupils take great care with the presentation of their work, the workbooks are well organised and there are examples of practice questions for the examination; pupils are well prepared for the examinations.

228. The coursework is of a good standard and there is evidence of thorough primary research through questionnaires. Worksheets and support material are comprehensive. Homework is regularly set, is appropriate and extends the learning in the lessons. It is regularly marked. Achievement at this key stage is very good.

229. The quality of teaching is good with some being very good. Teacher knowledge is very good and classroom planning is well organised and supports the good progress observed. Key terms are clearly explained, pupil knowledge and understanding are regularly tested and the pace of learning is rigorous. Teacher expectations are high and as the scrutiny revealed, pupils have high expectations of their own work and progress. Classes are very well organised so that every minute counts. This encourages pupils to work hard, and pupils' concentration and focus are very high. Pupils make good progress when teachers include opportunities to recap and emphasise the key ideas. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, the teacher emphasised the assessment sheets, drew attention to the tasks to be accomplished and at regular intervals re-energised the group work so that all groups finished their tasks within the timescale. Discussion and debate was lively and

enthusiastic and the pupils clearly enjoyed their simulated business activity. Teachers know their pupils very well and the relationships in the classes are very positive. Pupils work very well together, sharing ideas and tasks and they listen very attentively to the teachers. Individual concentration observed is very high. Behaviour and attitudes to the subject are excellent; as a result of the good organisation and high standards observed, pupils make good progress though the key stage.

230. Pupils make good progress, despite having no business base. Learning takes place in a variety of classrooms around the school. The textbooks and other support material have to be carried by the teacher. This has an adverse impact on the range of teaching strategies, as business education cannot be effectively learnt solely from books. There is some limited access to ICT, however pupils have to share a computer. This area of provision needs to be reviewed. Library provision is good and provides sound coursework research opportunities for pupils.

231. Leadership and management are very good. The newly appointed head of department has already carried out a curriculum review and the GCSE syllabus will be changed for 2002. It is hoped that both a long and a short business studies course will be taught in the next academic year. The departmental handbook and the schemes of work are being revised. Clear direction, support and momentum are given to the young business team. Since the last inspection, teaching methodologies and strategies have developed and assessment methodology has become more focused. GCSE achievement has improved and the high attainment at 18 has been maintained.

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

In the inspection, nine subjects 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 2000, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

***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
<b>GCE A Level</b>							
Art & Design	5	100	96	40	45	6.80	6.42
Biology	11	100	88	45	34	6.55	5.28
Chemistry	5	100	89	80	42	8.80	5.87
Classical Studies	6	100	94	50	46	6.33	6.36
Economics	5	80	88	60	36	6.40	5.41
English Lit.	12	100	96	33	36	5.67	5.90
French	7	100	91	43	39	6.00	5.74
Design and technology	9	100	92	67	29	8.00	5.37
Geography	6	100	92	83	37	8.00	5.73
German	5	100	92	60	41	8.40	5.88
Mathematics	20	100	89	45	45	8.40	5.88
Music	1	100	93	100	35	8.00	5.72
Physics	13	100	88	46	41	7.38	5.72
Religious Studies	4	100	91	50	35	7.50	5.57
Sociology	6	83	88	67	37	7.67	5.46
<b>AVCE</b>							
Art and Design	9	-	-	-	-	16.67	12.66
Business	12	-	-	-	-	15.50	10.78
Science	8	-	-	-	-	16.50	10.26



## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

#### Mathematics

232. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics. Examination results in mathematics are above average. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress. Five Sixth Form lessons were observed including one involving students repeating GCSE mathematics. Overall teaching is mainly good.

233. Overall the quality of provision in mathematics is good.

#### Main Strengths:

- The attainment of the majority of students is above national average levels.
- Teaching and learning is good.
- Students are highly motivated.
- Provision is well managed.

#### Areas for improvement:

- The proportion of students who gain high grades in the A Level examination.
- Opportunities for students to use ICT to support their learning.

234. In recent years the GCE Advanced Level examination results have consistently been above the national average. Twenty or more candidates have been entered in each of the last three years. Over nine-tenths of the candidates during these years have achieved pass grades. In 1999, all 26 candidates achieved pass grades, with 10 students achieving a grade A. However in some years the percentages of students achieving either grade A or grade B passes has been lower than the national average. Prior to 2001 there were only a few candidates entered for other than GCE Advanced Level mathematics. Results for the limited number of candidates entered for GCE AS Levels and GCE Further Mathematics during this time were variable but were satisfactory overall. In the most recent GCE AS Level examinations, 19 students were entered and results for these were good. About nine-tenths of those entered achieved pass grades, with four achieving an A grade pass.

235. The standard of work of the current students is above average. At the time of the inspection Year 12 students had only just begun their Sixth Form course. However many students are achieving as expected and some in excess of this. For example students in a Year 12 GCE AS Level class were undertaking group work on the drawing of Venn diagrams and using set notation to express the laws of probability. The students showed a good understanding of the principles involved, and were able to contribute to the development of the topic by giving full answers to the questions posed by the teacher during the group work. Additionally students in a Year 13 GCE Advanced Level class were able to work well on an independent basis on statistical examples from a textbook after an initial introduction by the teacher. Skilful questioning by the teacher during the group work, and significant contributions from individual students helped to enhance and consolidate the understanding of all the students of the statistical principles involved.

236. Teaching is good and in one lesson it was very good. Teachers plan their lessons well. Group work involves significant questioning of the students and the nature of the questions encourages the students to provide full answers including the reasoning involved. Some of the group work involved lively and interesting presentations leading to good levels of discussion. Teachers and students show an interest and sometimes an enthusiasm for the subject being covered. The pace that work is undertaken is well matched to the needs of the students. Sixth Form students have a positive attitude to their work in mathematics. They are well motivated and are encouraged and able to take more responsibility for their own learning. Relationships

between students and with the teacher are very supportive. Sixth Form students spoken to recognised that they received good support from the teachers and that teaching overall is of high quality. A few thought there was a lack of variety in terms of teaching approaches used in mathematics.

237. The Sixth Form work is well managed. Those teaching the GCE Advanced and AS Level courses work closely together and meet frequently both formally and informally. Work to be carried out in the students' own time is regularly set, accurately marked and returned to the students. Teachers know individual students' strengths and weaknesses well. The curriculum in the Sixth Form for mathematics is appropriate and meets the needs of the students. There is now a good range of alternatives available at A and AS Levels with modular schemes increasing the level of flexibility available to individual students. As with the main school although some use is made of ICT there is potential for its further use with Sixth Form students. High standards have been maintained since the last inspection and the proportion of good teaching has increased.

## SCIENCE

238. In science the focus was on biology and physics, but chemistry and the advanced vocational education (AVCE) course in science were sampled. Results for both chemistry and AVCE science in recent years have been well above average. Three lessons in Year 13 were seen across chemistry and AVCE science and a sample of work in both subjects from Year 12 and Year 13 students was seen. The teaching was at least good and one vocational lesson was very good. Strong subject knowledge and well-structured teaching contributed well in both subjects to students' learning. In addition, students achieve well as a result of their own commitment and positive motivation.

### Biology

239. Overall the quality of provision in biology is good.

#### Strengths:

- In the last two years results have improved significantly. In 2000 they were well above average.
- Students have a good grasp of concepts and effectively apply them when doing classwork and homework.
- Teaching is good and learning is well structured. Lessons have a brisk pace and a variety of activities to develop students' knowledge and understanding. Methods used also helped to develop key skills such as skim reading, note-making and communication skills.
- Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject.
- The head of subject provides effective leadership.

#### Areas for improvement:

- A more systematic approach is required to managing the transition from GCSE to GCE Advanced Level for Double Award Science students.
- The use of ICT needs to be improved substantially; the present provision is unsatisfactory.
- More emphasis needs to be given to developing the ability of students to work independently.
- As the new scheme of work is developed, attention needs to be paid to ensuring breadth and balance of teaching and learning activities, including practical work.

240. The GCE Advanced Level examination results have improved significantly since the last inspection. In 2000 the results were well above average. In 2001 they were above average. Two-fifths of students gained the highest grades, A and B, which is a little above average. All students who started the course completed it. At GCE AS Level this year all pupils gained pass grades and three-fifths of them gained A or B grades.

241. The standards of work of current students are also above average. In the lessons seen, they were doing well as a result of good teaching. In one lesson students were given a short, fixed time-scale in which to prepare a presentation for other students on different aspects of qualitative and quantitative field techniques. They drew effectively on their knowledge, together with information in textbooks. In an introductory lesson on the structure and function of the nervous system students made notes from a short video clip, and then extended their understanding of this topic with the help of an information sheet and structured questions. They showed good knowledge of earlier related work on the role of the endoplasmic reticulum and the sodium pump.

242. Students in Year 12 have only recently begun their course. Standards are again above average. Students worked effectively in groups, extending their knowledge of renewable sources of energy in preparation for presentations to the class. These were of a good standard.

243. Teaching is good and the students learn well as a result. The key features that characterised good teaching were well-structured lessons, variety of activity with clear time-scales, brisk pace and the use of methods that contributed to the development of key skills such as skim reading, extracting meaning from text and communication skills. The teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and this is apparent in their explanations, in their questioning of students and in the quality of the notes given.

244. Students show a positive attitude towards their learning and generally work with enthusiasm and interest. They work effectively as individuals, in groups and as a whole class. In a number of lessons students made presentations and showed good communication skills. There is some evidence that the progress of Triple Award GCSE science students being better than that of those who have followed the Double Award GCSE course. More systematic arrangements need to be put in place to manage the transition from GCSE to GCE Advanced Level.

245. Students do undertake some independent work, for example on the Human Genome Project and in making notes on certain topics. The Head of Biology recognises, however, the need to increase the amount of independent work and also to substantially increase the use of ICT - the present provision is unsatisfactory.

246. The good teaching and learning in biology are a result of effective subject leadership. Standards have improved significantly since the last inspection and there is a commitment to raising standards further. A start has recently been made on developing a scheme of work. This has the potential to have a positive impact upon standards if due attention is given to ensuring the use of a breadth and balance of activities, including practical work, which support effective learning.

## Physics

247. Overall, the provision for physics is very good.

### Strengths:

- Standards are well above course averages.
- Most students, particularly those with high prior attainment, achieve higher standards than those predicted from their GCSE results.
- Teaching is good.
- Students are very well motivated and show substantial capacity for hard work and perseverance.
- The subject is well managed.
- Procedures for monitoring the progress of students are good.

### Areas for improvement:

- Schemes of work need to be developed in order to fully identify the ways in which teaching can deliver the course objectives for all students, including the use of ICT.
- The department needs to examine ways in which students can be given more opportunities for independent study and research.

248. The standards achieved by students by the age of 18 are well above the national average as measured by performance in GCE Advanced Level examinations. In each of the last four years, virtually all students achieved at least a pass grade, and never less than half reach the very high A or B grades. Fewer girls than boys take GCE Advanced Level physics but they achieve comparable results. In the 2001 GCE Advanced Subsidiary examination taken at the end of Year 12, more than nine-tenths of a large group of 25 students passed and two thirds of them reached grade A or B.

249. The work of students currently in school confirms the standards shown by the results. Students not very far into their last year in school show a good grasp of basic concepts. Their ability to apply known principles to new situations is well above average. For example, most students were able to follow a well-constructed argument to derive an expression for the electro-motive-force generated by an aircraft flying through a magnetic field. The highest attaining students in the group were then able to apply the new information to solve numerical problems on the topic, although some of the weaker students needed support.

250. The majority of students cope well with the mathematical demands of the subject. In work involving radioactive decay, all have a very good grasp of the associated technical vocabulary and a clear understanding of the nature and properties of the different products of radioactive decay. Most students understand how the random nature of radioactive decay leads to an exponential decay curve, including those who are not studying GCE Advanced Level mathematics.

251. Students in Year 12 show good understanding of the principles of direct current electricity and mechanics. As with students in Year 13, they are coping well at this early stage with the mathematical demands of the subject. In electricity, they can confidently calculate the resistance of resistors in parallel and most are beginning to understand how a potential divider works. Higher attaining students can answer problems on potential dividers quickly and without support. For some others, the concept of potential difference poses difficulties. Most of the Year 12 group know the necessary conditions for the static equilibrium of parallel and non-parallel forces.

252. Teaching is good overall and promotes good learning. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and their substantial experience ensures that students have confidence in their teachers. The good structure of most lessons allows learning to proceed at a good pace. In a

year 12 lesson on direct current electricity, clear exposition of how a potential divider works was followed by a session in which students had to apply their knowledge to numerical problems. A discussion session at the end of the lesson effectively reviewed progress and gave students a chance to check their work and correct some errors.

253. The effective use of questions in Year 13 lessons on radioactive decay and on electromagnetic induction helped students through some difficult physical ideas. In the latter lesson, there was a progressive build up of challenging questions that directed students towards an understanding of how to apply knowledge of physical laws to new situations.

254. Good use is made of homework, and students feel well supported in the feedback they receive from it. In one lesson, the structure was less effective in promoting learning as a result of it being broken up into a number of sections in which the connecting thread was not made obvious to the class. Lessons observed and work seen shows little evidence of students being encouraged to learn independently.

255. Students make a significant contribution to their own learning in the attitudes they bring to their work. They are strongly motivated and work very well together in the positive learning atmosphere created by the very good relationships with their teachers. They complete large quantities of work and show perseverance when the work becomes difficult. They work well on their own in lessons when given the opportunity to do so. The subject is a very popular choice in

Year 12 and, of the 25 students who started on the GCE AS course in September 2000, 16 are continuing their physics studies into Year 13.

256. The subject is well managed. There is a strong commitment to maintain and improve on high standards. The monitoring of academic progress is well established and is a significant strength. Good records are kept of students' progress towards their targets. The joint progress statement made during a one-to-one interview is a motivating influence. Schemes of work for the new specification are not well developed and the use of ICT is not firmly embedded into the teaching programmes.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

257. The focus of the inspection was on design and technology and food technology. No additional courses were sampled.

### **Design and Technology**

258. Provision for design and technology in the Sixth Form is very good.

#### **Strength:**

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Accommodation and resource provision is good.
- Pupil attitudes, motivation and behaviour are very good.
- The quality of work is high and there is a significant 'value added' element.
- Very good performance of pupils in GCE Advanced Level examinations.

#### **Areas for improvement:**

- The breadth of the curriculum base, the provision for ICT in food technology and the place of CAD/CAM in DT
- The viability of Sixth Form group sizes, and continuity in recruitment.

259. Currently, DT and food technology exist as two different departments but there is considerable overlap between them in operational terms. The departments provide two courses at

GCE Advanced Level, one in design and technology and one in food technology.

260. Results in DT last year were excellent with over two-thirds of pupils achieving A and B grades. Value added calculations are very positive and indicate that a number of pupils had exceeded predictions by over a grade. GCE AS Level results in DT are not yet available because of a dispute with the examination board. Results in GCE AS Level food technology were very good, with half of the students gaining A and B grades.

261. Years 12 and 13 GCE AS and Advanced Level courses in DT and Year 13 GCE Advanced Level course in food technology were inspected. Attainment in lessons is well above average, and work seen during the inspection provides evidence of good standards being reached in a wide range of projects. Pupils' understanding of the design process is good and many have developed distinctive personal styles. Some pupils have produced innovative ideas and work displayed reflects a variety of approaches. The quality of presentation in the design folders is very good with pupils using a range of ICT and other graphical techniques. Pupils demonstrate maturity and an ability to employ key learning skills. Pupils are clearly interested in their work and are determined to succeed. The quality of models and products is very good and there is evidence of the use of a range of materials. Emphasis is laid on achieving high standards of finish and presentation. The current display of work provides important stimulus material for other pupils and a clear statement of standards to be achieved.

262. In Year 12, attainment was good in those lessons observed. Pupils were interested and attentive and participated fully in the activities. They conducted a critical dialogue with the teacher, and were clearly involved in learning. Many are following up interests and earlier studies, and are using a range of investigative means. Pupil work rate is good. Comments and questions made indicate a high level of understanding and commitment. Pupils showed responsibility for their work by their positive attitudes and their attention to procedures and deadlines.

263. Two Year 13 lessons were observed, one in design and technology and the other in food technology. Pupils in design and technology were engaged in pursuing a number of tasks and were focusing on to priorities and deadlines. They tackled their studies in a mature and efficient way using a variety of study skills. Dialogue with the teacher was of good quality and provided evidence of interest and understanding. Work in progress, and completed work, provides evidence of good quality work of sufficient quantity.

264. In food technology, pupils were engaged in an experimental assignment in preparation for designing a new food product. They had introduced interesting and well-researched topics. Work in progress provides evidence of depth of research and analysis, and richness of ideas. Pupils demonstrate independent learning skills and a very positive attitude towards the course.

265. Sixth Form programmes of study are well planned and organised. Teaching is consistently very good and is reflected in the raised standards of pupil attainment. Pupils are achieving higher grades than those predicted. Lessons proceed at an appropriate pace and teaching strategies challenge pupils to provide well-planned, good quality project work.

266. Teachers have high expectations and plan their lessons well. They are knowledgeable and work hard to provide appropriate support services. Project work is well monitored and teachers expect pupils to work hard and produce work on time. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good and dialogue indicates a mature approach to study. The pace of lessons is good and teachers have developed a range of successful support strategies. Overall the quality of teaching is very good.

267. The heads of department are experienced and knowledgeable teachers. They have clear objectives and there have been considerable improvements since the last inspection. Computer equipment in specialist food rooms is inadequate and there is a need to further develop CAD /

CAM techniques within the DT curriculum. Financial resources are limited and this affects the provision and replacement of key pieces of equipment in both departments. Assessment procedures are good and they are designed to provide teachers and pupils with effective and helpful feedback.

## **BUSINESS**

268. The focus was on business but economics was also sampled. In economics, results were above the national average in 2000 and an improvement on the previous year. However in 2001, less than a third of candidates gained an A-B grade, which was below the school's average for GCE Advanced Levels. One lesson was observed and the teaching was good. The lesson was well paced, with very sound explanation, regular review of student learning and practical involvement in constructing cobweb models. Students gained a secure understanding of the effect of varying price elasticity of supply and demand in agriculture.

### **Business**

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

#### **Strengths:**

- Achievement over recent years has been very high with the subject achieving the highest grade against national standards.
- Teachers have very secure subject knowledge, great enthusiasm and professional expertise.
- Work by teachers is thoroughly prepared and organised.
- Students have a mature approach to the subject and have good organisational and research skills.
- ICT is used widely, extending the reference base of business.
- Leadership and management are very good, giving strong support to the business team.

#### **Areas for improvement:**

- None.

270. The GNVQ examination result this summer maintained the very high standard of recent years, with all students gaining a distinction or merit grade. For the first time there were more merits than distinctions, perhaps reflecting the greater emphasis on external examinations. Business has consistently attracted a good number of students, with 12 students achieving the award in 2001.

271. Progress is very good; several of the students take up the subject for the first time in the Sixth Form and produce work of a high standard. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of students' work confirm that standards are above average. In the Year 12 AVCE group, students are able to create profit and loss accounts and balance sheets. They are confident in developing and using these financial tools. Although they are only a little way into their course, they can handle the intricacies of concepts such as 'sitting next to Nellie'. This particular training issue provoked lively discussion, and one student shared his own work experience of the technique with his group. The Year 13 group is able to reflect critically upon a recent public presentation, and the students are able not only to identify their particular strengths but also those areas that could have been improved. The quality of discussion and evaluation of each other's contributions are particularly impressive. Collaborative work is of a high standard and so is their work as individuals. The students work with great intensity. They focus on developing their management information systems coursework. Their concentration and purpose are impressive.

272. Teaching is good overall with some very good features. Teachers are very secure in their own knowledge of the subject and their classroom management skills are of a high order. Planning is meticulous and there is high quality support material. Teachers are enthusiastic about business and this is readily shared with the students, who learn well as a result. Relationships between

students and with the staff are excellent and this produces an environment in which good progress is achieved. The improvement in understanding, in overall confidence and in the collaborative work of the students from Year 12 to Year 13 is very marked.

273. Students learn very well. They have good concentration, a real sense of purpose and a desire to achieve high standards. There is a shared philosophy between students and teachers to work hard and to develop an impressive vocational business course experience. There are good links with local industry. Industrial representatives regularly visit the school; recently a Mitsubishi representative gave a presentation on management information systems. This will form part of the evidence gathering for the student portfolio. The evaluation of student work is thorough, and students have individual diagnoses of where they need to strengthen their work still further. Students are prepared very thoroughly for their examinations and assessments and the consistent quality of the portfolios is impressive.

274. Students show a mature approach to their studies. They have good independent study skills, and are actively encouraged by their teachers to build up their contacts with commerce and industry, and to develop their team skills, their presentational skills both oral and written and to become effective independent learners. Information and communications technology is used widely and to very good effect. It provides opportunities for students to extend their skills by making PowerPoint presentations to outside audiences, and to use the medium for extensive research into different business sectors and experiences. The business suite provides a high quality environment for effective learning.

275. The good teaching and learning result from work in the subject being very well led and managed. The recently appointed head of department is committed to improving the existing high standards. The student assessment procedures are being further developed and links with industry are being extended. Teamwork is effective and the new members of the department are supported strongly.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

276. The focus of the inspection was on art and design. Music was also sampled. In music the number of students entered for GCE Advanced Level in recent years is too small for meaningful comparisons with national averages to be made, or for trends to be reliably identified: however the students entered are usually successful and gain high grades. Current standards of attainment are above average, and overall the level of achievement is good. Performance standards are high. The quality of teaching and learning is very good.

### **Art and design**

277. Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

#### **Strengths:**

- The very effective and hard-working team of teachers have high expectations of their students.
- Pupils creatively apply a very high standard of craft skills in their work.
- Progress is promoted through the regular self-assessment system.

#### **Areas for improvement:**

- The extension of opportunities for live assignment work into the broader community.
- The upgrading of computers and their applications.

278. Standards and attainment are above average due to the high expectations of teachers, the quality of guidance provided and the mature response by students.



279. In the most recent GCE Advanced Level art examination results at grades A to B were above the course average, continuing a trend of very good results. In the GCE AS Level art examination the majority of students achieved high grades and all achieved the award. In the AVCE vocational art examination all students achieved merit or distinction grades, continuing a trend of high achievement. Art and design are popular subjects and student numbers have recently increased in both areas.

280. Standards demonstrated in lessons and folders of work are above average. Students consolidate their previous learning and acquire even better standards of skills that are now applied with greater individual flair. Their work has strength in graphic design and in drawing and painting. Painting ranges from finely detailed, formal, analytical studies to large-scale heavy impasto expressive paintings. Colour is understood and applied well. While the majority of work is predominantly two-dimensional, many students choose to extend their work with imaginative three-dimensional techniques. In well-executed design exercises, students show how the tensions and rhythms of shape and space, discovered in their study of the work of Victor Pasmore, can be developed and applied to graphic problems. Students develop a good understanding of the role of art in history, and the moral issues raised in subjects such as 'Picasso and the Spanish Civil War', following rigorous and thought provoking teacher presentations.

281. Achievement is very good. Students' progress is helped by the good-quality verbal and written assessment by teachers of their work and the well-considered guidance provided. Annotation continues to be an effective tool in the self-assessment process. Teacher demonstration of craft skills is the key to student proficiency, just as the establishment of a visually stimulating environment promotes their creative, experimental and imaginative approach to study. This is regularly demonstrated in vibrant sketchbooks that are crammed full of new ideas. The broad-based curriculum, with access to all available resources, provides a suitable structure for learning about art at this level. Working with a designer-in-residence is very beneficial in raising awareness of the role of the designer in society and this is strengthened by the work-experience links with professional design workshops. One such visit sparked a personal interest in jewellery and this led to new skills of working with wire and fabric.

282. Students speak confidently about art. They explain the different processes they employ using a good art vocabulary, due to the practice of making technical notes. They speak well of their experiences, value the wide range of teacher expertise provided and recognise the progress they are making. AVCE students show an open-minded experimental approach to exploring small-scale, three-dimensional structures with found objects. Working this way they make very good progress in being able to provide creative and imaginative design solutions, aided by the open-ended nature of their brief. Sound word-processing skills are demonstrated in well-presented personal critical studies. Computers and scanners are used creatively to produce solutions to graphic design problems.

283. The quality of teaching is consistently very good and at times excellent. Expectations are very high and this results in students' achievements being very high. A particularly imaginative and effective teaching method was the requirement for students to analyse and re-write obituary notices of a well-known artist they had studied, incorporating their own thoughts. All lessons have clear aims, with the result that all tasks have a strong sense of purpose. Good use is made of the department's resources, particularly the suite of computers to promote graphic production skills. Visits to national galleries and fine art auction houses, and opportunities to visit overseas centres of culture have been inspirational as well as broadening students' knowledge of art. Students are regularly exposed to examples of contemporary European typographic design and the display of a 'design of the week' extends their knowledge of designers. Teachers have very good knowledge and regularly direct students to particular artists or art movements that enables them to further their knowledge.

284. The courses are well led and managed. Opportunities to work on live assignments, such as teamwork designing the school prospectus, and designing and making a new altar cloth for the school chapel, are good vocational experiences but would be even better if the department explored additional opportunities in the wider world.

285. Since the previous report there has been improvement in the use of creative and experimental sketchbook work. Computers are now available in the department, although these now need to be upgraded to meet industrial standards and to provide Internet research access. Accommodation space has been improved and better storage facilities provided. Students now have a designated base providing access outside of the timetabled single periods, enabling them to work for extended periods at their craft activities.

## HUMANITIES

286. The focus of the inspection was on geography. History, sociology and psychology were also sampled. In history, work was scrutinised and three lessons were seen. History is attracting increasing numbers for GCE AS Level and for A2. Attainment is above average. There is plentiful evidence of developing skills in the prescribed areas of explanation, evaluation and perspective. Two lessons of sociology were seen, and one of psychology. Work samples were also inspected. In both subjects teaching and learning were good.

### Geography

287. The focus was on GCE AS and Advanced Level geography: GCSE geography in Year 12 was also sampled. All lessons seen were good or very good in terms of their teaching and learning, and were characterised by the quality and rigour of the questions asked by the teachers of the students. The discussion that developed enabled students to express their understanding and aid each other's learning. Examination results for the department at GCE Advanced Level are adjudged as excellent in comparison with similar schools.

288. Overall the quality of provision is very good.

#### Strengths:

- Over the last five years all pupils entered for GCE Advanced Level have achieved pass grades
- Teaching is always good or very good.
- Student understanding is expressed in well-constructed answers to written tasks.
- The highest attaining students display fluency and coherence in their work.
- The department draws on learning from the residential field trip and from GCSE coursework to develop student understanding of physical processes.

#### Areas for improvement:

- Resources for the GCE Advanced and AS Level courses.
- Access to ICT facilities for classroom-based learning.
- Access to GCE Advanced Level for those having followed the GCSE short course.

289. Examination results in the Sixth Form at GCE Advanced Level are judged as excellent in comparison with similar schools. For the past five years, all pupils entered have gained pass grades, with a percentage of higher grades that is significantly above the course average. Boys and girls do equally well at the subject.

290. Standards of work are good, and occasionally very good. In Year 13, students showed a wide range of knowledge and understanding: the majority of students were working at or above GCE Advanced Level standard in relation to the topic of glaciation. Year 12 students showed similar variation. For those who had taken the GCSE short course the transition to GCE Advanced Level was proving to be very demanding. In the Year 12 GCSE lesson students were making good

progress in relation to their previous attainment. They were producing a high standard of work from stimulating material. Students had good knowledge of technical language in relation to the theme of development and were able to use correct terms confidently.

291. The quality of teaching was good. In three-fifths of lessons it was good and in the remainder it was very good. Teaching was always challenging, demanding thoughtful attention and response from the students. In particular, teachers used their skills to draw out students with demanding questions. In a Year 12 lesson, all the class was encouraged to express their understanding of the competency and capacity of a river. There were always a variety of activities prepared by teachers from their own resources. Particular use was made of structured questions to aid understanding. Graphs and visual diagrams were provided for interpretation. Students sorted confused statements on a flow line system to explain Malthusian ideas about population growth. Essays had been regularly set and marked with individual targets for improvement. Samples of coursework and the write up of the residential field trip were all of a high standard.

292. In spite of a scarcity of resources for some topics, pupils use their single textbook creatively and supplement it with other source materials. Students independently make extensive use of the library and Internet. Teachers also provide handouts, basic data and other materials that they have prepared from other sources. The library has alleviated some of the resource problems with single copies of a variety of related GCE Advanced Level textbooks and with CD ROMs. Access to computers for whole class learning is very difficult.

293. It is a measure of the skill, commitment and subject knowledge of the teachers involved that excellent results are produced from limited resources. Students are able to develop their own knowledge and understanding of the subject through lively discussion in class. They display sound understanding of concepts, both in physical topics such as glacial impact and river velocity, and in human issues such as whether the price of wheat is still a factor determining the age of marriage. Gifted students produce high quality work. The teachers involved have created a highly conducive learning environment for the Sixth Form in the geography department.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

294. The focus of the inspection was on English and French. One lesson of German was sampled. In this lesson teaching and learning were excellent, with students demonstrating very high standards of attainment. They used an impressive range of structures for expressing opinions. Results in German are well above the national average.

### **English**

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

#### **Strengths:**

- Students make good progress in their Sixth Form courses. The great majority achieve or improve on target grades at GCE Advanced Level.
- Teachers know their subject very well and are able to communicate their enthusiasm for it.
- Students have very good attitudes to their work and make a valuable contribution to discussion in lessons.

#### **Areas for improvement:**

- Detailed schemes of work, which should be finalised, in line with changing requirements of new GCE AS and Advanced Level courses.
- Resources to support students' independent learning skills, which could be further developed – through new technology and study guidelines.

296. The English department caters for some 50 students. GCE Advanced and AS Level courses in English language and literature and in English literature alone are offered. A GCE Advanced Level Theatre Studies course has been introduced from September. A number of students also re-sit GCSE English each year. All advanced level courses were sampled during the inspection.

297. Standards in English on entry to the Sixth Form are above average, reflecting the pattern of high attainment at GCSE in the subject. In 2000, results at GCE Advanced Level in English literature were in line with the national average. A smaller number of students followed the course in that year, however, and the results were therefore more dependent on variations in individual performance. In the previous two years, results had been well above the national average. All of those students entered during this period gained pass grades in the A to E range. In 2001, results improved again overall, though for the first time in recent years one student failed to obtain a pass grade. Results in 2001 for the new AS Level course in English language and literature were very good. Over two thirds of students gained A or B grades in the subject at the end of Year 12. Numbers of students have fluctuated in recent years. They are low in the current Year 13, but higher in Year 12. Retention rates are very good for all courses.

298. Work seen during the inspection confirms that standards in English are good. Reading skills are well developed in the interpretation and evaluation of both literary and non-literary texts. In a Year 13 class, students responded sensitively to a close textual analysis of Chaucer's *'Merchant's Tale'* and were able to comment with understanding on biblical allusion and the imagery of the garden in the story. In an English language lesson, they showed a good understanding of technical vocabulary used in the analysis of language, but also demonstrated an immediate personal response to the use of irony and humour in articles read. Analytical and critical writing is also good. In English literature, the majority of students are able to analyse in some depth character, theme and use of language in novels, plays and poetry studied. Ideas are well justified by detailed reference to the text. Personal and creative writing by Year 13 students is well structured and sophisticated in its use of language. Work is presented to a high standard, with students making good use of ICT skills in word processing. One practical lesson for AS Level Theatre Studies was observed. Year 12 students joined in small group work and a read-through performance of a scene from Brecht's *'Mother Courage'* with some commitment. They demonstrated a good understanding of the impact created by body language and stage blocking, and were able to evaluate their work realistically and constructively.

299. The achievement of individual students is good at GCE Advanced Level, and very good for GCE AS language and literature students in 2001. The great majority reach or exceed their target grades in examinations, based on expectations derived from GCSE grades.

300. Teaching of GCE Advanced Level English and theatre studies is good. Teachers know their subject very well, and are able to communicate their enthusiasm for it. Very good, friendly relationships are developed between staff and students. Teachers' expectations of students are high, both in their contribution to lessons and in the range and development of written work. English lessons are mostly conducted seminar style, with discussions led either by the teacher or students themselves after research and preparation. Most students are highly motivated. They respond well and with maturity to this approach.

301. Students clearly work hard throughout their courses. They make a good contribution to discussions. Most are prepared to put forward ideas and are able to justify their opinions with some perception. Teachers already do much to encourage all students to develop independent learning skills, through their own reading, note making and research. Students in the early part of the course can find this approach demanding and may experience some difficulty in adapting to the requirements of advanced level study. Whilst the school library is a good source of help, further development of resources to support independent learning by the department is desirable. For example, study packs and guidelines, which have been used in the past, could be updated in line with new syllabus requirements.

302. Assessment of students' work is very good. Teachers usually give prompt and constructive feedback, making full written comments on essays against the detailed assessment criteria for the subject. Assessment criteria are also used explicitly to inform teaching, in order to focus students' efforts more clearly and to improve evaluation of their own achievement. Teachers monitor students' work carefully and are prepared to give additional personal help and guidance where it is needed. Progress is reviewed regularly and a clear process for setting targets for improvement has recently been introduced. Students feel well supported and value the staff's work, not least in giving substantially of their own time to support their work, and in organising extra-curricular activities including theatre trips and study days.

303. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Teaching rooms are satisfactory for the purpose. The furniture may be re-arranged flexibly to suit seminar style discussions, and there is access to TV, video and other equipment. The drama studio provides a good space for practical work, but only a limited range of technical equipment had been installed at the time of the inspection.

304. Leadership and management of English in the Sixth Form are good. A new head of drama was appointed at the beginning of the year. Her initial priority has rightly been to establish the new GCE Advanced Level theatre studies course effectively. Staff members in the department are committed to continuing improvement. They collaborate closely to share good practice. Staff training and development are well supported. In particular, importance is attached to keeping up to date with changes in examination and assessment requirements at this level.

## French

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

### Strengths:

- GCE Advanced Level results are well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is at least good and most is very good.
- Students are diligent and show real interest in their work.
- Students use computers regularly to research and present topics.

### Areas for improvement:

- The basic grammar skills of students prior to entry to Year 12.
- The enrichment of students' language learning through encouraging them to take advantage of travel opportunities.
- Opportunities for oral work in Year 13 so that students build their confidence in speaking.

306. In recent years, a small but increasing number of students has been entered for GCE Advanced Level French. Results have been generally good, and are mostly well above the national average. The majority of students entering have gained the higher grades A and B. In the most recent GCE AS Level examination, all students entering gained grade A. Most students produce course work of very good quality, and complement written work with good speaking, when given the opportunity for prior preparation. The consistently high expectations that teachers have of students, and their shared sense of purpose, result in high levels of attainment.

307. The quality of work seen in lessons and in student's files shows that standards are steadily rising, although a minority of Year 12 students finds the transition from GCSE hard. There is little difference between the achievements of male and female students in Year 13. In the close-knit teaching groups, students largely achieve their potential, and the less confident linguists learn much from the expertise of their teachers and their peers' example. Students have excellent listening skills and follow lessons taught in authentic, challenging French. They extract relevant details from lengthy tape recordings of native speakers and acquire good levels of pronunciation and intonation by copying these models of language. Most students read demanding texts with good understanding, supplementing their knowledge of the language with their own insights and

general awareness of the topic. All students use the Internet effectively to research material for discussions and essays. The quality of writing ranges from good to excellent. The most able linguists produce polished and sophisticated work with a wide range of reference and expression, whilst all students benefit from useful writing frames supplied by their teachers.

308. Attainment in Year 12 is above average, although the difficulties some students have in broadening their vocabulary and grammar base remain evident well into their course. Most make good progress through genuine interest and diligent application to their work. They improve their skills and knowledge in response to the individual advice and corrections of their teachers. By the end of the year they have developed the scope of their spoken and written expression from personal details and opinions to reflections on social and moral issues.

309. Overall, the quality of Sixth Form teaching is very good. Its high quality and consistency are reflected in the success and enjoyment of students in successive years. Teachers are fluent in the language and have detailed, up to date knowledge of French-speaking countries. Their expectations of students are uncompromisingly high, although they give generously of their time and expertise to sustain interest and involvement where necessary. Teachers encourage a closely co-operative atmosphere in the smaller groups and encourage self-reliance and personal organisation in the larger ones. They use time in class judiciously, allowing enough to concentrate on grammar, or setting a fast pace to gain an overview of a new topic. Teachers have acquired and exploit bright, stimulating textbooks, supplemented by materials they have made themselves or obtained from the Internet. They regularly share their knowledge of GCE Advanced Level requirements with their students, helping them to excel under examination conditions. Teachers assess pupils' speaking informally and test their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge continuously. They mark written work thoroughly, giving detailed comments as a basis for redrafting and improvement. Long term planning includes the extensive use of students' own time to supplement lessons in class, although there is only modest enrichment through extra-curricular provision.

310. Students' attitudes are largely positive although a few are hesitant in oral work. They approach their work methodically, with good powers of concentration. They mostly assimilate new language quickly and adapt it to debate and discursive writing. Those having difficulty show persistence and usually succeed in accomplishing set tasks. Most students appreciate the drive and support of their teachers and look forward to gaining good valid qualifications. Several students in each year intend to continue their studies and use the language professionally.

311. The management of the subject is excellent. Sound policies, variously based on experience and youthful vigour are effectively turned into working practice through hard work and commitment to students' welfare. The department reflects continuously on the quality and aptness of its provision in French as well as in German, and seeks new ways of improving the curriculum. Teachers' current aims are to improve their own competence in using the new technology and to create opportunities for students to live, work and travel in French-speaking countries.