

INSPECTION REPORT

ST JOHN FISHER CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Dewsbury

LEA area: Kirklees

Unique Reference Number: 107783

Acting Headteacher: Mr R Hodgson

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe
1025

Dates of inspection: 1st - 8th March 2002

Inspection number: 189748

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
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr J D Cortis
Dates of previous inspection:	7 th - 11 th October 1996

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13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector		Partnership with parents
5038	Mr H Heller	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language	Pupils' attitudes and values; school's care for pupils; leadership and management
11479	Mr J A Paine	Team inspector	English; drama	
20119	Mr A L C Bell	Team inspector	Mathematics; (information and communication technology)	
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science	
31688	Mr B McGonagle	Team inspector	Art	
11190	Dr W M Burke	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12470	Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	History	Efficiency: staffing, accommodation and learning resources
4603	Mr A F Ryan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8645	Dr J D Ward	Team inspector	Music	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; assessment
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education	
1819	Mr R H Crowther	Team inspector	Business education; travel and tourism; vocational education	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This average-sized, mixed comprehensive school educates about 1130 pupils aged 11-18: of these 970 are in Years 7-11. The school is growing steadily in size owing to increased parental demand. The social and economic background of pupils is broadly average. The overall level of attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is now close to the national average, but has been below average in most recent years. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average, but that with statements of such need is above average. About two per cent of pupils come from families of ethnic minority heritage, but only three pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The school was last inspected in October 1996.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good and much improving school. It has many substantial strengths and few weaknesses. Pupils' overall standard of attainment at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations has improved sharply in recent years and is now above average. Most pupils make good progress throughout the school. Sixth-form work is sound: most students make reasonable progress and their overall attainment is close to average. Teaching is an important strength: it is good and effective overall, partly as a result of enlightened recruitment and a commitment to professional improvement. Pupils are very attentive and well behaved in lessons. Governors, the school's transitional senior management team and staff as a whole are working hard to improve the school further. The school provides a high standard of education and care for pupils. On its average income (but current budgetary deficit), the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Attainment in public examinations, especially GCSE, has risen significantly since the last inspection.
- The majority of pupils make good progress in their studies.
- English, mathematics and science are amongst the strongest subjects in the school. Provision is good, too, in modern foreign languages, music and physical education (PE). It is very good in geography and history.
- The quality of teaching is good overall in all National Curriculum subjects – a considerable achievement.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social welfare are very well nurtured.
- There is a high standard of professionalism in nearly everything the school does.
- The school delivers what it promises.

What could be improved

- Management requires a more detailed information system about how well the school is performing.
- More opportunities for pupils to discuss their views and make presentations.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is not taught enough in Years 10-11.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the school's personal and social education (EPR) course.
- The information provided for parents both on subjects taught and on their children's progress.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since 1996. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9 has risen from below average at the last inspection to a point that is now slightly above average. Pupils' overall success in GCSE examinations and at GCE Advanced (A) level is significantly higher than at the last inspection. Results are going up at a faster rate than they are nationally. The school's teaching is now much better than it was. The school's ethos remains strongly rooted in the Catholic faith. The school has shown a strong capacity to keep on

improving. It is a much better school than it was in 1996. There is a strong momentum amongst staff and governors to improve the school still further.

The school has improved substantially virtually all the weaknesses identified at its last inspection. It now has:

- a clear sense of purpose, a commitment to quality assurance and the regular monitoring of teaching;
- a much improved mathematics department, where standards now match those of English and science;
- spending that is carefully targeted and now wisely controlled;
- policies and practices for pupils with special educational needs that are up to date and effective.

It has not done enough, however, to bring the quality of teaching and learning in its *Education for Personal Relationships* (EPR) course up to a good standard; a coordinator has recently been appointed.

STANDARDS

The table 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
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	C	B	B	B
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	B	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The school's results in the Year 9 national tests in 2001 were above average in mathematics, well above average in English and science, and above average overall. The results were well above the average for schools of a similar kind (as measured only by the proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals). Standards have risen over the 1997-2001 period, and to a greater degree than the rise nationally. By the end of Year 9, standards in the school are above average in most subjects. They are average, however, in art, design and technology, history, modern foreign languages and music. Boys and girls do equally well in most subjects, although girls do distinctly better than boys in English. The majority of pupils make good progress in their studies between Years 7 and 9.

Results in GCSE were above the national average in 2001. They have moved to this rating from an average position over the last five years. Now twice the proportion of pupils (52 per cent) gain at least five A*-C grades as did so in 1994. The overall standard in 2001 was also above that generally achieved in schools of a similar character. Boys, however, do worse than girls overall: the academic gap between the sexes has recently been greater than it is nationally. The strongest subject in GCSE over the last few years has been English (both language and literature). Geography and history also do relatively well. Design and technology has featured most consistently amongst weaker subjects. The progress of the majority of pupils from Years 9 to 11 is good, continuing further the improvement they made in Years 7-9. The good rate of pupils' progress during their time in school is a notable strength of the school's provision. Pupils receive a fine education here.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' cooperation and willingness to learn are very distinctive features of the school. Pupils are punctual, attentive and interested.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good and usually very good – often exemplary in class.
Personal development and relationships	Most pupils are naturally courteous and caring. The quality of personal relationships, understanding and respect for others is a considerable strength of the school.
Attendance	Sound overall and slightly better than in 1996. Punctuality for school is very good. Time-wasting between lessons is rare.

Most pupils are very pleasant, hard-working and obedient, with good personal standards and manners. The majority are mature and show respect for school property and that of others. Four out of five lessons were marked by very positive attitudes to work. Only very occasionally does boisterous immaturity emerge. Pupils are willing and helpful, and readily take on responsibility. Many have a strong social conscience.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7-9	Years 10-11	Years 12-13
Quality of teaching:	Good	Good	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 a substantial strength of the school. Teachers are committed and professional, and work very hard. Teaching is good overall throughout the school, including in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. It is much better than it was in 1996 as a result of internal monitoring, training and good appointments. Overall, teaching is satisfactory in art in Years 7-9, but unsatisfactory in EPR. In all other cases it is good (and in one in four lessons very good) right across the board. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is sound: the effects of national training show. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented are well taught in most lessons. The class management of pupils is a notable strength. In well-taught lessons pupils make good progress through stimulating teaching, a brisk pace, interesting variety, a calm atmosphere and hard work by all. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching and learning is characterised by poor explanations, too much talk from teachers and passive pupils. Nearly all pupils work hard and want to learn. These qualities and good teaching ensure that most pupils make great strides in their learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a generally good range of learning opportunities. Literacy and numeracy are given appropriately high priority.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	A strong feature of the school. Provision has improved significantly since 1996. The Learning Support Unit (LSU) is an effective addition.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	These aspects are well promoted overall – very strongly so in the case of pupils' spiritual and moral development, which are very firmly rooted in Catholic values and beliefs. Pupils are sensitively helped to grow up.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Another strong feature of school life. Staff value and nurture pupils as individuals with patience, commitment and much success.

Nearly all aspects of the curriculum are well planned. The two exceptions are that ICT does not meet statutory requirements in Years 10-11 (because it is not taught enough) and EPR is weak overall. Careers education is strong and a wide range of extracurricular activities is offered. Staff take their duty of care very seriously and have a wide network of support to draw upon. The school's system for monitoring pupils' progress is regular, detailed and thorough.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good and improved at all levels. The interim headteacher and senior management team are moving the school forward with purpose. Middle management is a great strength, with industrious and effective leaders.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are committed and supportive. They have a broad overview of the school, but are not involved enough in strategic planning.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has concentrated hard, and with great success, on evaluating pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning. This focus has brought deserved results. It now needs to assemble a comprehensive range of information by which to judge its overall performance precisely.
The strategic use of resources	Current financial planning, management, monitoring and review are sound. Past omissions have left the school with a budgetary deficit.

Significant weaknesses were identified in 1996 in the school's leadership, management and communications. In a short time the current leadership has almost closed the gaps, partly through delegated responsibility. The leadership and management of subjects and pastoral work are significant strengths. The school is still in budgetary deficit, but plans realistically to clear this by 2004. Spending on staffing is done very efficiently. An attractive site with good facilities is let down by poorly drained fields. Year 7-10 pupils have no social areas. There are some textbook shortages and not enough space (or adequate ventilation) for ICT. Toilets need further upgrading and better upkeep. The school pays close attention to obtaining the best value for its money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What some parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The school's ethos of care, encouragement and commitment to Catholic beliefs and values.• Pupils are expected to work hard and do their best.• The school's continuing academic improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The consistent setting of homework.• Clarity about the school's complaints procedures.

Inspectors' judgements largely support the views that parents express. Academic standards have improved significantly over the last few years. Most pupils make good progress in their time in school as a result of thorough teaching and concentrated effort. The school's tone is clearly set by the central place given to Christian values and a Catholic perspective. Pupils' *Journals* quite often show gaps in the setting of homework, but homework was set reasonably during the inspection. The school's *Prospectus* and *Annual Report to Parents* indicate how concerns and complaints should be channelled: the few doubts raised about the effectiveness of procedures were more than counterbalanced by testimony from other parents to the school's commitment to dialogue and its effectiveness in dealing with problems. The school is rightly popular with parents.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has about 160 students and is average in size, with slightly more female students than male. It offers a suitably wide range of courses. The majority of students study for GCE Advanced (A) level examinations, but about a quarter follow a range of vocational courses either at Advanced (AVCE) or Intermediate (I) levels. The vast majority of students are white, in line with the ethnic characteristics of Years 7-11. A high 95 per cent of Year 11 pupils move on to post-16 education in the school or other further education: about half of these stay into the school's sixth form, whilst a small proportion of students transfer from other schools into this sixth form. The sixth form has been steadily growing in size over the last few years. In recent years between 30 and 50 students annually have taken at least two GCE A-level subjects.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is successful and steadily expanding. On GCE A-level courses pass rates have been at least average in the last three years. The best results of recent years were obtained in 1999 and 2000, but those in 2001 were not far behind. The quality of grades obtained was average in 1999 and 2000, but a little lower in 2001. Students achieve high pass rates on vocational courses. In 2001, students made good (and sometimes very good) progress from the same subjects they took at GCSE in around half the subjects they studied over Years 12-13, satisfactory progress is almost one third, and unsatisfactory progress in the remainder. Teaching quality is good; it is very good in English and in design and technology. Five out of every six lessons are at least well taught, and a quarter of all lessons are taught very well. The sixth form is soundly led and managed. Students have a good choice of subjects and courses – but at a cost, since the sixth form is partly subsidised by the rest of the school. The main strengths and aspects that could be improved in the sixth form are:

Strengths

- Overall examination results are good: most students make sound progress.
- In 2001 all students passed their GCE A-level examinations in English, mathematics, biology, physics, art, design and technology, geography, ICT, music, religious education (RE) and business studies.
- The quality of teaching is high throughout: its strongest features are teachers' subject knowledge, planning, class management and the assessment of students' work.
- The vast majority of students are very cooperative, work hard and act responsibly.
- Students have a wide range of subjects and courses from which to choose.
- The sixth form is sensitively and soundly managed: students receive good support and guidance.
- Students give a high rating to almost all aspects of sixth-form life.

What could be improved

- The sixth form is not sufficiently cost-effective and the school does not have a clear enough strategy to sustain high quality at a lower cost.
- The amount of rigorous and extended discussion in a significant minority of lessons.

Further aspects for improvement are included within subject reports.

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 specifically inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected in detail. The ten listed below are seven GCE A-level subjects and three vocational (AVCE) courses.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics (GCE)	Good. Results at A-level in 2001 were above average. The current standard in Years 12 and 13 is below average overall, but students make good progress. Teaching is very thorough, knowledgeable, brisk and helpful.
Biology (GCE)	Very good. Results at both A-level and AS-level are good. Students achieve results at least in line with their earlier attainment in GCSE science. Good teaching: students' individual progress is carefully monitored.
Design and technology (GCE)	Good. Below average results historically, but the current standard of work in Year 13 is above average. Very good teaching underpins sound progress.
Business studies (AVCE)	Good. Clear, forceful teaching and enthusiastic leadership is leading to a fair standard of work and sound progress for most students. Students achieve better in class assignments than examination-style assessments.
Information and communication technology (AVCE-AS)	Good. Although AS results on this new course were below average in 2001, students made good progress from GCSE. Current work is below average in standard. Strong teaching fills gaps in students' knowledge effectively.
Travel and tourism (AVCE)	Satisfactory. Clearly structured lessons are soundly taught by supportive staff. The overall standard of current work is borderline pass. Written work is neatly presented, but tends to be thin and lack analysis.
Geography (GCE)	Very good. Effective, thoughtful teaching and keen students are producing an above average standard of work. In 2001 all students passed A-level and all but one out of 19 passed AS-level.
History (GCE)	Very good. In 2001 both the A-level and AS-level results were broadly average. Current work in Year 13 varies widely from the highly analytical to the largely descriptive. The fine teaching is thorough and challenging.
English literature (GCE)	Good. Students have a sound grasp of literary issues. Last year's A-level results were above average. Current Year 13 work is broadly average. The very good standard of teaching ensures that students make good progress.
French (GCE)	Satisfactory. Teaching is good and students learn well. Last year's results were well below average. Current work is average in standard overall, but speaking is the weak element.

Work was sampled in other subjects. Teaching was good overall and always at least satisfactory, as a result of which most students make sound progress. Teaching was good in the few lessons seen in chemistry, art, Spanish, music, PE (though often very good), health and social care and psychology, and very good in physics.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students receive sound, individual guidance and care. Their work is thoroughly assessed and their attendance and effort carefully recorded. The sixth form has a caring but challenging ethos.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Sound leadership and management have created a pleasant and hard-working sixth-form environment. Students have access to a wide range of up-to-date facilities. The sixth form is not cost-effective. Future planning requires an action plan to maintain the current high quality, but prune costs.

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">• Clear guidance on courses of study.• Good teaching, ready help and helpful marking.• Good opportunities for research and working independently.• Being well informed about progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A readier ear for sixth-formers' views.• Better advice about life after school.• Students being treated in an adult way.

Inspectors concur with students' "likes" about the sixth form. The sixth-form prospectus, subject teachers and personal tutors give timely, accurate advice about courses of study. Teachers are generally sensitive to students' different requirements, exercise careful oversight of progress and help students to stand on their own feet. A minority, however, perceive the school's approach to be sometimes a little over-directive: students found it difficult in conversation, however, to pinpoint examples and most recognised the necessary fine line between caring, concern and over-restrictiveness. Much textual and computer-based information is provided to guide students about higher education or immediate careers. Students are also provided with direct careers advice of good quality. Overall, the vast majority of students would highly recommend this school to prospective sixth formers.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The standard of attainment of pupils in the school varies widely, but is, overall, a little above that expected nationally of pupils by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils' level of attainment is also above average in the national tests in Year 9 and in GCSE examinations. Students' overall standard in GCE Advanced (A) level examinations has, on most measures, recently been a little above average. Pass rates on sixth-form vocational courses are high.

2. Pupils' achievement in the Year 9 national tests and external examinations has risen significantly since the last inspection in 1996. This rise has been at a faster rate than the rise nationally. Recent results represent a commendable achievement by the school. They have come about primarily as a result of good management that concentrates on issues of quality, very effective departmental leadership and much improved teaching.

3. When pupils come to the school in Year 7, their overall level of attainment is now close to, but just a little below, average. The academic level of the school's intake has, however, steadily risen over the last four years from a below average point to its present close to average level: the rise has been greatest in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in their primary school national tests – up from around 65 per cent of the national average in 1998 to just short of the typical national position in 2001. Other sets of national tests administered by the school also tell the same story of a rising trend in attainment level on intake that is now close to the national average.

4. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in both 2000 and 2001, the proportion of pupils who achieved the national standard of at least Level 5 or the higher Level 6 was above average in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science; the overall standard reached in English was slightly higher than that in the other two subjects. On the average "points" that pupils scored in the tests in these two years, their attainment was above average in mathematics and science (well above average in science in 2001), and consistently well above average in English. Since 1996 the school's results have risen significantly, year by year, from a position where they were below average to the above average performance of the last two years.

5. Girls tend to be ahead of boys in English by the end of Year 9, but the gap between the sexes is generally smaller in this school than is the case nationally. Girls and boys usually do equally well overall in mathematics and science, although boys just have a slight lead in both subjects. In the last two years, teachers' assessments of pupils have tended to be lower overall than the test results pupils achieved.

6. When these 2001 Key Stage 3 results are compared with those in schools which have a similar background (as measured solely by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school performed well above the group average – above it in mathematics, but well above it in English and science. Pupils' average points score for the three subjects was below the average of other schools in the same free meals category in 1998 and well below it in 1999, but has since picked up strongly to be well above the group average in the last two years.

7. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Year 9 in 2001, teachers judged the overall attainment of their pupils to be above average in geography, history and in information and communication technology (ICT), average in modern foreign languages, but (in strong contrast) to be well below average in design and technology. Inspectors agree with most of these assessments. They consider that the overall level of attainment of current Year 9 pupils is above average in geography and ICT, but close to average in design and technology, history and modern foreign languages. The low standard attributed to pupils' work in design and technology is inaccurate: the overall standard is broadly average.

8. The school has only limited external data by which to judge pupils' progress as they move through the school from the beginning of Year 7 to the end of Year 9. Full evidence is available about just one cohort, but it

is very encouraging: it shows that the 1998 intake of pupils made very good progress overall by the time they took their national tests in Year 9 in 2001, moving from a below average position in Year 7 on entry to an above average point three years later.

9. On the evidence of pupils' work and lessons seen during the inspection, inspectors judge that pupils' progress and achievement in their studies over Years 7-9 are good overall. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in nearly all subjects. They make satisfactory progress in art, but unsatisfactory progress in too many lessons of the school's course on personal and social education, *Education for Personal Relationships* (EPR). The most significant factors in this good rate of progress are the high quality of teaching and the very positive attitudes to learning of most pupils. Progress is unsatisfactory where pupils do not have sufficient chance to discuss and think through issues for themselves.

10. In the GCSE examinations of 2001, pupils' overall attainment was above the national average on all the usual range of measures. Over the five years since the last inspection, GCSE results (on the basis of pupils' average points scores) have risen from being in line with the national average in 1997-1999 to being above average in 2000 and 2001. The proportion of Year 11 pupils gaining five or more of the higher (A*-C) grades over the 1994-2001 period has risen sharply. In 1994, for example, it was 26 per cent, but doubled over the course of the subsequent seven years to 52 per cent – a substantial improvement that was greater than the rise nationally. There has been a similar rise in the proportion of pupils gaining at least five A*-G grades.

11. In the core subjects pupils' attainment of a grade in the range A*-C in GCSE in 2001 was average in all of English, mathematics and science, with a very similar level of performance in all three departments. Over the last four years English results have been uniformly high. Results in mathematics and science have improved since 1998, and by 2001 matched those in English. All pupils passed the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) course in business education (Part 1) in 2001.

12. When pupils' performances in all the subjects they take in GCSE are compared with one another, pupils have consistently done significantly better in both English language and English literature in recent years than in most of their other subjects. Pupils have also tended to do relatively well in geography and history. Boys have done consistently worse in the resistant materials element of design and technology in the last three years. Although no pupil achieved the highest A* grade in 2001 in mathematics, art or drama, the overall proportion of pupils gaining the highest A*/A or A*-B grades has been similar to the national picture in the last two years.

13. Girls achieved a greater proportion of the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE than boys in 2001 – about three in every five girls did so, compared with two in five boys. The overall gap between the sexes has been larger than it is nationally in three out of the last four years. In 2001, girls did much better than boys in English: seven out of ten girls, compared with four out of ten boys, for instance, gained a higher (A*-C) grade. Girls performed better than boys, too, in science. The performance of boys and girls was about the same in mathematics. The school is very conscious of this slippage in the overall level of boys' performance and is taking practical steps to improve the position: these include mixed seating arrangements and an increased, very precise monitoring of progress.

14. When the school's average point scores at GCSE are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school's performance was similar to most others in 1998 and 1999, but above the group average in both 2000 and 2001. By the same measure, pupils' overall performance was in line with the group average in all of English, mathematics and science in 2001.

15. Taking into account their achievements in the national tests two years earlier, pupils generally continue to make good – and often very good – progress in their studies during Years 10-11 from the position they had reached by the end of Year 9. The school fully met – and slightly exceeded – the realistic GCSE targets it set for itself in the 2001 examinations. Bearing in mind the evidence of a much higher performance than previously in the Year 9 national tests taken in 2000, however, the school's targets for 2002 are too low: their target, for example, for the proportion of pupils to attain at least five A*-C grades is the same as already achieved in 2001 from a much lower starting-point in Year 9. Higher targets are attainable partly as a result of the much improved quality of teaching over recent years and the dedication of staff.

16. The school's significant improvement in the standard of pupils' work and their rate of progress is due to

several factors. Firstly, the school's senior management and subject staff have put an increased emphasis on defining what constitutes a good lesson. They have then regularly and systematically monitored teaching to clear criteria, reviewed these evaluations carefully and set about securing any necessary improvements or refinements. Teaching has improved considerably. Secondly, the school has created a very thorough and comprehensive system of monitoring pupils' work and progress across all subjects and year groups. It does this in a more detailed way than usually found, by analysing the progress of individual pupils and every class and subject, applying both objective criteria and professional judgement. Targets are then regularly set for pupils and reviewed termly across the board. Both pupils and teachers are therefore very much aware of what is expected and achieved.

17. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall standard of attainment by the end of Year 9 was a little above that expected nationally. It is below average in EPR and average in art, design and technology, history, modern foreign languages and music. In all other subjects it is above average. By the end of Year 11 the overall level of work is above average. Although it is of an average standard overall in English, art, design and technology, ICT and modern foreign languages, it is above average in mathematics, science, geography, history, music and physical education (PE). It is below average in most EPR work, but average in careers education. Pupils with special education needs, the handful who have English as an additional language, and gifted and talented pupils all make good progress in this school.

18. In English the overall attainment of pupils is average in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Pupils read with reasonable fluency and accuracy. Most aspects of writing are average, but the standard of drafting and reshaping writing and taking notes is better than usually seen. Most pupils speak with fair clarity, but a significant minority do not and lack confidence in discussion: the English department recognises that the overall improvement of pupils' speaking is an important future task. Pupils listen satisfactorily, but could do so more intensively in a significant minority of lessons.

19. In other subjects across the school pupils' standard of reading is slightly above average. Most pupils are adept at quickly skimming texts and particularly at researching information from a wide variety of written material. They usually understand well what they read. Fluency and accuracy vary widely. A minority tend to read with some hesitation, but, through inspired teaching, some low-attaining pupils – and the majority of other pupils – read with clarity and accuracy.

20. Pupils' standard of writing is slightly above average overall. High-attaining pupils usually write accurately, imaginatively and copiously. The drafting of work and note-taking are used more frequently than often found and more pupils than usual tend to add their own annotations to teachers' guidance. The presentation of work is often carefully done. Handwriting, spelling and punctuation are usually about average, but of a higher standard where teachers particularly emphasise the importance of these aspects.

21. Most pupils are friendly and confident in informal speech. The quality of speaking in class is reasonable overall, but a significant minority of pupils tend to mumble or give brief (typically, single word) answers. In a few classes there is extensive discussion about work. The overall standard of debate – and particularly that of sustained, interactive discussion – is, however, a little below average: this is at least partly because many pupils lack some confidence and practice in expressing their thoughts orally and because teachers do not always value highly enough this mode of learning. Most pupils listen carefully to their teachers and to one another, within a classroom climate that is nearly always calm and respectful.

22. In mathematics across the curriculum (especially in science, design and technology and in geography) pupils generally handle numbers and data well. Most have reasonable facility in handling mental calculations. The overall standard in science is above average by the end of Years 9 and 11. Basic work is carefully recorded and learned. Attainment in ICT is a little above average at the end of Year 9 and average in the specialist-taught lessons by the end of Year 11. The standard of pupils' work in a range of ICT applications across the curriculum is, however, below average, because teachers do not incorporate it enough in their subject teaching.

Sixth form

23. The overall results at GCE Advanced (A) level for those students entered for two or more subjects were broadly average in 1997 and 1998, well above average in 1999 and 2000, and slightly above average in 2001.

The school's results have risen over the last few years from a below average point in 1994-1995 and a close to average position in 1996-1998 to an above average level in the last three years. Results reached a peak in 1999-2000.

24. The total points gained by each student have been at least above average in each of the last three years. This high level of attainment per student is partly the result of virtually all students taking a fourth A-level (general studies) in addition to the typical three subjects. The average points score per subject taken was also slightly above average in 1999 and 2000, although it dipped a little in 2001 to a point slightly below average.

25. The pass rate was lower than it was nationally in 1996 and 1997, but has been comfortably at the national pass rate in the last three years. The proportion of the highest (A-B) grades obtained was in line with the national average over the 1999-2000 period, but noticeably lower in 2001. Taking into account the quality of grades that they gained in GCSE examinations two years earlier, most students progressed soundly in their studies to A-level in 2001: on the subject grades that could be directly compared, students made good (or better) progress in nearly half their subjects, satisfactory progress in just under a third, but unsatisfactory progress in about a quarter.

26. All students who took GCE A-level in 2001 passed in English (language and literature), mathematics (including further mathematics), biology, physics, art, geography, music, religious education (RE) and business education. The quality of grades was generally high in English, mathematics and science. Students tended to do comparatively better in these three subjects (and by national standards, the level of these results was high) as well as in general studies at GCE A-level than they did in art, modern foreign languages, music and PE.

27. Almost all students take general studies at GCE A-level. In 2001 about four-fifths passed the examination, but a smaller proportion than nationally achieved the two highest grades and the pass rate was a little below average. Part of the reason for this level of result is that the subject receives a much smaller proportion of teaching time – and tends to receive less attention from students – than other A-level subjects.

28. For the first time in 2001, students took the new-style, GCE Advanced Supplementary (AS) level examinations: for the majority of them this was the first stage towards a full (A2-level) course and examination in 2002. Students passed the examination in about nine out of every ten subject entries (slightly higher than the national pass rate). The quality of grades obtained was broadly average. All students passed in English (both language and literature), biology, art, graphics, French, music, RE and general studies, and all but one did so in chemistry, technology, geography, history and performing arts.

29. The pass rates on vocational courses in 2001 were high. All students passed on the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses in business education, health and social care, ICT and in travel and tourism. Similarly, all passed on the three GNVQ courses offered at Intermediate level (business education, health and social care, and science) and on the Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC) national diploma offered in applied science (sports studies). The average points score for AVCE courses was around three-quarters of the national average.

30. Female students obtained a much higher average points score than their male counterparts in GCE A- and AS-level examinations in 2000: their average score was well above average, in contrast to a broadly average rating for male students. The reverse was, however, true in 1999. In 2001 both male and female students gained similar, broadly average points scores. The popularity of most GCE A-level subjects has remained fairly constant, but there has been an overall increase in the number of students following GCE A-level courses. The proportion of students choosing vocational courses has remained steady over the last three years.

31. Students express a high degree of satisfaction with their sixth-form courses, the quality of assessment of their work and the encouragement that they receive to study and research independently. Only a few students “drop out” of courses each year: there have been about 20 subject losses (seven per cent) in the current academic year since September 2001. Most of these students have entered employment, particularly on apprenticeships, and two left for further training in fashion or nursery nursing.

32. Students are a little above average overall in their use of the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT capability. Most students are good at skimming and researching written material and many do so very quickly – as in design and technology and in geography. Note-taking is generally very well done from a wide variety of media such as videos, textbooks and teachers’ presentations: notes are usually well structured and efficiently organised by, for example, colour-coding or highlighting. Oral work, however, tends to be a weakness: many students are hesitant or reluctant to state their views at length, when it would be appropriate to do so. Overall, however, there is a good climate for learning in the sixth form and students make sound progress.

Pupils’ attitudes, values and personal development

33. Pupils’ constructive attitudes and level of cooperation are distinctive features of the school. Pupils come to school willingly, are punctual and attentive, and generally show great interest in the range of activities and experiences provided for them.

34. Pupils’ behaviour in class and around the school is generally good and often very good. There are some isolated instances of boisterous and immature behaviour outside class, but these rarely escalate into any kind of serious misconduct.

35. In class, pupils behave very well. In four out of every five lessons seen pupils showed good or very good attitudes to their work. In only a very small number of the lessons (just under two per cent) did pupils show unsatisfactory attitudes, whilst in the remaining one sixth of lessons attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory. Pupils generally show a mature attitude to the buildings and fabric of the school. There are only few examples of graffiti and minor damage in some toilets. Pupils show respect for the property of others. There is a justified trust in pupils’ sense of responsibility towards their own and others’ belongings.

36. The majority of pupils display a natural courtesy and concern for one another in their daily lives. They extend similar consideration to teachers and other adults. This is not merely formal correctness or docility. Pupils show a good-natured interest in, and concern for, visitors and readily respond in a positive way, when invited to talk about themselves and their experiences of school.

37. The school is generally marked by an absence of significant bullying or oppressive behaviour. Where such instances occur, they usually arise from immaturity or impulsive action. Staff are prompt to investigate and put a stop to such behaviour, once it is detected. Pupils who have offended the school’s codes of conduct are often genuinely contrite and able to recognise the effects of their actions on others. Staff serve as good role models to pupils in carefully exploring the reasons for poor behaviour and in patiently explaining the error of their ways to pupils.

38. Pupils are very capable of taking initiative and assuming responsibility. They initiate projects to support charities or community action, for example, and volunteer for duties in the library. Pupils in Year 11 assume a rota of responsibility to help staff with duties around the school. There is at present, however, no school council or similar formal means whereby pupils can apply such initiative to addressing school issues in a structured way.

39. The number of exclusions has fluctuated over recent years, but is within the expected range for a school of this size and type. There is some evidence that the Learning Support Unit (LSU) has a positive effect in helping to reduce the number of pupils who proceed to being excluded from the school.

Sixth form

40. The vast majority of students show maturity and responsibility in their approach to the school, with a marked sense of concern for others. Some act as prefects to assist staff or volunteer to help younger children with their reading difficulties. They initiate worthwhile projects in the community – such as the improvement of a historic local churchyard, carried out in memory of a former student. A limited beginning has been made of involvement in economic awareness and activity through a Young Consumers' forum and the launch of a school bank.

41. Students work well in groups in class and show a capacity for active collaboration. Not infrequently, however, they are reticent in offering their views, unless invited, and thus do not always take full advantage of the opportunities provided to develop independent styles and habits of learning. This is matched by the response of a significant minority of students who, in the pre-inspection survey undertaken of students' attitudes towards the school, expressed the view that they were not treated as maturely as they would wish. There is evidence that some lack the confidence to take up the opportunities for independence that are available to them. Future planning for the sixth form requires careful consideration of the formal activities whereby the confidence and capability of sixth-formers can be further boosted.

Attendance

42. The overall attendance of pupils in Years 7-11 is sound. It shows a slight improvement over the satisfactory level of attendance at the time of the last inspection. In the 2000-2001 academic year, for example, attendance was 92.0 per cent – a position slightly above the national average of 90.9 per cent. The level of authorised absence in the same year was 6.7 per cent (8.1 per cent nationally). The amount of absence without good reason was close to the national average.

43. The school has the ambitious target of continuing to improve pupils' attendance towards the goal of 95 per cent. It has a very brief attendance policy to guide its work, listing basic procedures and aspirations, but not precisely identifying further steps it intends to take to achieve this goal. It works hard, however, on attendance matters and has a sound range of systems in place to secure a high level of attendance and curtail truancy effectively. It clearly points out to parents and pupils (in its *Prospectus* and in pupils' *School Journal*, for example) that good attendance, punctuality and academic success are closely linked and provides them with the evidence to prove the connection.

44. Punctuality for lessons is very good overall. This is because teachers give high attention and vigilance to this aspect of school life and partly because a five-minute gap is made between end-on lessons to enable all lessons to start on time. Punctuality in coming to school on time is generally good, except when public transport is late. About 12 pupils are late for school on a typical day, although the number on the first day of the inspection was higher at 18.

Sixth form

45. The level of attendance in the sixth form is satisfactory. In the last two years it has held steady around 91-92 per cent. It slipped fractionally below 90 per cent, however, in the first half of the current academic year. The main reason for this was a higher incidence of illness in mid-winter, a national phenomenon. The school has adopted a thorough system for registration that strikes a sensible balance between its own requirements for knowing accurately where students are and a desire to encourage them to show appropriate maturity and responsibility.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

46. The quality of teaching is a substantial strength of the school. It is good at all stages of the school, including the sixth form. It is satisfactory or better in almost all lessons – satisfactory in nearly a quarter, good in half and very good (occasionally outstanding) in about a quarter of all lessons. Eight lessons, however, out of the

240 inspected had teaching that was unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is similar throughout the school, but slightly stronger in the sixth form than in the rest of the school.

47. The quality of teaching has improved substantially since the last inspection. In 1996 only 82 per cent per cent of the teaching was satisfactory or better; in consequence, nearly one in every five lessons was judged to be unsatisfactory. Now just three per cent of teaching falls below a satisfactory level. Only just over a quarter of the teaching was good (or better) at the last inspection, but that proportion has now nearly trebled. Teaching quality, then as now, is evenly spread throughout the main school. Mathematics teaching was judged to be weak in 1996, but is now a strength.

48. This large improvement in the quality of teaching has come about as a result of several factors. Firstly, great care is taken with all appointments: candidates are expected to demonstrate at interview both their teaching capability and their capacity to reflect on their teaching. Secondly, a central thrust of the school's work is now the systematic, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation, by managers at all levels, of the quality of classroom teaching and learning. This has helped to raise the awareness of what constitutes effective teaching and to disseminate good practice widely. Thirdly, the effectiveness of teaching is mainly judged by the progress that pupils make: the school's regular and very detailed recording of individual pupils' standards and effort is used as the basis for a thorough professional dialogue about the quality of learning and teaching and of departmental management. Finally, there has been a considerable turnover of staff in the last few years and replacements have been of good calibre: all teachers in the mathematics department, for example, are new since the last inspection and only two English teachers out of nine taught in the school in 1996.

49. In nearly all cases, teachers have extensive knowledge of the subjects they teach. This usually enables them to explain lesson content clearly to pupils, to arouse their interest and curiosity, and to ensure that they understand new topics securely. Partly as a result of their subject expertise, the majority of teachers put a high emphasis on technical terms and processes being described accurately and in appropriate language – as, for example, in the correct terminology to describe reproduction in animals and plants in science lessons.

50. This good level of subject knowledge often means that lessons proceed at a brisk pace, because teachers are confident about the central issues in topics being covered. Most give a firm and interesting structure to lessons, so gaining pupils' interest and securing good gains in knowledge and understanding. Many effectively transmit their own enthusiasm for their subjects to pupils. Extensive local knowledge is often used to illustrate key issues. In a geography lesson in Year 7 on river basins, for example, the teacher was able to describe in detail why a local stream followed its route from its source through the town, thereby sustaining pupils' curiosity and concentration.

51. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are usually well taught. Most teachers put appropriately high emphasis on correct spelling and punctuation, on suitable phraseology and on the accurate reading of both common and subject-specific words. In a few cases this concern extends to expecting pupils to check in the dictionary the meaning of unfamiliar words. The drafting of work prior to a final version is quite frequently practised, as observed in a science lesson in Year 10. Key words are frequently displayed in class and used by pupils and teachers alike: most of these are easily legible from a distance, but a few are poorly written or too small. Hand-writing and note-taking tend to be given more attention than normal. Pupils' facility in arithmetic calculation, data-handling and the use of graphs is well developed in, for instance, mathematics, science, design and technology, and geography. The lesson structures recommended in the two national strategies for literacy and numeracy are widely adopted across the curriculum.

52. Teachers plan well in nearly all cases. They are good at clearly setting the scene for lessons and timing their various stages well. Most have a firm structure for lessons that incorporates the sharing of lesson aims and objectives. The central part of lessons is usually built around a suitable mixture of whole-class explanation, group and individual work, and a consideration of findings by the class together. In the best lessons, teachers draw the class together at suitable intervals to check on progress, clear up misunderstandings and give an extra fillip to tasks. Teachers try to make lessons interesting – as in an English lesson in Year 7, where pupils enjoyed the task of analysing magazine advertisements.

53. There are, however, two weaknesses in a minority of lessons. In a few cases teachers intend to draw a lesson to a close by reviewing in a plenary session what has been learnt, but do not leave enough time to

undertake this properly. The result is that the ends of these lessons are sometimes rushed and do not summarise or consolidate enough the ground that has been covered. A more common weakness is to spoon-feed pupils and do too much of the thinking for them: pupils then sit back and do not respond readily to the teachers' questions or join in debate.

54. The school generally has high expectations of pupils' work, endeavour and behaviour. Most teachers review pupils' progress very carefully and set suitable targets. As a result, they have high expectations of commitment and behaviour that keep pupils on task and working at a brisk pace. In a minority of cases, however, some teachers do not encourage pupils to exercise sufficient initiative or responsibility, but expect them to accept passively what they are told and to follow well-trodden ways. The result is that capable pupils grow to depend too much on their teachers for their information and ideas. This is a particular weakness in too many lessons in *Education for Personal Relationships* (EPR). Higher-attaining pupils are usually well provided for.

55. Most teachers use a sound range of effective teaching methods. The start of lessons is usually clear, crisp and interesting. This positive tone is partly set by pupils arriving on time and (with rare exceptions amongst a few boys) settling down to work quickly. Revision of past work is generally done briskly through oral questioning: a good example of this in a Year 11 English class on Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* enabled pupils to go on to formulate their own literary interpretations confidently.

56. Most lessons incorporate a suitable variety of learning methods that are well geared to the tasks being undertaken. Through clear teacher explanations, the exploration of issues in groups, individually or at whole-class level, and through (in most cases) a final, plenary review, pupils receive a firm framework and guidance for their studies. This occurred, for example, in the English lesson noted above when, after 20 minutes, pupils shared and explained their views clearly by close reference to the text. Pupils particularly enjoy (and gain considerable benefit from) solving problems – as, for instance, when they were given a series of short sources in a Year 7 history lesson on the Black Death and had to deduce the type of plague being described.

57. A fairly common weakness in some lessons, however, is not to allow (or expect) pupils to brainstorm ideas, think issues through, formulate their own judgements and debate issues, when all the class is together. The result is that many pupils are not as adept and confident as they should be at expounding their views or joining positively in the cut and thrust of debate. The exploration of issues in EPR is often too tightly circumscribed: teachers too often determine what pupils should think and do.

58. Time is normally used very well. Lessons start punctually and most proceed at an appropriately brisk pace. In many classes very much ground is covered and topics are pursued in depth as a result of teachers' precise planning, timed exercises and incisive questioning: "you have five minutes to work this out" is a common type of guidance. Audio-visual resources are often used imaginatively and effectively – as, for example, when overhead transparencies gave a clear idea to pupils in a Year 9 design and technology lesson on electronics and circuits of what components such as resistors look like. Carefully selected extracts of video-recordings bring subjects alive – as when pupils in a Year 10 English class analysed, with the teacher's clear and thorough guidance, the way filmmakers portrayed the English and French armies in *Henry V*.

59. The management of pupils' behaviour is a considerable strength of the school. Most classes are models of good attitudes and behaviour. Teachers have positive (and usually very warm) relationships with their pupils and exercise firm discipline. Pupils respond with good manners and a willingness to do quickly what they are asked, even in the few cases when teaching methods are over-didactic. The high level of deference and respect that the vast majority of pupils show enables teachers to concentrate on teaching well and to cover much ground rigorously. It also sometimes leads, however, to pupils being too hesitant to express a point of view with confidence. Only very rarely are a few pupils (nearly always boys) allowed to get away with gossiping.

60. The assessment of pupils' work is usually carried out very thoroughly. This is often done by the teacher continually circulating round the class, checking carefully that pupils have understood their work, asking follow-up questions and giving encouragement and praise. Staff also promote pupils' self-evaluation strongly and to a degree and detail that are not often seen – as, for example, in mathematics and in the *Pupil Evaluation* forms used throughout the school. Marking is usually done regularly and constructively, but occasionally is skimmed or has long lapses. On most occasions homework is set according to the timetable and is reasonable in quantity and type.

61. Teaching is satisfactory overall in art in Years 7-9 and good in Years 10-11. It ranges from good to unsatisfactory in EPR, but is unsatisfactory overall. It is good in specialist ICT lessons, but ICT is not used enough in most subjects. In all other subjects teaching is good throughout Years 7-11. The school has many very good teachers, although teachers overall work very hard and show a high level of commitment to the school, its pupils and their parents or carers. Amongst many very positive features, the management of pupils' classroom behaviour is a particular strength. In not enough lessons, however, are pupils encouraged to express their own points of view at any length.

62. Most pupils achieve good progress in their studies both in lessons and over longer periods of time. This is because of the high standard of discipline established in most classes, the fine teaching that pupils usually receive, the clear feeling of care and concern for pupils' welfare that staff display, management's emphasis on quality assurance and, above all, because of the high level of professionalism and dedication that teachers show in this school.

Sixth form

63. Seventy-six sixth-form lessons were inspected. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is satisfactory in around one out of every five lessons and good in over half. Teaching is very good in over a quarter of lessons and is never completely unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is very similar in both Years 12 and 13. The overall quality of teaching has improved significantly since 1996.

64. The strongest features of sixth-form teaching are the depth of subject knowledge that is up to date and fully capable of meeting the demands of advanced-level work and precise planning. Teachers are very well prepared and organised. They treat sixth formers in a friendly, mature way and encourage and guide them to do their best. They generally emphasise the importance of rigorous work and sound technical knowledge. Most train students well in note-taking, drafting and shaping written answers, and employ probing questions. Most marking is very thorough, constructive and detailed; students often add, as in history, their further annotations to teachers' comments.

65. The pre-inspection questionnaire completed by over 70 per cent of students gives a favourable view of sixth-form teaching that is endorsed by inspectors. Virtually all feel that they are well taught and challenged to do their best, that their work is carefully assessed, and that they are guided well in how to research and present topics. Nine out of ten students enjoy their studies and would advise others to join their sixth form. Some departments provide extensive enrichment opportunities to sixth-form studies: design and technology, for example, has arranged significant contacts for students with a variety of manufacturers.

66. There are also occasionally weak features in sixth-form teaching. In a few lessons teachers talk too much and provide too tight a structure. The result is that a significant minority of pupils tend to remain passive, do not acquire sufficient confidence, precise vocabulary or clarity of speech to project their views convincingly, and are somewhat guarded in response. The key skills of written communication, numeracy and ICT are generally taught well. Very good models of key technical definitions are displayed in some classrooms – as, for example, in business studies.

67. Teaching is good in all subjects. It is very good in English and in design and technology. As a result of this generally high quality of teaching, pupils make good progress and are well prepared for external examinations. Overall, sixth-form teaching is a strength of the school.

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

68. The curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities that mostly meet the needs of all pupils. It is enriched by a very good range of extracurricular activities and high quality guidance for future employment or further education. The provision for personal, social and health education (called *EPR* in the school) is unsatisfactory.

69. In Years 7-9 the breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory overall. All subjects of the National Curriculum and RE are taught. Information and communication technology (ICT) is studied within English in Year 7, in mathematics in Year 8 and as a discrete subject in Year 9. This arrangement, and the use of ICT in other subjects, is not coordinated well enough, so reducing the impact of the subject across the curriculum. Drama is taught within English, but is given a low priority and is not developed effectively to underpin the GCSE course in Years 10 -11.

70. In Years 10-11 a good range of curricular provision is offered. All pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, design and technology, and RE for GCSE examinations. In addition, pupils choose either geography or history and two subjects from an appropriate range of ten to study to GCSE level. A significant number of pupils are appropriately disapplied from the National Curriculum requirement to take a modern foreign language, in order to study other subject specialisms. There are no opportunities to study vocational courses, such as those leading to the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ), to provide a basis for progress to the vocational courses offered in the sixth form. A small group of pupils for whom the full range of subjects is not deemed appropriate attend work-related courses.

71. The EPR programme teaches personal, social and health education, and appropriately includes learning about the harmful effects of drug-misuse. This programme is well documented and, in Years 7-11, is mainly taught in association with RE. The overall quality of the provision is unsatisfactory. There is insufficient systematic coordination of the course and the quality of the teaching is both inconsistent and not good enough overall. Not all lessons timetabled as EPR are devoted, as they should be, to the subject – sometimes hymn-practice or RE are substituted. A coordinator for the subject has recently been appointed.

72. The school meets all statutory requirements for the curriculum except those for ICT in Years 10-11. This is because there is no time specifically allocated for ICT for the majority of pupils who do not follow the GCSE examination course in Year 10 or for pupils in Year 11. The programmes of study are not taught sufficiently in other subjects across the curriculum to meet national requirements.

73. The school's teaching time of 25 hours is in line with the minimum recommended by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Most subjects receive an adequate time allocation, but one option group in Years 10-11 (which includes eight subjects) is given eight instead of the ten per cent of time allocated to other subjects. This makes it more difficult for these subjects to be taught in sufficient depth to meet GCSE syllabus requirements.

74. The school has developed a satisfactory whole-school strategy to raise standards of literacy as part of the National Literacy Strategy. Most subject departments have introduced appropriate methods to improve the standard of literacy. In geography, for example, teachers focus on the use and spelling of appropriate terms, improve reading and note-taking, and teach pupils to structure written work effectively. The teaching of literacy in English is good, but no provision is made to hasten the progress of those pupils in Year 7 who have not reached the required basic level of competence.

75. The National Numeracy Strategy to raise standards of numeracy is a strong feature of work in mathematics. All members of staff have received training to enable them to develop provision within their own subject and do this successfully in, for example, science, design and technology, and geography.

76. All pupils have the opportunity to study the full range of subjects offered. Pupils are taught in mixed-attainment groups in Year 7 except in English and mathematics, where they are grouped by prior attainment. In Years 8-11 pupils are grouped by prior attainment in most subjects. This arrangement is broadly satisfactory: it is effective when (as is usually the case) work is matched appropriately to the needs of individual pupils. Both history and RE offer an alternative accreditation for those pupils for whom the GCSE examination is not judged to be appropriate.

77. The school has no policy statement to guide its planning of the curriculum. The process of wide-ranging discussion before making decisions about the curriculum is improving, but parents and pupils are rarely consulted. The curriculum is monitored effectively by senior managers through lesson observations and discussions with heads of department. As a result, plans for the future are well focused. Schemes of

work are very good in English, geography and history, good in science and music, and at least satisfactory elsewhere.

78. A very wide range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. There are, for instance, residential study visits to France, ski trips to Canada and the USA, and annual school camps for about 300 pupils. Pupils regularly visit museums and art galleries, and take part in fieldwork in the local area. A strength of the extracurricular provision is the wide range of music groups available, including the school orchestra. There is an extensive range of sporting activities: almost one third of pupils, for example, take part in a well-organised programme of inter-school fixtures. They are supported by the strong, voluntary commitment of ten members of staff. Most subjects organise study support to help pupils with their coursework and revision; some provide additional classes to support pupils who have difficulty with their subjects.

79. Provision for careers education and guidance is well coordinated and of very good quality. Careers education forms part of the EPR programme in Years 9-11: it is well organised, with a comprehensive scheme of work, and is supported by well-produced materials. A range of outside bodies, including those from the careers office, police and National Health Service, work with pupils during the course. Impartial and well-considered guidance is provided by the careers officer. This is appropriately focused on those in greatest need, but opportunities are provided for other pupils to receive support in small groups or, if requested, by an interview.

80. In Year 9, pupils are introduced to the well-stocked careers library, which has two pupil librarians. Materials are readily available to pupils, who can also use computer programs to access careers information. All pupils in Year 10 participate for two weeks in July in an efficiently organised programme of work experience. Pupils are well prepared, complete a diary and are visited by a member of staff whilst on the placement. Follow-up work takes place in September, as there is no time left before the summer holidays; in consequence, its impact is reduced.

81. Links with the community are good. The school has effective links with a number of local businesses, which are regularly visited by pupils to study personnel, production and marketing issues. A wide range of people from the locality visits the school to speak with pupils – such as the police, a local magistrate and the fire brigade. A close relationship is maintained with the pupils' parishes and local charities are generously supported. Good relationships are enjoyed with contributory primary schools, which are visited regularly by staff: these include joint planning meetings and a successful programme of induction for new pupils. Ties with other secondary schools and colleges are tenuous.

82. The overall quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. The SEN department is well staffed and all teachers have appropriate additional qualifications.

83. The school provides well for pupils with special educational needs in three ways. Support is provided in class through two specialist teachers who concentrate on English and mathematics, and by team-teaching with staff in subject departments. Secondly, the specialist, part-time dyslexia teacher, who is very skilled, uses resources well with both individuals and small groups. Thirdly, the Learning Support Unit (LSU) provides substantial, effective support for those pupils in Years 7-9 who have emotional or behavioural difficulties and who are at risk of exclusion.

84. The work provided for these pupils is satisfactorily matched to their needs in most subjects; this matching is well done in English, mathematics, science, geography and history. Subject teachers are sensitive to pupils with special educational needs and generally know and use their detailed Individual Education Plans (IEPs) well. The department's documentation is of high quality and its systems already take account of the new national Code of Practice. The coordinator is an effective manager and is well supported by the headteacher. Finance is adequate and well used.

85. There are only three pupils in the school who speak English as an additional language. Two receive suitable extra support from the English specialist within the special educational needs team and the other pupil is already almost fluent in English.

86. Only recently has a school policy been devised and an action plan determined for gifted and talented pupils. A preliminary search of existing good practice and for suitable enrichment activities has been undertaken in each subject area, but little active work has been undertaken. The school's major current provision is for such pupils to be taught in the top sets, where they make good progress. The highest-attaining pupils were entered in the last academic year for GCSE mathematics in Year 10, but the follow-up work in Year 11 was poorly planned. Other enrichment provision is skimpy.

87. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good overall; some of these elements are very strong. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is very good. Almost every aspect of the school's work is firmly based on Catholic beliefs. Prominent signs and notices make this clear in the reception area and elsewhere in the building. The school has a chapel and employs a full-time chaplain. Religious education is taught and examined throughout the school. In other subjects, daily lessons often begin or end with a prayer and in all assemblies there are moments for prayer and reflection. The pupils' *Journal* contains prayers which are said and studied regularly. Pupils recognise well the reverent atmosphere of assemblies and acknowledge this by becoming silent shortly after they enter the hall.

88. Pupils regularly celebrate religious seasonal events, are involved in preparation for mass and take part in retreats. Classes in Year 7, for example, have a week of "away days" that culminate in a "rainbow mass" in which all join together. The school's significant spiritual dimension is clearly expressed in its caring ethos; this is particularly noticeable in the very good relationships that exist amongst pupils of different abilities. Very good care is taken by pupils of their peers who have obvious disabilities or who experience tragedy.

89. Pupils are prepared to bear witness to their faith in the local community when, for example, they present their version of the nativity, *Live Crib*, and (at Easter) *The Passion of Our Lord* in the town's market place. Good links are maintained with their own parish churches, particularly as a result of the chaplain's regular contact with the parishes. The close relationship of school, parish and parents is a potent influence for good.

90. During the inspection not many explicit examples of spiritual elements within subjects were observed, except in English, design and technology, history and music. In these subjects pupils reflected on such themes as death, the aesthetic element in furniture design and manufacture, and the nature of celebratory anthems – as, for example, Handel's *The King Shall Rejoice*. The school intends to provide staff training to explore how spirituality can be more strongly included in the whole curriculum.

91. Moral education is promoted very well. In assemblies, RE and EPR, firm moral messages are given to pupils. During the inspection pupils had follow-up lessons on drug abuse after an effective professional theatre presentation called *Shot in the Dark*. The school's stated aims include the teaching of the difference between right and wrong: these are clearly expressed in the staff's insistence on good behaviour, especially in lessons, and exemplified in the care and respect shown towards individual pupils. The headteacher writes personal letters of thanks to students when, for example, they do good work. There is a well-understood system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils express care for people in the local and wider community, particularly in fund-raising efforts.

92. Pupils study and reflect on moral issues in lessons. In geography, for example, they consider fair trade, in history they learn about fascism and appeasement, and in design and technology they study product design in relation to conservation and care of the environment.

93. Provision for social development is good overall, with some very good features. The school successfully puts a high value both on the worth of individuals and the importance of belonging to a friendly and supportive community. Pupils have very good social opportunities to learn about different expectations when, for example, all year groups take part in religious retreats and other residential visits. Work experience for pupils in Year 10 also adds a new dimension to their social life. In most subjects pupils regularly work in pairs or groups. They also experience a wide variety of friendships in the very good range of extracurricular activities that the school provides: these include homework clubs, many sports activities, an orchestra, fieldwork in geography, drama, and science competitions.

94. Pupils have a few opportunities to experience responsibility. They help in the school library or with classroom preparation and older pupils help younger ones with reading. Pupils in Year 11 may become prefects, when they help with break-time supervision. There is, however, no school council in the main school and opportunities for pupils to represent issues on behalf of others are limited.

95. Whilst pupils in Year 11 have their own social area, there are no indoor spaces for other pupils to use in bad weather. Owing to limited space, too, pupils have to join a long queue and hurry over lunch. This restricts the opportunities for pupils to enjoy relaxed conversations with their friends at this time.

96. Pupils' cultural development is promoted satisfactorily. In RE, for instance, they are introduced to the main faiths in order to compare different cultural traditions, rituals and attitudes. The school also ensures that pupils experience the more immediate culture of local industry. Sound links with local businesses are a strength of the school's provision. Pupils benefit from a good range of visiting professional speakers, including the police, fire service and local magistracy. There is a large number of cultural links arranged through the music department. These have included, for example, concerts given by the African Children's Choir, Asian dancers and a samba workshop. Within daily lessons, pupils are taught about significant cultural influences as diverse as the lives of great scientists, notable furniture designers and styles, cultures such as the Masai of Kenya and life in modern Japan.

97. Although the school provides opportunities for pupils to study cultures and traditions other than their own, it devises only a limited number of occasions when they can work with, or meet face to face, people from a range of cultural or ethnic backgrounds. The school is aware of this limitation.

Sixth form

98. The quality and range of opportunities for learning provided for students in the sixth form are good. A wide range of AS- and A2-level courses is taught. These include psychology, media studies, performing arts and business studies. All students are taught RE. The school also teaches a good range of vocational courses – such as science, business studies, and health and social care for the Intermediate GNVQ and business, health and social care, ICT, and travel and tourism for AVCE. The majority of courses offered at AS- and A2-level build effectively on those that students have already experienced in earlier years. This is not the case with most of the vocational courses, because they are not taught in Years 10-11. Almost two-fifths of students combine both AS- and A2-level courses with vocational courses.

99. The school provides a broadly satisfactory programme to extend and enhance the curriculum. A significant proportion of students are taught general studies and in Year 13 take the GCE examination in that subject at A2-level standard. All students participate in a tutorial programme for half an hour each week: this includes first aid, driving theory and careers education. The opportunity is offered for all students to take part in recreational PE on one afternoon each week, but the take-up is poor.

100. Satisfactory provision is made for all students to develop further the three key skills of communication, application of number and ICT. In addition to lessons, students are encouraged to use experience and activities within other subject areas to provide evidence for key skills and to record these in a portfolio. Although schemes of work in most subject areas list key skills that will be practised during lessons, these opportunities are not systematically recorded in students' portfolios. All portfolios submitted in 2001 were approved by the examination board. There are policies and documentation for further extension of this work.

101. The school provides good facilities for students to study privately during the time when they are not taught directly. The amount of time available varies considerably, depending on the courses an individual student chooses, but increases for most students in Year 13. This time is not sufficiently monitored or coordinated.

102. The school plans the sixth-form curriculum following a satisfactory process of consultation with students, staff and parents. There is no whole-school policy statement, however, as a basis for this process.

One recent result of this consultation was the introduction of media studies, psychology and Spanish in the programme for students in Year 12. Subject schemes of work are generally of good quality.

103. Extracurricular provision is good. Students have recently visited New York and Paris and regularly take part in retreats and a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Study visits are arranged by a number of subjects – including geography fieldwork in Wales, visits to galleries in London and a theatre trip to Stratford-upon-Avon. Musical activities thrive. A small number of sports teams compete in inter-school fixtures. Most subjects arrange worthwhile additional support for coursework and revision.

104. An effective programme is provided to prepare students for further and higher education and the world of work. Appropriate guidance is provided by the Assistant Headteacher (Post-16) and tutors for those wishing to enter higher education. Students are helped to identify the courses available and complete the application process. They also have the opportunity to visit the Higher Education Fair in Sheffield and chosen universities. The careers officer provides well-considered guidance for those students who wish to enter employment. A well-stocked careers library enhances this provision.

105. Students take a full part in the religious events that the school provides. Regular assemblies are held in the Chapel, and the “achievement assemblies” in the main school are also aimed at sixth-form students. Students are involved in the preparation for, and celebration of, the regular masses and seasonal religious events. They attend retreats and take an active part in events at which they bear witness. Students are regular visitors to Lourdes.

106. The overall ethos of the school helps to teach students the notions of right and wrong, and promotes the expectation that they will acquire mature ethical attitudes and conduct. Although students have limited opportunities for serious debate of moral and other issues, they take part in discussions in certain lessons – as, for instance, on the moral questions raised in a study of *Wuthering Heights* or in French about racism.

107. Students largely control and maintain their own common room. They organise activities to raise money to buy equipment such as a CD player. They also raise money for charities. Students undertake voluntary work in the local community, often in connection with their career ambition – as, for instance, hospital or residential home care. There is a sixth-form committee which meets every third week and deals mainly with the organisation of events: these include an annual formal dinner and aspects of the annual prize-giving ceremony which is held in the local Town Hall. Sixth-form students can volunteer to become prefects and undertake supervisory duties. Other responsibilities include helping younger pupils with reading.

108. Students have reasonable opportunities to take part in educational visits to such venues as theatres and galleries. They recently reached the final stage of the *Young Consumer* competition. A significant minority of students who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that they were not treated as responsible young adults at school and that the school does not listen to their views. At the same time, discussions with inspectors suggested that they were somewhat reticent in initiating debates, cultural visits or community projects themselves.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

109. The quality of care for pupils is a considerable strength of the school. The nurturing of the full potential of each member of the school community is a prominent feature of the school's aims. This objective is generally pursued by staff with energy, commitment and much success. The school has a pervasive ethos of acceptance that enables all pupils to feel valued, whatever their status, attributes or attainments. The policy of “inclusion” is particularly successful.

110. The organisation of the pastoral care of pupils is sound and effective. The leaders of pastoral teams are experienced teachers who clearly focus on enabling pupils to achieve their best. They are well supported by form tutors, who are seen by pupils as adults in whom they can establish a high degree of trust. This rapport is achieved, in part, by the practice of tutors staying with the same group of pupils from entry in Year 7 to the end of Year 11.

111. The school's pastoral provision is further enhanced by the chaplain, who is available to all pupils, and by the diocesan social worker who works part-time in the school and its contributory primary schools. In collaboration with the school's education social worker, they support pupils who may be experiencing personal or family distress and improve significantly the school's capacity to ensure child protection.

112. Despite this positive picture, there are a small number of aspects in which there are risks to pupils' health and welfare and which need to be eliminated. The testing of portable electrical appliances has been deferred for financial reasons, although the need for such testing was communicated to the school in June 2001. The condition of some toilets is unacceptably poor: many lack soap and drying facilities and not all toilet doors are lockable. The ventilation in three of the school's ICT rooms is inadequate. Although pupils in Year 11 and sixth-form students have their own social areas at breaks and lunchtimes, most pupils have to remain outside in the open, except in "wet weather" conditions. These features detract from what is otherwise a very caring and vigilant provision for pupils' welfare by the school.

113. The school has paid significant attention in recent years to improving its policies on behaviour, anti-bullying and attendance. A thorough, recent survey of pupils' views has helped to pinpoint areas where pupils feel vulnerable to bullying or coercion. This information and current policies are now being reviewed.

114. The school's provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) varies widely both in its organisation, which is poorly coordinated, and in its delivery, where the quality of teaching is weaker overall than in all other areas of the curriculum. These programmes do not at present fully achieve the objectives set down for them. The school has, however, recently improved the coordination of this curricular aspect and has launched a training programme to improve its quality.

115. The monitoring of individual pupils' academic progress and personal development is generally good. Review tutors (who are distinct from form tutors) work with individual pupils to assess their progress and agree attainable targets for the future. Pupils and parents value this effective arrangement. The programmes of study provided for pupils with statements of special educational need generally correspond with the requirements of those statements.

116. The school's assessment policy provides good guidance on the assessment, marking, recording and reporting of pupils' work. Within subject departments the quality of day-to-day assessment of individual pupils' work is good overall; there are very good features in some subjects. In English, for example, very careful attention is paid to the accuracy of assessing work in line with National Curriculum levels. In mathematics pupils' progress is very well monitored, particularly in Year 9 where the results of practice National Curriculum tests are thoroughly analysed. In modern foreign languages, teachers make especially good use of a formal system of evaluating pupils' performance after an examination or on completion of a unit of learning. Overall, pupils' work is marked well. In English and PE very diligent marking ensures that pupils know exactly how their work can be improved.

117. In Years 7-9, assessments relate firmly to National Curriculum levels in all subjects except in science and in design and technology, where there are some inconsistencies in individual teachers' interpretations of the criteria for judging the levels. In Years 10-11, assessments are closely linked to the requirements of external examinations and, as a consequence, give clear indications of the progress of pupils as well as providing targets for improvement. The school has an agreed system of grading which is clear to both pupils and teachers.

118. The school has very thorough systems for the collection and collation of assessment data. These sets of data are well presented and easily accessible. As a result, the progress of individual pupils and current year groups can be judged reliably (with the exceptions above) and realistic targets can be set for them. The school has not yet extended the use of its banks of data to evaluate accurately its overall academic progress – although its academic performance is good. Partly for historical reasons it is unable to analyse precisely, for instance, the reasons for its recent substantial improvement in external examinations or for occasional dips in previous years.

119. Reports to parents are presented in a common format and use a clear, common grading system for showing attainment and effort. The school puts great emphasis on the assessment and reporting of the effort pupils make in their work and frequently celebrates significant achievements. The written comments in

annual reports are, however, not satisfactorily presented: teachers' comments are often far too generalised, do not give a clear indication of pupils' attainment and progress or specify exactly what action pupils need to take to improve their work.

120. *Records of Achievement* give a helpful indication of pupils' academic progress as they move through the school and are finally completed in Year 11. These records also show personal achievements outside the taught curriculum and pupils' evaluations of their own strengths. The school's assessment procedures and practice for pupils with special educational needs are good.

Sixth form

121. The sixth form is organised into eight form-groups that are led by form tutors, who take responsibility for students' academic progress and personal development. In addition to daily tutorial time and a weekly assembly, students experience a formal review of their progress three times each year, in which academic targets are reviewed and renegotiated. The senior staff responsible for the sixth form, together with tutors and the careers adviser, ensure that students have the opportunity to access the full range of higher education courses as well as employment and training possibilities. The quality of this guidance and of the overall care for students is sound.

122. Assessment procedures are well structured and carefully implemented. They are particularly well done in mathematics, science, design and technology, history and PE. Good use is made of GCSE results to guide students embarking on courses of study in Years 12-13. Students' progress is carefully reviewed each term: students are well informed about the targets set for them early in Year 12 and, as a result of the thorough system for recording attainment, of the progress they make towards achieving these targets.

123. Students' attendance and effort are regularly recorded, together with their own comments on their progress. There is an effective system for identifying under-achieving students. Parents are contacted, on a daily basis where necessary, if any students experience serious problems in keeping up with their work. Those students who work especially well receive congratulatory cards or awards in the school's well-established "achievement assemblies". After the regular reviews, information is posted to parents. Students themselves express a very high level of satisfaction at the thoroughness with which their work is assessed and how this helps them to know how to improve their work.

124. Students feel well informed about their progress, especially in relation to the qualifications they hope to get. Good records are assembled of their attainment and progress; these are used well, when tutors discuss future careers with them. Despite the absence of a model by which to review performance in individual subjects precisely, assessment data is used satisfactorily overall to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and academic performance.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

125. The return rate of the pre-inspection questionnaire seeking parents' views about the school was low, and lower than for the last inspection. It did, however, show that parents hold the school in high regard for what it offers and achieves for their children. They are pleased with the progress that their children make, feel that the school has high expectations for them and offers good teaching. A significant minority of the smallish number of parents who responded also felt that the school's links with parents and the information they received about their children's progress and behaviour could be better. The inspection showed that all these perceptions are well founded and that, despite some reservations, parents have a justifiably high opinion of the school.

126. The school's links with parents are satisfactory, a similar position to that at the last inspection. A termly newsletter contains interesting and useful information, although its format and content do not always adequately convey to parents the width of the school's activities. This may partly explain why a high 17 per cent of parents who responded to the questionnaire were not able to form a view about the school's extensive extracurricular programme of activities. The school maintains its strong pastoral and social links with the parishes it serves, but the decline in support for the Parents' Association has reduced the number of opportunities for parents to become involved with the school and to meet one another. The school displays a caring and welcoming

atmosphere for pupils and parents both inside the school and through its attractive, well-maintained grounds. The school's Home-School Agreement is taken seriously by the school and by most pupils and their parents or carers.

127. The school's prospectus contains a helpful range of general information that parents need to know about the school, its aims and objectives. The curricular information issued to parents in the prospectus or elsewhere is, however, thin: it indicates, for example, the amount of time spent on each subject in Years 7-9, but does not help parents to understand exactly what is taught. More information is not routinely provided until the Year 10 options have to be chosen. In the pre-inspection questionnaire a significant minority of parents indicated that they would like more information about how their children are getting on.

128. The annual reports to parents are not well presented or easy to read. They do not generally contain sufficient precision or detail about the attainment and progress of pupils or what they should do to improve their work. The school has, however, an effective review procedure for pupils that successfully tracks their progress up to GCSE. Not only is the system helpful to subject teachers and pupils, but it also enables review tutors to report to parents more accurately about the progress of their children. This and the school's links with the parents of children with special educational needs are rapidly becoming a strength of the school's provision.

Sixth form

129. The return rate of the sixth-form *Students' Questionnaire* was a high 71 per cent. The responses indicate that students are very satisfied overall with what the sixth form offers. They are particularly pleased with the quality of the teaching they receive, the help staff give them in adjusting to sixth-form work and the progress they are making. The school produces an informative sixth-form prospectus and helps Year 11 pupils and their parents to consider carefully the benefits and demands of sixth-form study. Sixth-form staff put in much effort to guide and assist students in many ways.

130. The overall picture presented by students is one of high satisfaction with what the school provides and does for them. A significant minority of students, however, did not feel that they were treated as responsible, young adults or that the school took their views seriously. The minority of students who felt in this way did not illustrate or amplify their feelings. There is a sixth-form council that provides some opportunity for the expression of opinion, but it mainly discusses social activities. The opportunity that this forum potentially provides to tap into the views and feelings of students is not exploited enough.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

131. The school has a powerful statement of its aims and values, firmly rooted in its Catholic commitment and tradition. This framework provides clear direction and purpose for staff, pupils, parents and governors. The result is an ethos in which all are valued in their own right and accorded equality of status and treatment. The commitment to a philosophy of inclusion is no mere formality. It is firmly embedded in the daily life of the school and in the way pupils of all backgrounds and abilities are not only cared for as individuals, but also challenged to fulfil their potential.

132. In the last inspection report, weaknesses were identified in whole-school leadership and in the inadequate communication of its vision. Over the last two terms, the acting headteacher, supported loyally by the senior management team, has made significant and generally successful efforts to open up channels of communication across the school and to create a dynamism for change to achieve the school's key objectives. He has brought considerable drive, vision and commitment to the task of addressing the school's priorities over this difficult interim period.

133. The senior management team has been reduced from six to a group of four by virtue of staff changes and vacancies. This team works very well together and commits considerable time and energy to developing sound, whole-school policies for improvement. The leadership of the school shows a firm commitment to improvement and, judged by the progress made in academic and other areas since the last inspection, has a clear capacity to translate this commitment into successful action.

134. According to the previous inspection report, the leadership culture at the time was characterised by an undue distance and poor communication between senior leaders and other levels of staff. The action taken by the senior management team over the last year has closed this gap in many respects through, for example, the increased delegation of key tasks and the closer support and monitoring of staff. There still remains, however, a perception amongst some staff that their views are not taken sufficiently into consideration when key decisions are made.

135. The quality of the leadership and management of subjects and pastoral work is a strength of the school. It ranges from very good to satisfactory, but is very good overall. The effectiveness of middle managers is shown in the school's clear focus on high standards of teaching and learning, on the creation of a committed and hard-working climate within teams of teachers, and in the systematic planning and review of work undertaken.

136. The governing body is positively committed to the school and to the effective discharge of its responsibilities. Through a well-structured system of committees the governors obtain a sound general view of the school's progress and of its broad strengths and weaknesses. They do not, however, have access to a comprehensive management information system about the school's performance as a basis for fully discharging their responsibilities. There is also a feeling, on the part of at least some, that they have not been historically in a position to exercise a strategic oversight of the school's direction and performance.

137. The monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance are significant strengths. This results from active intervention, including the frequent direct observation of teaching, both by senior managers and by subject leaders. Line-management consultation is built into the school's timetable structure: accountability is thereby highlighted as a regular feature of the school's management. This approach has been well supported by a framework of quality assurance procedures. The performance management system, recently introduced on a national basis, has been successfully launched and is well accommodated within the school's existing quality assurance system. It does not, however, constitute a comprehensive management information system of the kind that permits clear and ready judgements to be made accurately about the overall performance of the school.

138. The school has a well-structured system for planning. It incorporates clear timescales and provides opportunities for consultation to all levels of staff as well as to governors. The number of key areas and objectives for improvement within the present plan shows a realistic and manageable scale of priorities.

139. The school's financial management and planning are sound and support its educational priorities effectively. The governing body is, in the main, sufficiently informed about the school's spending patterns and is involved in discussing, although not taking the initiative in, financial matters. Their advice is not used well enough in financial planning, however, and they have not always been fully consulted in the past prior to decisions on spending being taken.

140. The school is spending more than its income and its budget is in deficit, with the agreement of the local education authority. The surplus at the previous inspection was turned into a deficit largely because of an excess of spending on staffing. A spending plan, drawn up with the advice of the local education authority, anticipates that the school will have a small surplus by 2004. This spending plan is regularly reviewed by the budget monitoring group: the latter is made up of the acting headteacher, an assistant headteacher, the bursar and a staff governor, but does not include any governor who is not on the school's payroll.

141. The school has made suitable and effective use of funds for staff training. Good use has been made of the professional expertise of members of staff, where appropriate – as, for example, in the recent literacy training. Professional training is linked closely to the priorities in the school's development plan. Several staff have, for example, attended training on the issue of raising boys' achievement. Other specific grants and funds are used appropriately – as, for instance, in the use of funds for newly qualified teachers, who are well supported during their first year of teaching.

142. The school makes satisfactory use of such new technologies as e-mail and the Internet. When purchasing services, the school takes best value into account. The school requested tenders for the catering

contract, based on the maximum that the school was prepared to pay. The clean state of the buildings indicates that the school's direct employment of its own cleaners is good value for money. There has, however, been little consultation with parents about major spending issues.

143. The proportion of the school's budget spent on teaching staff is broadly average and is used very efficiently. The provision of teachers is good: almost all lessons are taught by specialists. The teaching of ICT in Years 7 and 8 by English and mathematics teachers who are not ICT specialists is, however, resulting in satisfactory, rather than good, teaching of ICT. There are sufficient qualified teachers for pupils with special educational needs.

144. Teachers spend a higher than average proportion of their time in teaching: the low time available to some staff means they do not have sufficient time to carry out other responsibilities effectively. The teacher in charge of the library, for example, has no specific non-teaching time allocated for library work. The ratio of pupils to teachers is above the national average.

145. There is sufficient technical support except in food technology, where there is just five hours per week; this places an additional burden on the teaching staff in this subject. The administrative and clerical staff, on a slightly above average number of hours per week overall, provide good support for the teaching staff.

146. There is a good system of induction to the work of the school for teachers new to teaching and to the school. The school provides good information about the day-to-day running of the school for supply teachers working in the school for short periods. The school has taken a considered decision not to take trainee teachers during the current academic year, but the school's good standard of teaching and the very good overall quality of subject leadership indicate that the school would be an effective provider of initial teacher training.

147. Most subjects have sufficient, suitable accommodation. There are, however, some deficiencies. There is no specialist accommodation for drama. Some of the rooms used for science teaching are too small for the groups using them. The temporary classrooms used for some history teaching are in poor condition. The accommodation for the Learning Support Unit and dyslexia workshop is of sound quality and congenial for pupils, but limited in size, so restricting the scope of the work that can be done there.

148. There is insufficient accommodation for the teaching of ICT across the curriculum. The two specialist ICT rooms are heavily over-subscribed and are therefore not always available at times when subject teachers may need to use them. Rooms for ICT are poorly ventilated. The problem, reported at the last inspection, of a lack of storage space for pupils' bags in the design and technology area has still not been solved. As at the time of the last inspection, the playing fields are poorly drained; this lowers standards in hockey and soccer. There are no indoor social areas for pupils in Years 7-10 to use at breaks and lunchtimes, a problem that was raised by some parents and by those pupils interviewed during the inspection.

149. The school's site is generally pleasant and attractive. The school's groundsman produces plants and flowers that are used to maintain an attractive area to the front of the school. There is minimal litter and little evidence of graffiti. The interior is generally well maintained and corridors are made attractive with good displays of posters and pupils' work. There is access for people in wheelchairs to almost all the school's site by ramps and lifts. The policy of checking toilets every hour has led to an improvement in the general state of the toilets. They are, however, as noted earlier, still not good enough.

150. The spending on learning resources is below average, the result of the tight budget. The provision of resources is generally satisfactory, an improvement since the last inspection. There is, however, a shortage of textbooks for pupils in science and in design and technology for pupils in Years 10-11. Many of the books in modern foreign languages are out of date. All pupils studying history in Years 7-11 have a textbook of their own. This is a much better situation than usual but, because the books are heavily used, many are very dilapidated. The school does not evaluate the balance of spending within curriculum areas. The amount of photocopying undertaken, at an average of 100,000 copies per month, is considerable. The spending on this item by a small number of departments is unusually high; the value for money offered by this level of photocopying has not been thoroughly evaluated by those with overall management of the budget.

151. The number of centrally provided computers is about average, but about a third of the machines are out-of-date and will not run the latest software efficiently. The provision of ICT in departments is unsatisfactory in mathematics, food technology and PE. In these subjects there are insufficient, up-to-date computers available for pupils to use. Access to centrally provided ICT facilities is not easy for mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages and PE. This situation has not improved since the last inspection.

152. The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) provides limited help for pupils, especially those in Years 10-11, who wish to research independently. This is a similar situation to that described at the last inspection. Although it is a pleasant and welcoming room, with both study and soft-seating areas, it is too small for a school of this size and type. The layout of the room on two levels, although architecturally interesting, makes the supervision of a full class difficult. The number of books is too small for the size of school. There are two computers with CD-ROMs and Internet access. Three quality daily newspapers are taken, but no magazines for pupils in Years 7-11. The centre is open during the school day, but is not available to pupils after school hours.

153. Taking into account the school's good quality of teaching and learning, pupils' very positive attitudes and behaviour, their good progress throughout the school and the effective quality of management, set alongside the school's budgetary deficit and its average expenditure, the school gives good value for money.

Sixth form

154. The leadership and management of the sixth form are sound overall. The assistant head (post-16) and the director of the sixth form, supported by the senior management team, have created a positive, favourable environment for the successful development of the sixth form. Students can select their programmes of study from a suitably wide range of academic and vocational courses. They have ready access to a fair range of enrichment activities and the resources they need in pleasant, often specially designed accommodation. Staff have established a compassionate climate of care and guidance for students and effectively monitor their progress.

155. The expenditure on the sixth form is higher than the income the school receives for its sixth formers. This is because, although some groups are large and fully economic, there are many small groups for which the cost of teaching is high. The number of students who leave before the end of their courses is small; those who do leave usually do so for good reasons, such as to go into employment or to vocational training elsewhere.

156. The school has not sufficiently investigated the spending on the sixth form and does not have an accurate method of assessing and monitoring the cost-effectiveness of its sixth-form provision. It already takes into account its teaching costs, but does not give due weight to the other costs which the sixth form incurs – such as the proportion of the school's budget spent on resources, accommodation and administrative support. Nor does it have a robust strategy to underpin its forward-planning, such that it can rapidly adjust its course provision and methods to its budget. It has a satisfactory system to measure the progress and achievement of sixth formers, although this does not comprehensively measure the overall academic performance of students, subject by subject.

157. The provision of teaching staff for the sixth form is good overall. All subjects are taught by specialist teachers. The cost of providing these teachers is, however, high, because of the large number of small groups. The accommodation for the sixth form is very good. Sixth formers have an area designated for their sole use: this comprises an attractive social and dining area, a suite of teaching rooms and an ICT room for their sole use. The students also have a quiet-study room attached to the Learning Resource Centre. A few students make good use of this, although many prefer to study in their social area.

158. The provision of resources is satisfactory overall. The designated ICT room is a good facility for research and study. Students have access to the Internet both in this room and in the LRC. The provision of ICT specifically for pupils taking vocational education courses is poor, however, as most of the machines are too old to run the latest software effectively. There is a shortage of textbooks in science: students have been advised to buy their own books, which the school will purchase from students at the end of the course.

159. The LRC does not provide students in the sixth form with a satisfactory overall facility for independent learning. There is a good stock of books for students studying history, because the department has spent money on books specifically for the centre. Provision is also good in English and is satisfactory in geography. It is poor, however, in other areas of study, especially in science, music, PE, psychology and vocational education. Only two periodicals are available to sixth-form students in the library. The learning resource centre has two computers, both with CD-ROMs and Internet access, but these are also for use by pupils in Years 7-11.

160. Overall, students have access to a good range of facilities, courses and teaching. They make sound progress in their studies. Given, however, that the expenditure on the sixth form exceeds the income received for it, the school's sixth form does not give full value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

161. To improve and build upon the good quality of education that pupils already receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:

- (a) extend further the school's very good system of assessing pupils' progress to a clear model for assessing accurately the school's overall academic performance by:
 - establishing the benchmarks and stages for assessing whole-school performance;
 - identifying and recording the factors that have led to the school's recent significant improvement;
 - incorporating these within a comprehensive management information system; and
 - sharing the judgements produced with staff, pupils and parents or carers (## 8 118 137).
- (b) enhance pupils' and students' overall confidence and capability in speaking by increasing the opportunities for them to take part in extended discussions and oral presentations in class and across the school (## 21 53 57 and in subject sections).
- (c) improve the cost-effectiveness of the good range of course provision in the sixth form by:
 - accurately assessing the full cost of running the current sixth-form programme; and
 - devising a robust strategy for maintaining quality, but reducing costs (## 155-156 160).
- (d) ensure that the curriculum is improved further by:
 - teaching information and communication technology (ICT) sufficiently in Years 10-11 to meet statutory requirements;
 - ensuring that ICT is used sufficiently in all subjects, as indicated in the National Curriculum programmes of study; and
 - coordinating and monitoring adequately the Education for Personal Relationships (EPR) course and teaching it in such a way that pupils consistently have sufficient opportunity to express their own points of view and to discuss with one another the important issues raised (## 9 54 57 61 69 71 72 114 143 and in the ICT subject section).
- (e) improve the quality of information provided for parents or carers by:
 - making reports on children's attainments and progress uniformly clear and specific; and
 - producing clear details of the content of the subjects and courses provided for all year groups (## 119 127 128).

In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action. These are indicated in paragraphs 7 12 13 38 43 53 70 77 86 90 94 95 112 139 140 144-152 and in subject sections.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	165
	Sixth form	76
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		106

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	0	35	81	41	8	0	0
Percentage	0	21	49	25	5	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	19	42	14	0	0	0
Percentage	1	25	55	18	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. The total of sixth-form percentages does not equal 100 owing to "rounding".

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	970	160
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	103	8

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	38	6
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	143	8

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.7
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.2
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for 2000-2001.

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	105	103	208

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	89	86	89
	Girls	87	79	73
	Total	176	165	162
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (79)	79 (73)	78 (72)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (39)	50 (44)	43 (37)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	75	85	86
	Girls	76	78	67
	Total	151	163	153
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (69)	79 (72)	74 (69)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	21 (14)	44 (34)	36 (35)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2000.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2001	87	85	172

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	36	84	85
	Girls	53	82	83
	Total	89	166	168
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	52 (49)	97 (98)	98 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2000.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	41.1 (42.0)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

Figures in brackets refer to 2000.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied:	School:		
	Intermediate	7	100
	Interm-Part 1	11	100
	National		n/a

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	22	20	42

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	19.0	16.2	17.7 (20.6)	4.0	2.0	3.0
National	16.9	17.9	17.4 (18.2)	n/a	n/a	4.1

Figures in brackets refer to 2000.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	Advanced – 11	100
		Intermed. – 8	100
	National: Advanced – Intermed. –		85% (83%) 76% (83%)

Figures in brackets refer to 2000.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	6
Pakistani	6
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1109
Any other minority ethnic group	3

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	77	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	65.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	193

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.4
Key Stage 4	24.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	2,875,284
Total expenditure	2,837,589
Expenditure per pupil	2,566
Balance brought forward from previous year	-119,937
Balance carried forward to next year	-82,242

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	21
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	12

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	7
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	7
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

1130

Number of questionnaires returned

194

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	54	6	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	42	52	6	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	26	51	10	9	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	65	9	4	2
The teaching is good.	32	61	2	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	43	19	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	41	4	6	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	30	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	49	16	6	2
The school is well led and managed.	33	47	6	7	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	53	4	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	43	10	5	17

Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents or carers on 19 of the questionnaires returned.

Amongst the positive points mentioned were:

- the good progress that children make in the school; and
- the care, support and encouragement given to all children.

Amongst occasional concerns expressed in questionnaires were:

- inconsistencies in the setting of homework; and
- some uncertainty about the scope and application of the school's complaints procedure.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES: YEARS 7-11

ENGLISH

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

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• teachers' very high level of subject knowledge.• the good quality of teaching.• the high calibre of departmental leadership and management.• the overall level of attainment and progress in Years 7-9.• the very positive use of assessment data about pupils' work. <p>Areas for improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the attainment of boys in GCSE English language and literature.• pupils' speaking and listening.

162. On entry to the school in Year 7, the proportion of pupils who have already reached the benchmark of Level 4 in the national tests in their primary schools has increased since 1999, but still remains a little below the national average. The proportion of pupils entering the school at the higher Level 5 has increased significantly over the period 1998-2001, but is also still a little below the national average.

163. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have improved significantly over the last few years. In 2001 the proportion of the school's pupils reaching either Level 5 or Level 6, for example, was double what it was at the last inspection in 1996. These proportions are now well above the national average. When compared with the attainment of pupils in schools with similar socio-economic circumstances, pupils' performance in this school was well above the group average in 2001. The attainment of both boys and girls exceeded the national average for their age group over the period 1999-2001. Girls perform better than boys overall, but boys and girls are similarly close to the national average for their respective sexes.

164. In GCSE English language in 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C was at the national average. The proportion of grades A*-C obtained over the period 1998-2001 varied slightly, but was always close to the national average figure. The proportion of pupils gaining either of the two highest (A* or A) grades over the same period was higher than the national average in 1999 and 2001. The overall performance of girls in GCSE English language is much better than that of boys. Pupils perform close to the group average for schools in similar socio-economic circumstances.

165. The proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C in English Literature was above the national average in 1999 and 2001, but below the national figure in 2000. Girls gain significantly more grades in the range A*-C than boys.

166. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall standard in English is above the national average. Most pupils use well a wide range of reading techniques, accurately identify textual references to support a point of view and acquire a reasonable body of knowledge about language. Pupils in a Year 7 class, for example, used the mnemonic *SMILE* to identify aspects of structure, meaning, imagery, language and effect when reading the poem, *Inside the Egg*, by Noel Petty. Year 7 pupils in another class, studying the effect of emotive language in advertisements, played a card game to help them to consolidate their knowledge of terminology such as "audience", "campaign" and "dialect".

167. Pupils in a Year 8 class reviewed the use of the exclamation mark and then created an alphabetical list of alternative words for "exclaimed". In a Year 9 class, studying a film version of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, pupils began their lesson with a starter activity that considered the differences between the meaning of "denotation" and "connotation". They were competent and well-practised in note-taking from their teacher's and other pupils' ideas. Later questioning enabled them to reinforce these concepts, so that they accurately

spotted film techniques and significant features of camera work. In another Year 9 class, pupils readily recognised the characteristics of blank verse before going on to a careful reading of part of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

168. Pupils regularly work in groups to discuss language or literature. In Years 7-9 there is a strong focus on literacy skills, with the result that pupils use appropriate terminology when discussing texts. In a Year 7 class, for example, pupils identified how the poet Maggie Holmes used onomatopoeia in the poem, *The Spider's Web*, and noted the effective use of short sentences.

169. Pupils (including those with special educational needs) make good progress overall during Years 7-9. Teaching objectives from the *National Framework for Teaching English*, including objectives for word-level and sentence-level activities, have been incorporated soundly into new schemes of work. The national "level descriptors" for Key Stage 3 English guide and inform pupils' work.

170. By the end of Year 11, the overall level of pupils' attainment is average, but most pupils make sound progress. Pupils' written assignments in Years 10 and 11 are well planned and organised, to ensure that evidence is appropriately drawn from textual references. In a Year 10 class studying *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, for instance, pupils particularly considered the roles played by Mary Warren and John Proctor. In another Year 10 class, pupils watched the opening of the film *Shakespeare in Love* to increase their understanding of Shakespeare's London, before moving on to read some extracts from Pepys's diaries as a means of considering how style and language reflect the time.

171. This imaginative development of pupils' knowledge and understanding continues soundly in Year 11. Working in small groups, for example, one such class deepened their understanding of the characters of Kerry and Sandra in *The Darkness Out There* by Penelope Lively. In another class, pupils had a textual sequence and simple pictures to match to the story before going on to read *The Beggar Woman* by William Kay. Pupils' perceptions of the poem were then deepened, as they closely watched a video-recording of a reading of the poem.

172. Pupils' overall standard of writing is close to the national average by the end of Year 11. This is partly achieved because most pupils give considerable attention to the planning and drafting of their coursework: the majority of pupils organise their work in such a way as to ensure that appropriate textual references are used to support points of view. The highest-attaining pupils write with a considerable maturity of style and interpretation and a high degree of technical accuracy. Pupils with special educational needs, too, make good progress.

173. Pupils' attitudes to work are good throughout the school. Most pupils enjoy the subject, are well motivated and concentrate well in lessons. Pupils respond well to the varied range of teaching styles they encounter in a lesson. They work willingly and cooperatively both with one another and with their teachers. High expectations of classroom behaviour are reinforced by the staff carefully monitoring pupils' movement along the English corridor at the change of lessons.

174. Teaching is good overall throughout Years 7-11. The specialist English teachers have a very substantial command of their subject and a commitment to high standards. Their enthusiasm is much in evidence in the lively and interactive way they often teach. Lessons are carefully planned, incorporating the clear statement of lesson objectives at the beginning of classes and a summarising plenary session at the end of each lesson. The regular use of "starter" activities helps to ensure that teaching is highly interactive from the beginning of lessons. The national Key Stage 3 Strategy planning for English is incorporated well into the department's recently revised schemes of work.

175. All teachers in the department set high expectations for all pupils, including those with special educational needs. Oral work is a regular feature of many lessons, although insufficient attention is given to the quality of speech to ensure that pupils speak clearly and fluently and can present their points of view in sustained discussion. The quality of pupils' speech is only just average.

176. The study of English language and literature makes a very substantial contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils consider thoughtfully, for example, the impact of witchcraft in

The Crucible by Arthur Miller and the effect of the language of advertisements. The department organises a range of extracurricular activities that include theatre visits.

177. The leadership and management of the department are very good overall. A clear sense of vision guides the development of the subject in the school. Day-to-day administration is very effectively carried out. All members of the department share responsibility for elements of the curriculum. This collegiate approach to planning is a significant strength. The department has a rigorous method of tracking pupils' progress from Year 7 onwards and incorporates fully data drawn from the Year 6 national tests.

178. Regular and thorough reviews of pupils' work ensure that pupils receive appropriately targeted support. Departmental documentation, which was identified in the last inspection as in need of improvement, is now exemplary and incorporates the kind of planning recommended in the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. Planning for drama in Years 7-9 is an integral part of the English curriculum, but in its current format does not identify in sufficient detail how progression in drama techniques and strategies will be ensured.

179. Across other subjects in Years 7-11, pupils use a suitable range of reading strategies that include the skimming and scanning of texts. Most pupils are fluent and confident readers who also understand what they have read. The overall standard of writing is good: most pupils soundly annotate texts, make notes, and draft and edit their writing. A generally good standard of handwriting is seen in science, design and technology, geography and music. Written work is generally well presented as in science, design and technology, and music.

180. The overall standard of speaking, although broadly average, varies widely: it ranges from very articulate pupils to those who speak with little expression or coherence of meaning. Where pupils do speak clearly, their use of language is sometimes limited by the use of vague expressions such as "thingy". Pupils generally have insufficient opportunities to develop and sustain extended or interactive discussion in class. Pupils listen carefully in most subjects.

181. Overall, the quality of provision in **drama** is good. The subject is taught within English in Years 7-9 and as a separate GCSE subject in Years 10-11. About three-quarters of candidates gained a GCSE grade in the range A*-C over the period 1999-2001. The performance of girls is significantly better than that of boys.

182. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall level of attainment is broadly average. In a Year 10 class, pupils studying *Tell Tale Heart*, based on a story by Edgar Allan Poe, used improvisation and dialogue well: they created a scene in which anger was exchanged, and thoughtfully considered how characters develop through their use of language, movement and space. In a Year 11 class, pupils used a quick, warm-up session to focus their coordination and movement before working in groups to interpret the feelings of characters attending an audition; in this exercise they appropriately used dramatic techniques such as freeze-framing and thought-tracking.

183. The quality of teaching is good overall. Lessons are very well managed. Teachers give clear instructions and focused guidance. Their high expectations help to ensure that pupils make sound progress. Pupils' attitudes are very good and most pupils thoroughly enjoy their lessons.

184. The teacher with responsibility for drama coordinates the subject effectively. The current scheme of work has recently been reviewed to incorporate elements of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. As noted earlier, however, the means of securing progression in dramatic techniques and strategies is not sufficiently detailed in current planning. The assessment of GCSE work is carried out rigorously.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths:

- the leadership and management of the subject.
- the monitoring of pupils' progress and taking any subsequent action effectively.
- the use of assessment data to guide curricular planning.
- the department has met its targets and has appropriate priorities for improvement.

Areas for improvement:

- the limited use of ICT.
- the quality of marking is inconsistent.
- pupils have insufficient opportunities for investigational work in Years 7-9.
- the department does not have enough ICT or resources for practical work.

185. The proportion of pupils who achieved the basic standard or higher levels expected of 14 year olds in the 2001 national tests at the end of Year 9 is above average. Based upon the average points scored by all pupils, the school's results were above average both in relation to the national results for all schools and when compared to schools in similar social circumstances. The rate of improvement in results is higher than the national trend. This is a very substantial improvement on the results at the time of the previous inspection. Both boys and girls perform at a similar overall standard.

186. The proportion of pupils who achieved grades in the range A*-C in the GCSE examinations in 2001 is in line with the national average. No pupil achieved the highest A* grade, but the proportion who achieved either grades A-C or A-G was broadly in line with national averages. The results have steadily improved since the last inspection and at a faster rate than the national trend. Both boys and girls performed similarly overall.

187. The attainment of pupils on entry has improved steadily over the past four years and is now broadly in line with the national average. An increasing proportion of these are higher-attaining pupils. Pupils in Year 7 demonstrate good skills in number and mental arithmetic as a result of the use of the National Numeracy Strategy. Pupils are enthusiastic learners: in a lesson on probability, for example, they were totally focused on the task and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the likelihood of particular totals for a pair of dice. They have good understanding of shapes and the properties of angles.

188. By the age of 14, the overall standard of work of the majority of pupils is a little above that expected of that age group. Pupils in the top sets continue to make good progress in number work, algebra, geometry and data-handling. They manipulate numbers accurately when solving problems and have competent skill in algebra. Pupils are keen to discuss their work, contributing well during any oral sessions. Skilful questioning by teachers challenges their thinking and helps to extend their depth of understanding.

189. Although pupils show satisfactory skill in mathematical investigations, progress in this aspect is less than in other areas of the subject, as pupils have insufficient opportunities to practise these skills. Pupils respond positively where opportunities are provided – as, for example, in a Year 8 lesson investigating the patterns of growing shapes. Good discussion amongst pupils not only deepened their understanding of shapes and patterns, but also extended their mathematical language.

190. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in lessons overall and in most aspects of the subject. Good relationships between teachers and pupils provide a secure and caring environment where these pupils develop confidence and competence. Gifted and talented pupils, too, make good progress, partly as a result of the "setted" arrangements throughout the school.

191. Most pupils work at a brisk pace in lessons and, with help from staff, make good progress in their work. Their overall achievement is substantial. Pupils generally make significant gains in knowledge and understanding. The school has adopted the recommended methods of the National Numeracy Strategy.

This assists pupils to enhance their mathematical skills through an oral session at the beginning of lessons. Good attendance and very good attitudes and relationships with teachers contribute positively to their learning.

192. By the age of 16, pupils achieve an overall standard that is slightly above average. A significant proportion of pupils in the top sets demonstrate high levels of mathematical skill in number work, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and data-handling. As a result, one Year 10 group recently took the GCSE examination a year early and achieved very good results. Many of the higher-attaining pupils are predicted to achieve grade A*. These pupils acquire very good skills across all areas of the subject.

193. Pupils in the middle sets attain an overall standard that is close to average and make good progress. They acquire appropriate competence in handling numbers, showing clear understanding of, for example, fractions, decimals and percentages. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. They respond positively in lessons that are planned to meet their specific needs and are well supported by a special needs teacher. In one lesson, for example, pupils showed a clear understanding of probability. The teacher broke down the problem into small steps to make it easier for the pupils to understand. As a result, the pupils gained a good grasp of the different ways of gathering and recording information.

194. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good. Most make very positive responses to the teaching they receive and are cooperative when undertaking the tasks set. They show good levels of concentration and perseverance when working. Most contribute well during oral sessions, are keen to answer questions and develop good understanding of mathematical terms. Younger pupils are keen to explain their methods of mental calculation. Most have pride in their written work, taking great care to set it out carefully.

195. Behaviour in lessons is very good. Pupils have very good relationships with both adults and their peers. There were no examples of misbehaviour observed in lessons. Pupils respond positively to teachers and show them great respect.

196. The quality of teaching is good overall throughout Years 7-11. It has improved significantly since the last inspection. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. The teaching of mathematics specialists in the department is significantly better than that of others and is often very good.

197. Particular strengths in the teaching are good management and control of pupils, very warm relationships with them and very thorough lesson planning, linking teaching styles closely to the recommended format of the National Numeracy Strategy. The school has extended this approach to all lessons with great effect. Teachers' planning is detailed and thorough, catering appropriately for the range of attainment within classes. Precise time-limits are often set for tasks, which are effectively enhanced by well-prepared resources.

198. In the best lessons, teachers' substantial subject knowledge results in an emphasis on the correct use of mathematical terms and appropriate methods. Higher-attaining pupils are suitably challenged and low-attaining pupils are well supported. Explanations are detailed. Teachers monitor and support pupils suitably as lessons progress, questioning them to check their understanding. Very good use is made of assessment to identify any areas of weakness and to plan future teaching programmes. This technique is particularly well used towards the end of Year 9. Practice examination papers are analysed, weak areas are identified and lessons are planned to remedy these problems and to prepare pupils effectively for their external examinations. Teachers' very good instructions on examination techniques, too, help pupils to avoid the usual pitfalls, when answering specific types of question. Homework is well used to enhance teaching and learning in all lessons.

199. In a small number of lessons that are broadly satisfactory, teachers' planning lacks sufficient detail and touches too lightly on important elements that would help lower-attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs to learn better. There is insufficient emphasis, for example, on the use of mathematical language. Short-term targets are not set to give pupils something to aim for and to encourage them to succeed. Poor presentation is sometimes accepted and a few lessons lack sufficient variety and interest.

200. In Years 7-9 there are insufficient, planned opportunities for pupils to extend their skill in solving problems or undertaking investigations. There are only two computers in the mathematics department and these are used for administrative purposes. All pupils have limited access to computers in mathematics; they are not used effectively to enhance teaching and learning in the subject. This deficiency, as the department is aware, significantly undermines potentially excellent teaching.

201. Nevertheless, the generally high quality of teaching has had a significant impact on standards. In the lessons observed, good (and often very good) teaching pushed pupils forward at a pace, resulting in very thorough understanding of the points taught and at least good progress through the topics being studied.

202. Resources are inadequate overall. Book resources are barely adequate, but are well supported by materials produced by the staff themselves. Practical equipment is inadequate: this restricts opportunities for practical work and results in some pupils having poor skills in the estimation of measures. As noted above, there are no computers available in classrooms to enhance the day-to-day learning in lessons. Good use is made of graphic calculators, but these are only on loan. Limited access to the computer suites has enhanced the work of some pupils, but the majority do not have access to computers in mathematics lessons. The head of department is aware of this deficiency and plans to remedy the situation, as and when funding becomes available.

203. The general standard of numeracy across the curriculum is good. The department has adopted the National Numeracy Strategy in all its planning and numeracy lessons are taught to all pupils up to the age of 14. As a result, arithmetic and mental skills are stronger than other areas of mathematics. All other departments have had recent training in numeracy and have been given numeracy targets. There were no examples observed in other subjects of weak numeracy skills restricting progress. On the contrary, in some subjects (notably science) a close partnership with the mathematics department has resulted in planned, parallel teaching programmes. These not only help pupils' understanding, but also extend their awareness of mathematics' usefulness.

204. Progress since the last report has been very good. The previous head of department has to take some credit for this, but a significant amount of work has been done by the acting head of department since she took up the post last September. Her leadership is very good. Standards of attainment, quality of teaching and pupils' progress that were unsatisfactory in 1996 have all improved significantly. The serious weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics no longer exist.

205. Teaching is now of high quality. The quality of leadership of mathematics was unsatisfactory, but is now very good. There was insufficient use of homework to support teaching and learning in lessons. Homework is now well used. There were inconsistencies in the use of assessment. Now assessment is used very effectively. Good policies and an effective numeracy programme have replaced inconsistencies in the use of numeracy across the curriculum. An appropriate system is in place for monitoring teaching, with the result that the quality of teaching has improved significantly. The only aspects that have not improved sufficiently are the quality of resources and the opportunity to apply mathematics to investigations in Years 7-9; here, too, the situation is improving.

206. The head of department and other members of the team give up a great deal of their own time to carry out a variety of duties – as, for example, during breaks and after school, to provide the best possible support for pupils. Members of the department work well together as a team, are very committed and share the common goal of improving provision in the subject.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths:

- pupils' attainment has improved significantly since 1996.
- the high quality of teaching.
- the quality of pupils' investigative and experimental activities.
- pupils' strong interest in the subject and very good behaviour in lessons.

Areas for improvement:

- a better match of work for pupils of all abilities in the Year 7 mixed-attainment classes.
- stronger links with contributory primary schools.

207. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their overall level of attainment in the subject is around the national average. The overall standard has risen in the last four years in line with the national trend.

208. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall results in the national tests have been, in varying degrees, above the national average since the last inspection. In 2001 the results were well above average. Boys and girls generally do equally well, although boys edged slightly ahead of girls in 2001. These improvements since 1996 represent a significant rise in performance, particularly in the achievement of the higher Level 6. When compared with those in similar socio-economic circumstances, this school's results were well above the group average in 2000 and 2001 both for average point scores and for the proportions of pupils reaching Levels 5 and 6.

209. All pupils in Years 10-11 follow the national pattern of taking GCSE double-award science. The proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C was close to the national average in 2001 and nearly all pupils gained at least the lowest grade G. The proportion of the top A* and A grades obtained was above the national norm in 2000, although average in 2001. These results represent a good achievement by the department. Science results are steadily improving. Pupils tend to perform as well in this subject as they do in most of their other subjects.

210. In most years pupils make sound progress across the school, because their attainment in GCSE is at least in line with what they have attained earlier on in the school. The most able pupils often achieve the highest grades. Girls tend to do better than boys: in 2001, for example, some 55 per cent of the girls gained at least a grade C compared with 42 per cent of the boys - although the boys' results are in line with those achieved in similar schools.

211. In Year 7, pupils are taught in classes of mixed-attainment. Although pupils of similar attainment often work together within those classes, some able pupils are not offered sufficiently challenging work. Whilst the needs of lower-attaining pupils are catered for (such as when an assessment test is read out to them), abler pupils are not given enough opportunities to show what they can do through, for example, more demanding tasks. The department's bank of materials for pupils with special educational needs is a good model to guide the formation of a similar range of materials and tasks for the most able.

212. Owing to its light contact with contributory primary schools, the department cannot build securely on pupils' previous scientific experience. It has, however, introduced "scientific thinking" lessons in Year 7. In these, pupils demonstrate their sound skills in recognising relationships, identifying variables, articulating relationships between inputs and outputs and make generalisations about their findings in practical activities.

213. By the end of Year 9 pupils' overall standard of attainment is above average. A top set, for example, showed a high degree of capability in their biological work on respiration. They followed instructions carefully, measured liquids and temperatures precisely, were fully aware of the need for accuracy and the potential for errors in the tasks they were doing, and identified correctly the reasons for the rise in water temperature. Another Year 9 class of low-attaining pupils, working on the parts and function of the skeleton, recalled the names of bones in the body, indicated accurately where they were and commented satisfactorily on their functions.

214. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall level of attainment is close to average. High attainers generally achieve a very good standard: top sets demonstrate, for example, above average competency in the use of graphs. There is still, however, room for them to acquire even greater depth of knowledge and understanding through more rigorous questioning and debate. The majority of pupils have sound knowledge of basic scientific principles and information, describe with reasonable accuracy the scientific patterns they observe, and recognise the features of fair testing. The standard of much written work is above average. It is generally neat and well presented.

215. The quantity and quality of pupils' numerical work are good throughout the school. Pupils use formulae confidently. They construct graphs quickly and accurately, and then interpret them appropriately. These skills were ably demonstrated by a mid-range class in Year 10, studying rates of reactions. The pupils had measured the rate of precipitation of sulphur from a reaction of sodium thiosulphate solution and dilute sulphuric acid. Their assignment also required them to predict further trends as a result of changes in reaction conditions. When asked, they used their graphed information well to describe how changes in rates of reaction can be linked to other variables and commented on how collision theory explains the changes in the speed of the reaction. Pupils enjoy their science.

216. Throughout the school, pupils enjoy practical work and readily acquire new skills. In the large amount of practical work done in lessons, pupils handle equipment such as thermometers safely and correctly. Most pupils have reasonable competence in the planning of fair tests – choosing variables, making predictions and subsequently analysing their findings soundly.

217. Pupils make good overall progress in the subject. A major contributory factor to this positive achievement is the high quality of teaching in the department. Pupils display good behaviour in lessons and classes are managed very well indeed. Pupils' mature behaviour and cooperative attitudes are additional contributory factors to the steady improvement of results in the department. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very positive. The best lessons are those that are based on detailed planning and carefully timed sequences and that contain a suitable variety of exposition, the sharing of objectives, question and answer sessions and a work-summary on the board.

218. Pupils with special educational needs receive appropriate help from learning assistants and generally make good progress. An important feature of the lessons for the lowest-attaining groups is a statement on the board of the minimum they are expected to learn. Pupils in Years 10-11 receive more support from assistants than in many schools. Teachers make extensive use of pupils' Individual Education Profiles (EPs). One consequence of this support is that a very high proportion of the school's pupils gain at least a grade G in GCSE examinations.

219. The quality of teaching is predominantly good throughout Years 7-11 and a third of lessons are very well taught. Teachers' in-depth knowledge, interest and excitement in the subject are conveyed strongly to pupils. Most staff have a suitably wide range of teaching styles. These are used to best advantage in Years 7-9, since a few lessons in Years 10-11 lack the necessary variety. Good lessons are also typified by scientific and technological examples drawn from everyday life. Many staff use their detailed knowledge of the work of important scientists to stress the personal attributes of science. A physics lesson in Year 10 on electricity and magnetism, for example, was brought to life by the teacher's substantial knowledge of the work of several major Victorian scientists.

220. The department is very conscious of the need to keep on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy. Staff make a positive effort to correct the spelling of key scientific words in books, and in most lessons a list of the more important words is put on the board. Many teachers enhance pupils' literacy by the common practice of reading aloud sections of text. In a top set in Year 10 the teacher extended pupils' comprehension by asking very relevant supplementary questions. This lesson was also notable for the importance the teacher attached to the development of oral skills and vocabulary through scientific debate.

221. In many lessons, however, teachers' questioning seldom progressed beyond the level of recalling information or simple understanding. The department does not have a clear strategy to engage pupils in scientific debate and extended discussion – an important omission.

222. In several lessons teachers used ICT effectively to demonstrate scientific phenomena and stimulate discussion. Computers are underused in the department for the word processing of pupils' work and the manipulation of data, particularly with older pupils. Overall, however, the use of ICT in the subject is greater than often found. Its use is increasing, as staff gain greater competence through the training they willingly undertake on the use of such aspects as digital video-projectors and presentations, Internet access and data-logging.

223. Since the last inspection there has been steady progress in all aspects of the department's work. The head of department has collated an extensive bank of statistics that covers pupils' attainment throughout Years 7-11. The results of modular tests underpin the organisation of teaching sets after Year 7. The department has a generally thorough system for analysing pupils' attainments and achievements and has firm plans to chart pupils' progress specifically across Years 7-11. It analyses and shares amongst all staff pupils' progress across all the three aspects of biology, chemistry and physics, especially when pupils are taught the separate disciplines by different teachers.

224. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The caring, conscientious and hardworking head of department leads a team of dedicated teachers. During the period of inspection, for example, one member was unable to be present: staff were keen that his classes would not suffer and readily taught his timetable, despite their heavy teaching loads. The strengths and interests of staff are used to the full. There is much emphasis on developing the team for the future.

225. The department has eight well-furnished laboratories. The building of an additional laboratory is to commence shortly; this is planned to take some pressure off the current shortage of accommodation. The laboratories are attractive and provide a purposeful learning environment, although the location of utilities in some of the older laboratories results in pupils having to move around too much during practical work. Storage space is not organised to best effect and the general preparation area needs upgrading. All rooms have excellent wall displays of pupils' work, however, supplemented by lists of key words on the topics being taught.

226. There is a shortage of up-to-date textbooks and other materials throughout the department. In the last year the department tried to compensate for this deficiency by photocopying. This then resulted in a disproportionate expenditure on consumable materials. In the last six months the department has attempted to become more realistic about the quantity of such material. The school has not had its portable electrical appliances tested for several years.

227. A team of three technicians effectively prepares teaching materials and equipment for the department. Their efforts are a contributory factor to its success. The school has been successful in recent years in the local Royal Society of Chemistry's *Top of the Bench* competition. Staff regularly contribute to the extracurricular life of the school through a chess club. Revision classes are offered prior to GCSE examinations. Overall, this is a good and improving department.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- teaching is good overall.
- teachers are knowledgeable, plan effectively and set clear aims for pupils.
- pupils are interested in the subject and keen to do well.
- the overall standard of work is steadily improving.

Areas for improvement:

- assessment and recording systems lack rigour.
- target-setting for pupils makes little use of available data.
- insufficient use of modern technology.

228. Teachers assessed the overall standard of work produced by pupils aged 14 in 2001 as being at a level above the national average. The standard of work seen during the inspection, however, was slightly lower than this and indicates that pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 9 is broadly in line with national expectations.

229. In the GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11, attainment is well below the national average. No pupil gained the highest A* grade in 2001. A much higher percentage of girls than boys achieve the higher grades A-C. Girls' attainment was much higher, and boys' attainment much lower, than the national average in the recent past. GCSE results for 2001 were much lower than those for the period prior to the last inspection, when the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-C was well above average.

230. Most pupils enter the school in Year 7 with a level of attainment in the subject that is broadly in line with the national average for pupils of their age. They have a fair range of skill in drawing, painting and working with craft materials. Most pupils enjoy the subject and are keen to acquire the technical skills to communicate their thoughts and feelings to others through art materials. The majority of Year 7 pupils produce work that is reasonably competent. A minority of the highest-attaining pupils produce work that is higher than the national standard for pupils of their age. Overall, however, there remains a need in this early stage of the school to improve pupils' basic drawing and painting skills.

231. In Year 8, pupils continue to make some improvement in their drawing and painting skills. Some pupils make good use of line, tone and colour to describe, in visual terms, the form and shape of a wide range of man-made and natural objects. In one lesson observed, for example, pupils made good use of colour in their Icon paintings. The majority apply reasonable effort to their work. As a result, the most able pupils succeed in producing two-dimensional drawings and paintings that are of a slightly higher standard than average.

232. In Year 9 there is a slight change in emphasis: pupils work with a variety of new materials, primarily in three-dimensional crafts. In one lesson, for instance, they worked enthusiastically to produce their own versions of African and Indian masks, using cardboard and plaster. There is a gradual improvement of standard during Year 9. Although the overall standard of work produced is close to average by the end of the year, the standard of the most able pupils is above average. Most pupils make reasonable progress.

233. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall standard of drawing and painting is around average. In Years 10-11, the majority of pupils produce art and craft work that is concerned with such traditional subject matter as the figure and still-life objects as well as the use of perspective to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat, two-dimensional surface. The evidence of pupils' visual diaries shows that many pupils are now capable of carrying out some degree of independent research.

234. The majority of pupils work well at this stage to acquire new knowledge and technical skills so as to communicate their values and ideas convincingly to others. There is little use, however, of any significant experimentation or exploration that employs a wide range of different media or materials and little experimentation with the use of photography or computer-generated imagery. Most pupils, however, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in traditional skills and media. Underachievement by boys remains a problem.

235. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7-9, good in Years 10-11 and good overall. Teachers come to lessons well prepared and make very good use of illustrative material. In one lesson in Year 9, for instance, excellent use was made of the school's collection of African and Indian masks to guide pupils and to arouse their interest. Lessons are well organised and introduced, so that pupils have clear objectives and understand precisely what they have to do. A suitably wide range of teaching methods enables pupils to learn to the best of their ability.

236. There are, however, weaknesses in teaching. Homework is set and marked satisfactorily on the whole, but is not used frequently enough to encourage pupils to research and work independently. Pupils are not provided with written briefs for homework tasks, with the result that they are not always clear about what has to be done and by when. Current procedures for assessing pupils' work and recording their achievement do not provide them frequently enough with detailed information about their achievements or with accurate targets for development.

237. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory overall. In response to a weakness identified at the last inspection, all aspects of the National Curriculum are now covered in Years 7-9. Pupils are provided with ample opportunity to work in clay and a variety of other three-dimensional craft materials. The majority of pupils in Years 7-9 are given many experiences to enhance their knowledge and understanding of art and craft, but require further opportunities for design work. The head of department works closely with other members of the department to produce suitable schemes of work.

238. Accommodation is generally satisfactory, but space limits the storage of materials, resources and pupils' work. Displays of work in both art studios and the corridors are satisfactory overall, but are not always labelled and often use mounting card of poor quality. There are very few electronic resources such as computers, scanners, digital cameras and printers available in the department. This restricts the range of activities that can be offered to pupils – and especially those to extend design or work-related projects. Overall, however, satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the quality of teaching and learning.• pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9.• provision for pupils with special educational needs in Years 7-9. <p>Areas for improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the standard of teachers' formal assessments at the end of Year 9.• the standard of work in resistant materials at GCSE level.• boys' underachievement in GCSE examinations.• better storage and presentation of work throughout the department.

239. By the end of Year 9 pupils' overall standard of attainment is average. In recent years teachers' formal assessments have suggested that the standard of most pupils' work is at Level 4, a level below the minimum expected of pupils of this age. Inspection findings indicate that these assessments are incorrect: the proportion of pupils attaining either Level 5 or Level 6 in their work is average.

240. During Years 7-9, pupils make good progress in acquiring practical skills, knowledge and understanding. In Year 7, for example, a mixed-ability group of pupils made good progress in understanding about the classification of food, as they watched a video and made notes, using a writing framework provided by their teacher. There was generally good progress and an average standard in designing and making in a Year 8 textiles lesson, although pupils' skill in using a sewing machine is lower than normally found. A high-ability group of pupils in Year 9 made good gains in their knowledge and application of electronics and formed sound links with what they were learning in mathematics and science. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is good: in a Year 8 food technology class, for instance, they acquired sound knowledge of both practical and theoretical issues in studying pasta dishes, the need for healthy eating and the importance of a balanced diet.

241. Pupils listen well and most concentrate fully during activities. Behaviour was good except in one Year 8 lesson, where pupils with known behavioural difficulties slowed the learning of all pupils. The learning assistant worked well with these pupils and helped them to control their anti-social behaviour. Homework is generally done on time; when a number of Year 8 pupils failed to do so in textiles, their teacher called them appropriately to account over the omission and set them a new deadline.

242. In GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils who gain the higher A*-C grades is well below average; in 2001 the proportion obtaining grades A*-G was also below average. For the past three years pupils have underachieved in relation to the grades they obtained in their other school subjects. The lowest level of attainment is in resistant materials: in this element of the subject boys significantly underachieved in 1999 and 2000, whilst girls did so in 2001.

243. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of attainment throughout the department is currently close to average. Achievement in GCSE examinations in resistant materials is held back by the large number of boys who are poorly organised, use time inefficiently, forget coursework or leave it around and risk losing it. Pupils' practical skills are, in general, better than the aspects of research, designing and evaluating work.

244. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils made a variety of useful storage units, some of which required good craft skills – such as the accurate cutting of a mortise and tenon joint. The turned chess set produced by one talented pupil showed very high craftsmanship as well as a high standard of finish. A higher-attaining boy produced a complex and well thought out design for a storage unit, but he had not the foresight to bring his coursework to guide his thinking within the practical session. A number of pupils with special educational needs choose to take the resistant materials option, but their problems with literacy or numeracy and their poor research skills often lower the standard of their examination result.

245. The overall standard gained in graphics, textiles and food technology is higher than that in resistant materials such as wood, metal and plastic. These first three areas tend to attract more girls, who are often better organised than boys in the timing of their coursework, and pupils with higher ability. In a graphics lesson in Year 11, higher-attaining boys dominated the discussions in the lesson, but there was little difference between boys and girls in the quality of practical work accomplished.

246. The overall level of numeracy is good. Year 7 pupils accurately measure and mark out work in resistant materials in such a way as to ensure a good fit. They weigh accurately in food technology. In electronics Year 9 pupils work out values and convert units correctly. The overall level of literacy is good: pupils are well able to read the texts required of them – as, for example, in GCSE food courses. They generally highlight key ideas in worksheets and make detailed notes from teachers' explanations to a standard higher than normally seen. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in taking notes from videos by means of the prompt sheets supplied by teachers. The overall standard of handwriting is good and spelling is generally accurate.

247. Gifted and talented pupils are not identified in lesson-planning nor are their needs fully recognised at present. Many pupils are content to do as their teacher asks, but are less able to work independently. Pupils with special educational needs progress well in Years 7-9, but often make less progress in Years 10-11. This is because there is no alternative accreditation offered for those pupils who find the coursework element at GCSE hard to organise and who succeed better in practical work.

248. Most pupils have good attitudes to the subject (very good in Years 7-9) and their relationships with teachers are very positive. There is a distinct difference between how pupils behave with their usual teachers and with those who are on temporary supply to the school. Any disruptive behaviour is usually by boys; the exception was in a Year 10 food group, where potentially higher-attaining girls chatted, giggled and generally wasted time, except when closely controlled by their teacher.

249. Teaching and learning are, on the whole, good and quite often very good throughout Years 7-11. The strongest aspects are teachers' subject knowledge and understanding, their enthusiasm for the subject and their relationship with pupils. The strongest subject elements are in graphics, electronics, food and textiles.

250. In a Year 11 graphics lesson, for example, the planning was very good, the pace well maintained and the challenge well pitched to stimulate pupils' minds: pupils learned a great deal about a range of information packs as well as what made them successful. In a lower-attaining class in Year 8, the teacher and learning assistant worked very well together in assisting all pupils. As a result of the resources provided, the pupils had a multi-sensory experience that helped them to learn about pasta as well as how to form, roll and shape their own pasta. Teaching is less successful where the teacher does not know the pupils or where there is too much emphasis on one aspect of learning at the expense of others. For example, in one resistant materials lesson in Year 7 pupils' designing was weak. Pupils concentrated on the basic construction, but then chatted rather than fully focusing on the finishing processes.

251. The quality of marking varies amongst teachers, but is satisfactory overall in Years 7-9 and good in Years 10-11. Homework is set regularly and rigorously followed up. The use of ICT during the inspection was largely linked to homework research and presentation, although Year 10 pupils made good use of a graphics program to produce interesting logo designs. Experience of ICT is built into the schemes of work and, during the course of the year, all pupils in Years 7-9 experience control technology. Computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) facilities are available – as, for example, the milling machine and the computerised sewing machine – but they were not used during the inspection. Lack of a computer restricts nutritional analysis in food.

252. The leadership and management of the subject have been adversely affected by the head of department's progressive physical incapacity over a number of years: this has unfortunately led to unsatisfactory features. The substantive head of department, with colleagues' help, has recently improved subject documentation. He is aware of inconsistencies in teachers' assessment in Year 9 as well as where weaknesses lie in provision at GCSE level. The local authority has provided help with ICT software, but this is not yet in use. The second-in-department has played a major, effective role in maintaining the momentum of the department.

253. The provision made for pupils in Years 7-9 is good both in the range and depth of experience offered with pupils and in the clear appreciation of what links all areas under the technology umbrella. There is, however, no unified approach to presenting or filing work, or for pupils having it to hand, once they have moved on to another aspect in the rotational class arrangements. Overall, the assessment of performance is not good enough, because teachers' assessments are not moderated and because the department does not have a complete evidence base from which to remedy weaknesses. Very good displays in the main corridors and textile room, as well as access to computers, raise pupils' awareness of what standards are possible.

254. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection in remedying most of the weaknesses noted then. The storage of pupils' bags still, however, poses a problem. The department is short of some suitable sewing machines in textiles and of textbooks in food. The resistant materials area is well served by a qualified and experienced technician, but the food and textiles areas have too little support. Statutory requirements are met.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths:

- pupils make good progress: their overall attainment is above average.
- teachers plan well and their expectations are high.
- the scheme of work for the subject is very detailed and well written.
- leadership and organisation are of a very high standard.

Areas for improvement:

- greater challenge for high-attaining pupils.

255. Pupils' overall level of attainment at the end of Year 9 is above that expected nationally. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 2001 at the end of Year 9, the results also indicated that the overall standard was above the national average. Boys and girls achieve similar results. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was above the national norm.

256. By the end of Year 11 pupils' level of attainment is above average. Results in GCSE examinations are generally above the national average. They declined to a point broadly in line with the national average in 2001 owing to the lower prior attainment of the pupils. A steady improvement in results was recorded from 1997 to 2000 and pupils have done consistently well in the subject. Pupils generally gain higher results in this subject than in most of their other subjects. Overall, girls achieve higher results than boys.

257. The department carries out a detailed and thorough analysis of examination performance: this indicates that pupils make good progress in this subject. A very clear strategy for improvement has been implemented that focuses on a close monitoring of pupils' progress, much examination practice, enhanced support for coursework and sound revision. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, because they receive good quality support in class and the work set for them is closely matched to their needs. Few strategies are, however, used to enhance the progress of higher-attaining pupils, who are often not challenged sufficiently in class.

258. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good knowledge of, for example, how landscapes are formed and how they may change. They know what different kinds of environments are like and understand the relationship between people and the world around them. In one Year 9 lesson seen, for example, pupils studied National Parks. During a brisk review of previous work they showed a good knowledge of the purpose of these parks and what their main features are. Pupils then used this knowledge effectively to take the role of different people who live in, or visit, these areas. After discussion with a partner, they successfully wrote a letter suggesting what their views might be in response to a farmer's proposal for a caravan and camping site. Pupils conduct geographical investigations and structure their explanations effectively. Another group of pupils in Year 9, for instance, competently extracted information about a recent volcano from Internet sources and structured an accurate report of what happened.

259. By the end of Year 11, pupils have a good understanding of the main features of cities and of the models geographers use to describe and explain how land in urban areas is used. One group in Year 10, for instance, accurately used a map to describe correctly the pattern of shops, offices and places of entertainment in the centre of Leeds. In Years 10-11 pupils acquire a clear understanding of geographical enquiry, the collection of data and the analysis of information to draw conclusions. Higher-attaining pupils write fluently and accurately, and use geographical terms correctly. All pupils have good numerical skills and use graphs well.

260. Throughout the school, pupils have a good knowledge of where places are, what they are like and how the people make their living. They quickly extract information from a wide range of resource material. In one lesson, for example, following a rapid review of previous work, pupils successfully used a series of photographs to discover details of the way of life of people in Kenya. Pupils have a good knowledge of geographical terms and higher-attaining pupils use them effectively. The majority of pupils give appropriate examples of the features they study. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs have a secure knowledge of the subject and their work is generally accurate.

261. Overall the quality of teaching is good. Teachers have an extensive knowledge of the subject and the local area. They provide clear explanations, drawing apposite illustrations from their own experiences or from the local area and ensuring that pupils understand topics clearly. Preparation and organisation are excellent, with the result that lessons start promptly and proceed smoothly. Lessons often start imaginatively, gaining pupils' interest and curiosity through, for example, a discussion of spectacular photographs of national parks in the USA or the skilful use of a child's story book. Teachers do not, however, always use a sufficiently wide range of strategies to involve all pupils in such discussion.

262. All lessons are carefully planned. They have a clear focus and a variety of activities that extend pupils' knowledge and reinforce their understanding. Teachers effectively use exercises that ensure pupils use what they have learnt in a new context. In one lesson, for instance, lower-attaining pupils in Year 10 studied the layout of a city. A brisk, introductory review of previous work, using well-chosen photographs, gained the pupils' interest. They then worked through a series of well-structured exercises, in pairs and individually, using photographs, maps and diagrams to reinforce and extend the knowledge they gained earlier and made use of it in the context of a local city. The teacher drew on excellent knowledge to add detail, support individual pupils and assess the good progress that the pupils made.

263. Teachers have high expectations of both behaviour and the quality of work. They manage classes very well. A positive working atmosphere is quickly established, so that work is always completed accurately and well presented, and books are maintained in good order. Every opportunity is taken to develop pupils' knowledge and use of geographical terms and teachers set a good example by using them regularly.

Opportunities are appropriately provided for pupils to write for different audiences and due emphasis is given to the structure of extended pieces of work, so that written work is varied and of good quality.

264. All lessons have clear objectives, but they are not always made known clearly to pupils. Conclusions are too often ineffective, as they are rushed and do not assess fully the effectiveness of lessons and the understanding gained. The resources used in lessons are varied, of good quality and used effectively to provide information and enhance pupils' understanding. Marking is up to date and generally incorporates helpful comments, but unfinished work is not often followed up. Homework is appropriate and set regularly.

265. Pupils learn well. They are well motivated, always interested and keen to produce their best work, owing to lively teaching and a variety of purposeful activities. Pupils behave well and maintain concentration throughout lessons because of very skilful class management and work that is closely matched to their capabilities. They settle to work quickly, listen carefully, are attentive and work hard. Most pupils are willing to contribute to class discussion, but a significant minority only do so when asked directly by the teacher. When working in pairs or groups, they organise themselves speedily and cooperate very effectively with one another.

266. The curriculum is of high quality and fully complies with national requirements. The scheme of work is detailed, well thought out and includes a good range of opportunities for fieldwork and the use of ICT. The procedures for assessment are very good. Pupils' work is assessed regularly through a range of excellent assessment tasks. The data from these is recorded efficiently and used effectively to monitor pupils' progress and to support the work of individual pupils. Comments on reports, however, are weak, as they do not focus sufficiently on what pupils have achieved.

267. The subject is taught by a team of well-qualified and experienced teachers. The staff are hard-working and committed to high attainment. Resources are of good quality and well organised. All pupils have their own textbook, but there are insufficient maps of the local area and atlases for pupils in Years 10-11.

268. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a clear sense of direction for the subject, which is very well organised and has a clear mandate to raise standards. The scheme of work, the system of assessment and monitoring procedures are all of high quality. Standards in Years 7-9 have improved since the time of the last inspection and the good standards in Years 10-11 have been maintained. The department has the capacity to succeed in raising standards still further.

HISTORY

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

Strengths:

- teaching is good overall, and often very good in Years 7-9.
- teachers have high expectations of pupils.
- most pupils make good progress.
- pupils' attitudes to the subject are good overall and very good in Years 10-11.
- all pupils have their own textbook for use at school and home.

Areas for improvement:

- the lack of long-term planning in the department.
- the poor condition of many textbooks.

269. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment overall is broadly in line with that expected nationally. This is a similar standard to that reported at the time of the last inspection. In 2001, teachers assessed their pupils overall as a little above the national average by the end of Year 9. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was average. There is little difference between the overall attainment of boys and girls.

270. The proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-C in the GCSE examinations was above the national average in 2001, following below average results in 2000. In 2001, the proportion attaining grades A*-G was above the national average, as it has been for the past three years. These standards are an improvement on those reported at the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades A or A* has been below average for the past four years, although there has been a considerable improvement in 2000 and 2001. The improved results in 2001 reflect a very determined approach by the department to raise standards, following the dip in attainment in 2000.

271. The overall standard of the work of pupils currently following the GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 is above that expected nationally. Most pupils are making good progress from their work in Years 7-9. Pupils with special educational needs reach below average standards, but make satisfactory progress in Years 10-11.

272. By the end of Year 9, pupils generally have good knowledge and understanding about the past. They explain the causes of events well, and most understand that there are often many reasons why an event occurred – as, for example, in their work on the causes of World War 1. They see and explain changes and continuities over a period of time; the highest attainers assess successfully the relative importance of changes. In work in a sample of books seen during the inspection, the highest attainers competently evaluated the changes in British industry and society between 1750 and 1900, in order to decide which developments had had the greatest impact on people's lives.

273. Pupils successfully select and collate information from an appropriate range of sources to deepen their knowledge and understanding. In a wide sample of work seen, lower-attaining pupils made valid deductions from Hogarth cartoons about life in the eighteenth century. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 used a painting of a World War 1 battlefield effectively to deepen their understanding of the horrors of war. The lowest-attaining pupils often demonstrate good understanding in their oral answers, but their low level of literacy prevents them showing the depth of their understanding in their written work.

274. During Years 7-9, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Lower-attaining pupils usually make good progress, because teachers set work which is suitable and select resources that allow pupils to complete the activities successfully. The highest-attaining pupils usually make good progress, especially in Year 9 where the work set for the top groups is appropriately demanding. Two groups in Year 9 – a high-attaining set and a lower-attaining set – were seen working on evidence about life in the trenches in World War 1. Pupils in both groups made good progress, because the teacher appropriately modified the standard worksheet and reduced the number of resources used by the lower attainers.

275. The overall standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 was above the national average. Most pupils taking the GCSE course have good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 11, for example, defined communism and The Cold War adequately and understood the rivalry between the USSR and the USA following World War 2. Higher attainers showed deep understanding of the nature of the propaganda from the two rival countries.

276. In these two years pupils make good links between causes and effects, and understand well the role of individuals in shaping events. In a sample of work seen during the inspection, pupils explained clearly the reasons for the failure of the League of Nations to deal with the Abyssinian and Manchurian crises. The highest-attaining pupils use sources very well, assessing the reliability and usefulness of sources successfully. A group in Year 11, for example, used a video about the Berlin airlift very well to deduce the post-war feelings in the USA about the situation in Europe. They write lucidly and at length, producing well-structured essays. Lower attainers struggle to interpret sources, using them for information only.

277. Teaching is good overall and often very good in Years 7-9. This is an improvement on the quality reported at the time of the last inspection. Teachers know their subject very well and communicate it effectively, so that most pupils acquire solid knowledge and understanding about the past. Teachers are confident about the requirements of the examination courses and ensure that pupils are well prepared for their examinations.

278. Lessons are well planned, generally taking good account of pupils' differing abilities. Teachers frequently modify work and resources to ensure that pupils of all abilities work at appropriately demanding levels. In Year 7, however, all pupils are usually asked to complete the same task, using the same resources. Although the teachers provide extra support for the lowest attainers, these pupils sometimes struggle with the materials they are asked to use. This was particularly noticeable with a group studying the Black Death that used a textbook with a high reading age.

279. An appropriate variety of teaching methods – including individual study, work in pairs and groups, and whole-class discussion – ensures that pupils have good opportunities to learn in a range of different ways. Some effective whole-class teaching helped lower attainers in Year 11 to develop their understanding of the chronology of events which led to the Cold War. Another group of Year 11 pupils worked effectively in pairs to consider the options open to President Kennedy at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. The effectiveness of this methodology was helped by the cooperative approach to paired work from the pupils.

280. Teachers use resources and teaching methods that stimulate interest amongst the pupils. In a Year 8 lesson on witchcraft in the seventeenth century, for instance, the teacher established the problem of stereotypical views of witches quickly and effectively by asking pupils to close their eyes, picture a witch and then describe one feature from their image to the whole class.

281. Teachers expect their pupils to work hard. They maintain a good working environment with friendly but, when necessary, firm discipline. Most pupils have a very positive approach to their work and behave well: these are important contributory factors to their good progress. A small minority occasionally distract others and interrupt the flow of the lesson by chattering instead of listening to the teachers. Teachers deal quickly with such interruptions. Most pupils listen very well to teachers' instructions and explanations. When working individually, they concentrate on the task in hand. Many show great interest and clearly want to improve their knowledge and understanding.

282. The subject meets the statutory requirements for Years 7-9. The leadership and management of the department are both very good. The head of department has a very clear vision for the development of the subject and is determined to maintain its current popularity as an examination course in Years 10 and 11. The department works extremely closely as a team and the newly qualified teacher is supported very well. There is a compelling ethos for learning throughout the department and a noticeable commitment to improve the performance of pupils taking examination courses. The departmental documentation reflects the good team-work and is of very high quality, although the longer-term plans have not been committed to paper.

283. All pupils in Years 7-9 have a textbook for their own use at school and at home. This is a very strong feature of the department. As a result of books being in regular use, however, many are very dilapidated and in need of replacement. Pupils are encouraged to use ICT for research. The resource list for pupils in Year 9 studying trench warfare, for instance, included appropriate websites.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of specialist provision in ICT is **good**, but the provision of ICT across other subjects is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths:

- the successful emphasis on high standards, disciplined behaviour and personal responsibility.
- a brisk pace and suitable challenge in all lessons.
- pupils' self-critical and reflective uses of ICT.
- the quality of specialist teaching, subject management and technical help.

Areas for improvement:

- some aspects of health and safety in ICT rooms.
- statutory requirements for teaching the subject are not met in Years 10-11.
- the standard reached by high-ability pupils by the end of Year 9.
- a planned programme for the replacement and extension of both hardware and software.
- close monitoring of exactly what ICT is taught across all subjects.

284. By the end of Year 9 pupils' overall level of attainment is above average. Over Years 7-9 most pupils make good progress and at the end of Year 9 achieve the nationally expected standard. This represents a good achievement, because pupils' overall standard is slightly below average on entry to the school in Year 7. In 2001, teachers' assessments indicated that the proportion of Year 9 pupils reaching the national Level 5 was above average. Over the last three years, attainment has been above average. Too few pupils, however, reach a level higher than 5.

285. In Year 10 less than 25 per cent of pupils – the first cohort – take an external examination course in ICT. There are no formal arrangements for pupils in Years 10 and 11 to experience the National Curriculum programme of study for ICT, unless they are in this minority group studying ICT for the GCSE examination. The standard of those following the specialist course is average overall, but other pupils' level of capability in ICT, though varying widely, is below average overall.

286. By the end of Year 9, pupils are competent and confident in the efficient use of ICT applications, including word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and database software. They use scanners and industry-standard, image-manipulation software satisfactorily. Many use advanced features of word-processing software to enhance their documents. They use ICT effectively to communicate and present ideas and information and to produce well-designed, carefully researched newspaper reports. Pupils have created, for example, a range of newspaper-style presentations about local Dewsbury personalities who won the Victoria Cross for gallantry in World War 1.

287. In Year 7, pupils learn about basic ICT terminology, using industry-standard word processing, desktop publishing and presentation software. They quickly learn to load and save work correctly and gradually acquire keyboard efficiency. They know about passwords and networks and how to log on to the school network to access their work files. Most can access the Internet and search for suitable graphic images to enhance their work, when producing multimedia presentations about their hobbies and interests.

288. Pupils in Year 8 continue to build their skills in using ICT. They increasingly decide on the appropriateness of ICT for a given task and know satisfactorily how to use spreadsheets and databases to handle information, carrying out enquiries and entering data. They reflect thoughtfully on their uses of ICT, its benefits and limitations, and how it is used in society. In Year 9 they learn how spreadsheets are used to model real-life situations and to predict their possible outcomes.

289. In Year 10, the minority of pupils who follow a GCSE course in the subject extend their word-processing skills soundly by designing and using a wider range of documents that display more advanced use of word processing. They create different views of a lengthy document to enable faster and more effective drafting and redrafting of text. They have constructed, for instance, spreadsheet models that predict to a promoter the most profitable structure for ticket costs, so establishing whether a concert tour can be profitable.

290. Overall, GCSE work in Year 10 demonstrates pupils' increased capability to use ICT effectively and with insight. Pupils integrate several ICT tools effectively to carry out a planned project. Most, for example, produce coursework that incorporates graphics programs, spreadsheets, databases and information saved from the Internet within word processing and desktop publishing, so developing increasingly more complex and effective applications of ICT. Pupils learn, for example, to create advanced formulae and multi-chart types for their coursework. During Year 10 they show increasing insight and developing capability in the thoughtful annotation and improvement of their coursework.

291. Most pupils on the specialist-taught courses make good progress in acquiring or extending their ICT skills. Most pupils in Year 7 make good progress in their studies by quickly learning to use both the network and the computer keyboard efficiently, so increasing the pace and accuracy of their text-based work. In Year 8 they improve their understanding, speed and technical accuracy in using such industry-standard software as e-mail, multimedia applications and the Internet. Pupils in Year 9 extend their knowledge of spreadsheets beyond handling and organising data to the development and testing of basic scenarios and models.

292. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress because of the intensive and sensitive help of teachers, well-structured software, helpful written guides and the effective support of learning assistants. Higher-attaining pupils also make satisfactory progress overall by moving more quickly than others on to work that requires a wide use of ICT skills. The highest attainers, however, require more challenging work by the end of Year 9, to enable them to work towards the highest levels of attainment through such means as designing and testing information systems and working with computer-controlled devices.

293. The progress of pupils on the specialist courses in Years 10-11 is enhanced by more extensive and challenging work and deeper self-evaluation. Their folders show thoughtful evaluations and reviews of their ICT work as well as different approaches to achieving the required results in coursework. Most pupils make sound progress in acquiring a suitable level of self-accountability, showing responsibility and persistence in producing coursework to ever more specific and demanding criteria. In Year 10, pupils learn how to use spreadsheets to create complex, extended formulae and begin to use macro language programming in setting up worksheets. They plan and predict, for example, the most direct fire-safety escape routes from individual screens in a multiplex cinema, when looking at the uses of ICT in the business world.

294. Pupils show a ready willingness to work hard in lessons and to participate thoughtfully and with concentration in discussions. They take considerable pride in the range of work they produce. They demonstrate persistence in drafting and producing improved versions of their work. They take increasing responsibility for their own progress and for maintaining their work files on the network. Pupils' annotations on printed work files demonstrate their increasing understanding of the need to reflect upon, and critically evaluate, the quality and accuracy of their work.

295. The quality of specialist teaching and learning is good overall throughout the school. Teachers use praise and the recognition of achievement very positively. Good teaching is characterised by a brisk pace, a highly disciplined yet pleasant classroom climate and high expectations. Teachers intervene in a timely and constructive way to extend pupils' ICT capability. The quality of specialist teachers' subject knowledge, lesson planning and classroom management are high.

296. Most lessons are carefully structured. They have well-defined introductions and appropriately timed sequences of activity. Time is not, however, used as profitably as it could be in some non-specialist lessons, because activities are not structured tightly enough to encourage pupils to work at a fast enough pace. In the majority of lessons plenary sessions effectively synthesise and reinforce what has been taught. Teachers make very effective use of departmental computers, although these are of variable quality. All teachers intervene sensitively and effectively to encourage pupils and to identify any problems.

297. The department of three specialist teachers is well led and coordinated by an experienced member of staff. It has a strong professional ethos. Their work is supported in Years 7 and 8 by teachers drawn from the English and mathematics departments. All staff teaching ICT share a dedication and enthusiasm for developing pupils' skills and capability in the subject. Non-specialist teachers, however, generally require more subject knowledge.

298. Departmental documentation is of a high standard and complies with all current subject requirements – as, for example, outlining measures to protect pupils from undesirable materials on the Internet. The development plan for ICT is comprehensive and generally realistic, although the actions to cost and replace obsolete hardware are not detailed or clear enough. Some aspects of the programme of study – such as working with information systems and control – require better coordination across the school.

299. The lack of clarity in the role and responsibilities of the current subject leader is a weakness. It is currently unclear who is responsible or accountable for the lack of strategic planning and monitoring of provision for ICT across the curriculum, especially in Years 10-11. This seriously limits the school's potential for effective provision in the subject across school and especially into the sixth form, where the current inconsistent provision of experience in ICT in Years 10-11 depresses potential achievement.

300. Overall, owing to the gaps in provision in Years 10-11, the school has made unsatisfactory progress in ICT since its last inspection, even though much progress has been made in remedying many of the weaknesses identified in 1996. Amongst the improvements made are a comprehensive development plan, a detailed scheme of work and assessment for pupils in Years 7-9, separately timetabled ICT lessons for these three year groups, and GCSE accreditation being on offer to pupils in Year 10. Inappropriate hardware is being phased out and the school now has a clear policy of acquiring only industry-standard hardware and software. The school has installed a school-wide network, with up-to-date software of good quality in some rooms, and broadband access to the Internet for pupils and staff.

301. The effective ICT technician makes a good contribution to the work of the department and to pupils' learning. New ICT rooms have been created. Some computer provision has been made for most subject areas. Timetabling restrictions mean, however, that access to the two specialist ICT rooms for the cross-curricular use of ICT is very limited. Staff have embarked on the *New Opportunities Fund* ICT-training programme. They have greatly benefited from several associated, skills-based ICT courses from the school's main training provider; it is planned that all training will be completed by the end of 2002.

302. Some significant weaknesses in provision identified by the last inspection have not, however, been addressed. Continuity and progression from Year 9 into Years 10-11 have been only partly improved. The school still does not fulfill the statutory requirements for ICT in Years 10-11. This is because there is no planned teaching programme for those pupils who do not take the GCSE course in ICT and the school does not have adequate monitoring and evaluation of the use that all subjects make of ICT.

303. Despite the school's commitment to the wider use of ICT in all subjects – with its associated training and much improved hardware – there is inconsistency in the application of ICT within subject departments. Some now use ICT to enhance pupils' knowledge and skills, whilst others do not make regular, effective provision. There is also not enough teaching overall of computerised control and information systems. Although these feature within the planned schemes of work for science and for design and technology, they are not a regular, secure feature of learning.

304. The use of ICT outside the specialist department is variable. In science, some pupils use the Internet to develop their scientific knowledge and curiosity. In design and technology, pupils use ICT to help their design work in graphics, electronics and resistant materials. They sometimes use computer-aided design (CAD) software to create two-dimensional work, but have limited experience of learning how computers can control production machinery (CAM). Pupils make good use of ICT overall in geography and history to extend their sources of information and improve their coursework. In music, pupils in Years 10-11 make effective use of ICT to enhance their understanding of composition and notation. Pupils make good use of ICT in business education and in other vocational settings, where they learn new uses for word processing, spreadsheets and databases as part of their course assignments. Pupils with special education needs regularly use a commercial integrated-learning product to improve their literacy and numeracy.

305. Pupils in English, however, do not make sustained or effective use of ICT beyond their experiences in Year 7, where the English department teaches the ICT scheme of work to all pupils. The use of ICT in mathematics to support pupils' mathematical understanding and enquiry is unsatisfactory. Little is done and departmental resources are inadequate to support class teaching.

306. Although the ratio of pupils to computers is good overall, a significant proportion of computers are close to becoming obsolete; a planned and costed programme of replacement is required. Aspects of health and safety provision in the subject are unsatisfactory. The lack of ventilation in the two main ICT teaching rooms and of systems to check and report on the electrical safety of the school's computer systems and peripheral equipment should be dealt with as a priority.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- the department is well led and managed.
- pupils achieve well in Spanish; girls achieve well in French.
- good use is made of assessment to monitor pupils' progress.
- good attitudes and good teaching help pupils to learn well.

Areas for improvement:

- the accuracy of written work in Years 7-9.
- pupils' skill and confidence in speaking.

307. Teachers' assessments of pupils' standard of work at the end of Year 9 in 2001 suggested that pupils' overall level of attainment was close to the national average. The proportion of boys attaining Levels 5 and 6 was above the national average for boys, whereas the proportion of girls attaining these levels was below that of girls nationally.

308. In 2001, the proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in the full-course GCSE examination in French was significantly below the national average. The proportion of girls attaining these grades was, however, above that of girls nationally; this marks an improvement on the previous year. In contrast, the attainment of boys was significantly below that of boys nationally and represents a drop in their results from 2000. Boys underachieved, particularly in the oral component of the examination. The proportion of pupils attaining grades in the range A*-G was in line with the national average: almost all pupils in Year 11 were entered for the examination in French.

309. A small number of pupils learn Spanish for the full-course GCSE examination. All pupils attained a grade in the range A-E, five of which were grades A-C. Since Spanish is not commenced until Year 10 and pupils have less curricular time than in French, these pupils achieve well.

310. Pupils' overall level of attainment in French by the end of Year 9 is average. Pupils have a good understanding of the foreign language, which is used extensively in the classroom by teachers. They extract information successfully from conversations that they hear on cassette – as, for example, the leisure pursuits that people like and dislike. Pupils' own oral skills are weaker and below average. Many pupils lack confidence and have to be encouraged to extend their replies. In a Year 8 class, for instance, pupils gave short opinions about food, and middle-attaining pupils in a Year 9 class gave only short opinions about television programmes. In two Year 7 classes, however, pupils spoke in complete sentences, from memory and with a good pronunciation, to describe themselves and say which leisure activities they liked.

311. In their written work pupils reach an appropriate level. In Year 7, for instance, pupils write at a reasonable standard about their preferences. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 8 write competently about future events and in Year 9 write about present, past and future events, using the imperfect tense when describing the weather. Middle- and lower-attaining pupils in Year 9 use the perfect and the immediate future tenses, but not with consistent accuracy. Accents are often omitted from past participles. A weakness is that few pupils complete corrections or redraft their work in order to improve its accuracy. In contrast, some high standard work was on display: in an excellent report on holidays a girl in Year 9 used three different tenses; pupils in Year 8 had word-processed descriptions of their home town and added art work; and pupils in Years 7-9 had produced some interesting songs and poems.

312. Pupils' overall attainment in French and Spanish by the end of Year 11 is average. Pupils' understanding of the spoken word is good. In a Year 11 Spanish lesson, for example, pupils recognised from pictures in the textbook, and put into the correct order, ten household tasks that they heard on cassette. Speaking is improving in both languages in Year 11, because the department has targeted this skill for the examination. Higher-attaining pupils in two Year 11 classes, for instance, spent the lesson practising their daily routine in pairs or independently, using both the present and perfect tenses. They extended each sequence with the addition of time phrases; in one of the classes they had a very useful model sentence as a guide. Some pupils then recorded their presentation on tape in the language laboratory and listened intelligibly to the finished product. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 11 talked about illnesses in a reasonable accent.

313. In their written work in Year 11, higher-attaining pupils write about such topics as holidays, using three different tenses. Average-attaining pupils write appropriately about their family or the school. Lower-attaining pupils write about their home town, using the *on peut* construction. In a sample of coursework about work experience, pupils' work is well presented, written in paragraphs, has a logical progression through the tasks that they had to complete and finishes with an evaluation and what they would like to do in the future. Pupils make obvious attempts to expand the scope of their writing by, for example, using different tenses to give opinions. Some pupils are more successful and more consistently accurate than others. Pupils in Spanish in Year 11 use the preterite and perfect tenses appropriately to write about past events.

314. The achievement and rate of progress of most pupils are good in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in Years 10-11. The department takes an active part in strengthening pupils' literacy in Years 7-9 through a focus on important verbs, the introduction of tenses and the recycling of infinitive constructions with different verbs. Key words and phrases, such as opinions, are displayed prominently in class. Numbers are used well for dates, telling the time and for the 24-hour clock. Teachers constantly remind pupils in Years 10 and 11 that the use of different tenses and opinions is the way to achieve higher grades.

315. Pupils across Years 7-11 acquire a sound knowledge of the vocabulary of the topics they cover. Year 11 pupils, who started Spanish only in Year 10 and with a limited share of curricular time, have made very good progress over the five terms. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. In a Year 8 class, for example, some of the pupils wrote the immediate future tense and the *on peut* construction quite accurately; other pupils write about their likes and dislikes. These pupils are well integrated into classes, which in some years are small. When support is available, it is good.

316. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Pupils apply themselves well to their tasks, generally respond well to the teacher and work cooperatively in pairs (which usually comprise a boy and a girl). They also work well independently and with limited supervision – as was the case with Year 11, when they recorded their oral presentations in the language laboratory.

317. The quality of teaching is good overall. The department consists of well-established, experienced teachers. They make very effective use of the foreign language in the classroom, enhanced by listening exercises on cassette, to promote pupils' aural skilfulness. All tasks are set in the foreign language, but teachers ensure that all pupils understand thoroughly what they have to do. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught. Over time, pupils acquire a sound knowledge of verbs, different tenses and the relevant vocabulary. Pupils are regularly encouraged to use different tenses and opinions to extend their capability.

318. Lessons are well planned, with a formal start and finish. Teachers begin every lesson with revision and then introduce different activities and skills to help pupils to maintain their concentration and interest during lessons. Pupils have to think, are productive and work at a good, steady pace. In a very effective Spanish lesson in Year 11, for example, pupils practised the perfect tense, recognised ten household tasks from cassette, developed these in pair work (using three of the examples that they had heard plus one more example from memory) and consolidated the oral work in writing. Occasionally, however, opportunities to involve pupils more fully in lessons by, for example, their reading aloud or asking questions instead of just answering them, are not exploited enough.

319. Teachers' expectations are high, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Teaching methods are effective: good use is made of such means as the overhead projector, cassette recorder, flash cards, chorus work and paired work in most lessons. Chorus work does not, however, always challenge individual pupils enough and pupils do not always present the results of some of their paired work to the class. Teachers make good use of time and work closely with the support assistants. Assessment is used thoroughly to monitor pupils' progress. Homework is set regularly and written work is well marked, using either levels or grades. Teachers help pupils by putting in many of the missing accents, but pupils frequently do not respond appropriately by completing corrections or redrafting their work. This aspect is not monitored closely enough as a means of helping pupils to increase the accuracy of their written work.

320. The department meets statutory requirements for teaching the National Curriculum. Leadership and management are good overall. Effective monitoring of teaching takes place. Teachers make good use of assessment data to monitor the progress of pupils. Examination results are very closely analysed. Last year's analysis resulted in the decision to target speaking skills in Year 11, particularly those of boys, for improvement. Pupils evaluate their own performance and set themselves targets. The department makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development through the creative writing of songs and poems in Years 7-9, good relationships in paired work and very stimulating displays in classrooms.

321. Departmental accommodation is very pleasant. The language laboratory is used well. Books in Years 7-9 are now outdated and in poor condition. The number of pupils expressing an interest in continuing French or Spanish into the sixth form next year looks very promising.

322. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching has improved substantially. Many of the other shortcomings have been rectified: some ICT, for example, has now been incorporated into the main curriculum. The department has no foreign language assistant and therefore fails to provide pupils with contact with a native speaker. The department is committed to high achievement and has the capacity to improve further.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- the leadership of the department.
- the quality of teaching and learning musical instruments.
- the range and quality of extracurricular activities.

Areas for improvement:

- the quality of singing.
- the provision of computer-assisted music in Years 7-9.

323. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9, their overall attainment is in line with the national average. Pupils perform, compose and improvise, using electronic keyboards as well as (in some cases) their orchestral instruments, voices and percussion. Pupils gain good familiarity with the music keyboard, although many of them rely too heavily on letter names which are printed on the instruments. They know the names of notes on the stave and understand how familiar scales and chords are formed.

324. In one lesson on film music, for example, pupils in Year 9 showed a good grasp of musical elements and features that enabled them to begin work satisfactorily on compositions in pairs and groups. The resulting work included chants, a piece for solo instrument and a piece composed at the computer, but intended for trombone and piano. Pupils also learn about music from a wide range of sources: these include the English composers Michael Nyman and John Tavener as well as music from Asia and Indonesia.

325. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 11 is above the national average. In the 1999-2001 GCSE examinations, taken together, 22 out of 32 pupils gained grades in the range A*-C. One of these gained an A* grade.

326. In the work seen during the inspection the overall standard of performance, composition and listening was above the national average by the end of Year 11. In one lesson, pupils developed and played their compositions and rehearsed their performances. Their work included a guitar composition with fast passages that required a high level of technique and a Country and Western song performed in appropriate style. Pupils at this stage also acquire good aural skills and background knowledge of music from a wide range of sources. This listening aspect of their studies enables them to make accurate, analytical comments on the music they hear in their regular lessons, in tests and in the final GCSE examinations. A significant number of pupils at this stage (as by the end of Year 9) play individual instruments to a good standard, as exemplified in their creditable successes at Grade IV or higher in the Associated Board examinations.

327. The quality of learning in Years 7-9 is good overall. Pupils enter the school with a wide range of musical attainment and experience and with general educational standards a little below average. The good teaching they receive enables most of them to acquire quite quickly the necessary skills on which their creative work is based. This was particularly noticeable in a lesson in Year 7 on creating music for a film clip of a car chase: they readily understood how rising pitch and *accelerando* are used to denote tension. The quality of singing in the school varies widely: the standard in class work is average overall; the quality of singing heard in a hymn practice was poor; but some individual pupils sing at a very high standard.

328. Almost all pupils are interested in their lessons. Some classes are especially enthusiastic and clearly enjoy the subject. In a lesson in Year 8, for instance, in order to learn about “hooks” or catchy phrases in popular songs, pupils first sang and played a simple song and then analysed it, in order to identify the introduction, verse and chorus. Pupils with special educational needs are well involved in all class musical activities. They make good progress and achieve standards in some aspects of music-making that compare favourably with those of their peers. Musically gifted and talented pupils, too, make good progress in their studies. Often these pupils take leading roles in group work and in rehearsals.

329. In Years 10-11 all pupils learn well and make good progress. The requirements of the GCSE course help to motivate pupils to reach appropriate standards in performing, composing and musical understanding. During the inspection, pupils in Year 11 worked on compositions that aimed to build a sense of tension. In their discussions they naturally used musical language – as, for example, “transpose it down” – in order to share their ideas about the compositions.

330. Overall, pupils’ attitudes to learning are good throughout the school and especially so in Year 10, where they quickly develop a mature approach to the subject. This is particularly evident when pupils work independently and without direct supervision. Almost all pupils behave very well.

331. Teaching is always at least good (and sometimes very good) throughout the whole age range. This good teaching is characterised by a broad and secure subject knowledge and expertise. Although one of the two permanent teachers was absent during the inspection, it is clear that staff have complementary skills that are used to good effect. Often these skills are used to demonstrate how a piece should be played or sung, to accompany pieces or to direct pupils in their listening tests. The teaching of literacy is sound overall. It is good in Years 10-11, where pupils are required to write about different styles and types of music.

332. Teachers pay good attention throughout the school to the correct use of musical terminology. They always prepare lessons in detail, with each section realistically timed. They have high expectations that pupils will work hard and behave well. Pupils are managed very effectively. A team of visiting instrumental teachers gives lessons to about 100 pupils. These teachers make a very good contribution to pupils’ musical education. The day-to-day assessment of pupils’ work is sound overall and good in Years 10-11. The newly formed National Curriculum levels are used well to monitor the effectiveness of teaching.

333. The department is very well led and managed. Timetables for the large number of instrumentalists are very well devised to ensure that pupils do not miss the same lessons each week. After the last inspection, new accommodation was provided to give enough space for the increased number of instrumental learners and for practice and rehearsal spaces. This is a very good improvement and contributes much to the raising of standards.

334. Pupils in the music department take part in a very wide range of activities outside lessons. These include an orchestra, a woodwind group, a flute group and a choir. Pupils also have excellent opportunities to perform and work at events in the wider community. These include concerts, local festivals, religious celebrations and the annual involvement in the National Festival of Music and Youth. Music makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- the well-balanced curriculum and good extracurricular provision, particularly in games.
- the high quality of teaching.
- the department is very well led and managed.
- good working relationships exist between teachers and pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- the playing fields are in an unacceptably poor condition.

335. At the end of Year 11, the overall standard in the subject is above average. The first pupils to follow the GCSE course will take the examination in the summer of 2002. Pupils' written work is good and assignments are nearly always adequately completed. Both boys and girls express thoughtful opinions about current issues in sport. In one lesson, for example, pupils analysed and compared reports of sport in both the broadsheet and tabloid press. Girls in particular, when questioned about theoretical issues in sport, have a good store of knowledge and discuss items in an informed way.

336. By the end of Year 9 pupils' overall standard of attainment is higher than is typically seen. About three-quarters of the girls in Year 8, for instance, ably construct dance sequences to meet teachers' requirements and work well both individually and in pairs. Girls have very good gymnastic skills and at least half work well above the normally expected standard, executing front and back walkovers and with a few holding front and lateral splits. Many pupils confidently perform the cartwheel (and variations of it), integrating these movements smoothly into floor sequences. Boys perform well at rugby league, operating moves from set play, and find the game stimulating and challenging – some two-thirds of them have very capable ball-handling and tackling skills. Pupils with special educational needs always work very well and teachers are careful to involve them in lessons.

337. Throughout the school, pupils reach a good standard in the practical aspects of the subject. In health-related exercise, girls perform aerobic exercises well, although their knowledge about the effects of exercise on the cardio-vascular system is sometimes sketchy. Boys conduct the warm-up phases of lessons confidently and effectively. Most boys have satisfactory racket skills in badminton: about a third consistently and successfully apply a range of strokes in the game, although few execute drop-shots.

338. The overall standard of teaching is good. Teachers have considerable subject knowledge and inspire pupils both to perform well and to reach their potential. Lessons proceed with purpose and pace, because teachers plan lessons very effectively. Lessons have clear objectives that are often shared with pupils. Electronic technology is occasionally used to deliver theory lessons: in these cases the subject matter is very professionally presented.

339. The behaviour and attitudes of pupils are very good at all ages. Very few pupils miss lessons without acceptable reasons. There is always good cooperation and collaboration amongst pupils in lessons. These attributes help pupils to increase their understanding of the subject and their evaluations of one another's work.

340. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Thorough documentation and policy formulation provide clear aims and objectives for the department's work. A well-planned programme meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and ensures that all pupils experience an appropriate

range of activities. Many excellent displays throughout the school both celebrate pupils' achievements and provide helpful information for them. There are clear policies for developing literacy and numeracy within the subject. Although the library does not have CD-ROMs for examination courses in the subject, resources are generally good.

341. Aspects of the school's accommodation and facilities are very good – most notably, the sports hall and gymnasium. The playing fields, however, are poorly drained. Soccer and hockey cannot be played for extended periods each year, because the fields are too wet. No ICT equipment is specifically available to the department.

342. Extracurricular provision is good for both boys and girls, particularly in games. Many pupils take advantage of the activities provided at lunchtimes and after school. Some teams – most notably in soccer and rugby league – do well in regional and national competitions. Several former pupils play professional sport. The school arranges biennial skiing trips to Canada and has organised a games tour to New Zealand for the current year. Outdoor and adventurous activities are provided for pupils in Years 7 and 9 on annual residential courses to Wales and the Yorkshire Dales.

343. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. A GCSE examination course is now well established and popular. All teachers have ICT skills, which they use both for administration and for the production of teaching materials.

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

In the inspection, ten 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 the ten courses completed in 2001, 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
Mathematics (GCE)	8	100	87	63	43	7.25	5.80
Biology (GCE)	5	100	88	40	34	6.40	5.25
Design and Technology (GCE)	16	94	91	0	30	4.00	5.38
Business Studies (AS-AVCE)	11	91	87	9	n/a	n/a	n/a
Information & Communication Technology (AVCE-AS)	17	94	n/a	24	n/a	n/a	n/a
Travel and Tourism (AS-AVCE)	6	83	86	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Geography (GCE)	9	100	92	11	38	5.56	5.74
History (GCE)	9	89	88	11	35	3.56	5.45
English Literature (GCE)	6	100	95	50	37	6.67	5.91
French (GCE)	7	71	89	29	38	3.40	5.59

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business Studies	3	100	n/a	33	n/a	0	n/a

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

344. Most of the sixth-form work seen was for the GCE A-level course. One GCSE lesson was inspected for students resitting the examination in order to get a higher grade. Students on this course are well supported. The students seen acquired good understanding of, for example, angles and bearings through sensitive and closely targeted individual help. The irregular attendance of some students in these groups, however, has a detrimental effect on their progress. The teaching was good.

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

Strengths:

- overall achievement is good: students grasp concepts soundly and apply them well.
- teaching is of high quality.
- teachers know students' capabilities very well and target support for them carefully.
- homework supports and extends class work very well.

Areas for improvement:

- extending the use of ICT in lessons.
- very few students take the subject in the sixth form.

345. Over the last four years GCE A-level results have generally been below average, although comparisons with the national picture are unreliable in any one year, because the number of candidates is small. Results in 2001, however, were above average. Proportionally small numbers of higher-attaining pupils go on from Year 11 to take mathematics at advanced level in the sixth form. Taking into account students' previous attainment in Year 11, their progress is very good. The overall standard of attainment is significantly better than it was at the time of the previous inspection in 1996.

346. The overall standard of work of the students currently in Years 12 and 13 is below average, although students achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment at GCSE. Students in Year 12 achieve very well, taking into account their previous GCSE results. Some struggle with new work, but they are well assisted and gain confidence. In Year 13, students achieve well, as a result of clearly focused and well-planned teaching which ensures that they work at a level appropriate to their individual needs. Most students have a good recall of knowledge and apply it soundly, when solving problems. Those students who find the work difficult are carefully supported by staff who know them well and who provide encouragement and support. Learning is effective because of students' positive attitudes, very good relationships and good teaching that is based on careful planning and regular revision.

347. Advanced-level students make good (and often very good) progress. In a Year 12 lesson on friction, for example, as a result of well-planned and focused teaching, pupils acquired a good grasp of the topic and its associated problems. This work was considerably enhanced as a result of liaison with the science department, which extended this work through practical activities in science lessons.

348. Students have a good understanding of algebraic and manipulating equations, when working on higher-level algebraic skills. They are moving into areas of mathematics which challenge their thinking, but they concentrate hard to improve their knowledge and skill. The amount of time allocated to mathematics in Year 12 has been reduced by one lesson per week this year. Staff find it difficult to cover the course and provide sufficient time for revision for examinations. As a result, staff take pupils in their own time, both in school and during the holidays, to make up for this loss of time.

349. Teaching is good (and often very good), as a result of which students make clear gains in their knowledge and understanding. Other strengths in teaching include good subject knowledge, very effective class management and very thorough planning which takes account of individual needs. Lessons proceed at a very brisk pace. Assessment is regular, thorough and appropriately integrated into schemes of work. Assessment information is well used to plan teaching programmes to ensure that they meet individuals' needs. Lessons often include reference to problems identified from marked work of the previous lesson. Questioning is carefully pitched at an appropriate level for each student. It always tests understanding by systematically asking students to justify their thinking and explain why some answers are incorrect. Teachers set ambitious, but realistic, targets for students.

350. Learning is good. Students are very focused in lessons and relate well to teachers. They want to do their best. They attempt challenging problems and are not deterred when they make mistakes. They are confident in discussion and all are involved in question-and-answer sessions. Students support one another and share their ideas, talking and listening sensibly. Teachers modify their methods, when students do not understand or cannot remember some of the work. New topics include a review of previous work to reinforce

understanding. Students are very positive about the course and speak well of the teaching they receive. They are clear about their progress and what they need to do to improve.

351. Students undertake some independent work in the sixth form; this helps to improve their study skills. This range of work is provided by the examination board, is very well prepared and provides an opportunity for students to apply their skill in solving practical problems. Homework is used effectively to enhance work in lessons and is set regularly. Students lack confidence in ICT, because they have poor access to computers and appropriate software.

352. Very good management ensures that staff have been effectively trained and accredited to teach the courses. Staff work well together, when planning the modules of work. The department has a commitment to improving standards: teachers have high expectations and set suitably high targets for students.

Sciences

353. The focus was on biology, but chemistry, physics and vocational science lessons were also sampled. Sciences are popular in this school and regularly attract high-attaining students. In the new AS-level examinations in 2001, 22 A grades were achieved across the three sciences. Overall, this is a very good achievement for the department.

354. Two GCE A-level chemistry lessons were observed. Teaching is supportive, yet challenging. In one lesson students undertook manganate VII titrations, analysing them for the percentage concentration of iron II ions. They balanced difficult ion equations and accounted for the inconsistent results being found in their air oxidised crystalline samples. In the other lesson students successfully grappled with the complexities of entropy. One notable feature of this lesson was the inclusion of biographies of some of the major scientists involved in the development of thermodynamics. In 2001 six of the seven students who entered the GCE A-level examination passed and four gained A grades.

355. The GCE A-level physics groups are usually six to eight in size. In 2001 all eight candidates gained a grade D or better, with five attaining an A grade. In a Year 13 class seen, where the teaching was very good, the students studied mirrors and their role in the construction of telescopes. They readily rose to the high intellectual challenge set by their teacher. They demonstrated that they were appropriately conversant with the different characteristics of mirrors and lenses. They carried out investigations with minimum prompting and recorded accurately the focal lengths of a range of concave mirrors. Individuals were then set tasks that required them to describe the operating modes of different types of telescopes and draw them, enlarged, on the whiteboard for their colleagues to discuss. They were successful in this task.

356. In most years there are usually three to five students taking vocational science at GNVQ Intermediate level. Each year most complete this science course successfully, usually gaining merit level. These students have typically gained grades D-E at GCSE. They make sound progress in this one-year course. Their grades are consistent with their prior attainment. Students often proceed to other Advanced-level vocational courses at the school. They appreciate the practical approach that the course requires. Students enjoy the subject and speak enthusiastically about the varied topics they study. They described in depth how they constructed a burglar-alarm circuit, based on a light-dependent resistor and how it could be adapted to be latched to stay on, if the alarm was activated. All the staff involved pitch the work at the appropriate level for these students.

357. The provision for students with special educational needs is very good. One student in Year 13, with mobility needs, uses a wheelchair. Suitable, lower benching is available in laboratories. The student speaks very favourably about the help she receives from teachers and support assistants. Similarly, a Year 12 student with dyslexic problems has access to a laptop computer and is appreciative of the help given by the school.

Biology

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

Strengths:

- stimulating, well-sequenced teaching both in theory lessons and in practical exercises.
- students are treated as mature individuals, yet have their progress carefully monitored.
- empathetic relationships where students feel comfortable in seeking assistance.

Areas for improvement:

- better access to up-to-date scientific texts.

358. Class sizes over the last five years have ranged from five to 21. In 2000, of the ten candidates who took the GCE A-level examination four attained a grade A and one a grade B. In 2001 there were five candidates, of whom two gained a B grade. Overall this represents sound achievement; for some students the achievement is good. These results are typical of groups in recent years. In the last four years, 37 candidates have been entered for A-level in biology: 35 have passed and eight attained an A grade. This is a consistently creditable achievement.

359. In 2001, in the AS-level examinations taken at the end of Year 12, all 21 candidates achieved at least a grade D and higher-attaining students reached their target grades of A or B: 11 students gained a grade A and a further three a grade B – again a very good achievement for the subject. Seventeen students who sat the AS-examination in Year 12 have continued the study of biology to A2-level. Most are on target to gain their predicted grades, based on their previous attainment in GCSE.

360. The high number of students taking the AS-course in Year 12 maintains the significant growth in the subject in recent years. The AS-level results in 2001 were very good: students gained grades commensurate with their prior attainment and efforts throughout the year. The overall standard of work of students currently studying the subject is relatively better in Year 13 than in Year 12, but the standard in both years is at least sound. Some students' written work is outstanding.

361. Students exhibit a good knowledge and understanding of the fundamental concepts of genetics. They competently handle the numerical aspects of the course. They distinguish, for example, between mitosis and meiosis. They use terms such as "chromosomes", "chromatid", "haploid" and "zygote" appropriately. Students in Year 13 make steady progress as a consequence of effective teaching.

362. The teaching observed in three lessons was good overall with many very good features. Teachers prepare their material well, give lessons clear objectives and schedule the content closely to fit the available time. They have the necessary knowledge to deliver the subject in appropriate depth, consistent with the needs of the highest-attaining students. They do not, however, encourage students to ask enough questions and then discuss them with more depth, rigour and challenge.

363. The students' assignments, assessments and written notes submitted for review were mostly complete. The notes of the most able students were impressive in the clarity with which the most salient features had been identified. Assessed practical sessions were a feature of the inspection period. Students were avidly preparing investigations on the factors that affect the souring of milk. The majority of students prepared this work very conscientiously. At the planning stage their practical investigations contained the right techniques, temperature and pH controls, and their timings for the tasks were realistic.

364. Assignments are often based on questions taken from the examination papers of previous years. Students welcome this approach. Assignments are marked appropriately, with errors corrected and annotated with recommendations. Theory is appropriately supported by practical work in class. Structured questions are used to assist students to check out their understanding and to prepare them for external examinations. The written work in assignments is at an appropriate level and generally commensurate with students' prior attainment.

365. All three teachers have the necessary academic background and experience to offer their students a thorough grounding in the fundamental processes of the Life Sciences. They bring to their classes experience of work in industry – as seen in a carefully prepared electronic presentation on biotechnology. The subject is ably coordinated by a well-qualified young teacher who has a clear vision for the development of the subject. In each year group the work is shared between two members of staff who meet regularly to review progress and willingly share ideas. This arrangement works well. Students say that they like the opportunity to ask for a second perspective on a topic.

366. The department has a valuable bank of assignments, built up over a period of time, to support and extend the work covered in class. Goals are set for individual students, who are realistic about their likely grades in future examinations. The careful monitoring of students' progress, with any necessary follow-up or remedial action, is a significant feature of the department.

367. The smooth transition to the new arrangements for AS- and A2-level has been achieved through careful planning and a sensible sharing of the workload. The year's work is thoroughly planned: students are fully aware of the internal deadlines for assignments and the external ones required by the examination board.

368. Students have good access to computers within the department, in the sixth form centre and in the library. The availability of computers and access to the Internet are used to good purpose by students. There is a need, however, for students to have more access to up-to-date scientific texts.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Strengths:

- the quality of teaching and learning.
- the use of ICT for research, product analysis and presentation.
- the wide range of enrichment opportunities provided.

Areas for improvement:

- the overall standard of attainment at GCE A-level.
- ventilation in the ICT room.
- the use of ICT to model designs for products.

369. The GCE A-level examination results have declined in recent years. In 2001 they were below average. Not all students who took the examination passed and the proportion gaining the higher A-B grades was well below average. In relation to their GCSE grades, about a quarter of students did less well than expected. Male students usually achieved below the grades they gained in their other subjects.

370. The standard of work of current Year 13 students, however, is above average. Students' craft skills and their knowledge and understanding of manufacturing processes are of a high order. Most students gained one of the higher grades at GCSE level and are making good progress. A clear illustration of the good progress being made in design and manufacture is where students build a scale model – as, for example, a combined stool and storage system for use with a guitar. This modelling clearly shows the student's intent at an important early stage in the design process as well as giving the opportunity to rehearse processes and refine details before working on the final piece.

371. Students who do not make such a model currently have a sudden transition in their thinking from a paper design to the creation of the final object in metal or wood. At present the lack of an ICT- modelling programme, where students can design and rotate their ideas to consider all features, limits alternative methods of linking design to manufacture. As a result, students meet problems that might have been foreseen with more careful planning: progress is often slowed whilst solutions are sought.

372. Students in Year 12 make satisfactory progress in their manufacture of a chair. Designs are clearly influenced by the classic, modern furniture designers who worked at the Bauhaus as well as by more recent innovators. One student had imaginatively deconstructed an abandoned supermarket trolley and was recycling this to form an upholstered chair. Many students solve problems as they meet them rather than planning ahead to prevent difficulties.

373. Much of students' written work is in the form of annotations. They also make well-ordered notes during the course of lessons. The standard of handwriting is good in both years and spelling is generally accurate. Reading and numeracy levels are adequate. Students' skill at research is generally good: the key ideas in work downloaded from the Internet are often carefully highlighted. Computers are used well by students for research, the analysis of data and the presentation of work.

374. Teaching is always very good and occasionally excellent. Very good subject knowledge and understanding, enthusiasm for modern design and high expectations for students' achievements are all features of this practice. This strong team includes one teacher providing the expertise on graphics and design and the other offering very good input into manufacturing. The current illness of one of the team has led to major adjustments in how the course is run. The transition period does not disadvantage students. They are well prepared for the AS- and A-level examination – as, for instance, when Year 12 students learned about the changing nature of such kitchen designs as the bottle and can opener or the lemon squeezer. The skilled technician supports teaching on the construction side well. He works closely with students in overseeing welding and brazing processes. Excellent teaching of Year 13 students has led to high levels of independence and students offering one another a very good level of support.

375. Students enjoy the course and are full of praise for the provision offered. One Year 12 student has returned to school, after two years in the workplace, with raised expectations and renewed enthusiasm for learning. Students benefit from trips to, for example, printing works and firms that mould-inject plastics. They also have good opportunities to talk to visitors, such as a chair designer. They only have single lessons, however: this time restriction limits their practical work in both problem-solving and acquiring skills. Links with further education are not as strong as in the past.

376. Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students listen well and engage in discussion, when opportunities arise. Some Year 13 students frequently initiate ideas or suggest lines of possible enquiry. One student has helped to create very good links with a local plastic dip-coating firm which is willing to supply a free finish to students' metal products.

377. Severe physical problems affecting the leader of this subject have presented difficulties in recent years. The acting leader of the department, with the help of colleagues, is doing a very good job. The lack of adequate ventilation in the ICT room used by students is a cause for concern.

BUSINESS

378. The main focus was on business studies (AVCE and GNVQ), but GCE AS- and A-level work was also sampled. The typical pattern of attainment in business studies at GCE A-level has been for all candidates to pass the examination, but with most obtaining a grade C or D. Of the entry of 21 in 2001, four students achieved the highest grades (A or B): the overall result was a little above the national average. In 2001 13 candidates took the new AS-level at the end of Year 12 and achieved above average results: 11 passed and seven gained a grade in the range A-C.

379. Hard-working teachers provide brisk, clear lessons. They use an appropriately wide variety of teaching strategies and set students thorough tasks to do. By specific questioning teachers ensure that students understand their work securely. They provide excellent, individual support for students both in and out of lesson time. Students work industriously and steadily in groups or individually. Their work is usually well presented and makes good use of ICT – as, for example, in the analysis and presentation of the results of surveys. Current achievement is mainly around grade C. Teachers mark students' work systematically and provide clear feedback on areas for improvement.

Business studies (V)

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

Strengths:

- good teaching that ensures students work hard and successfully.
- a good level of achievement.
- enthusiastic and well-organised departmental leadership.
- clear policies for planning, teaching and assessment.

Areas for improvement:

- the achievement of higher grades by students.
- a greater involvement of students in discussion and other learning activities.
- The provision of base rooms for the subject.
- opportunities for staff to refresh their knowledge of industry and commerce.

380. The rate of successful completion of the AVCE course is above the national average. Twenty-six students have followed the course over the last four years: with the exception of 1999, all candidates have passed and been awarded a merit level. A small number of students have undertaken the Intermediate award (GNVQ): all have received either a pass or merit award. In 2001, a larger than average group at Intermediate level achieved the above average results of five distinctions, one merit and one pass. Some students progress over three years from a modest GCSE-base to an Advanced-level pass, therefore making above average progress in that time.

381. Students' current AVCE attainment, as indicated by written records and class work, is mainly within the range of grades C to E. It is neatly presented. It embraces preparatory notes, unit and intermediate tests, and completed assignments. Although there are occasional errors in syntax, punctuation and spelling, the standard of both handwritten or word-processed work is at least satisfactory. Marks in practice tests suggest that students find more difficulty in responding successfully to examination-style assessments than to class-based assignments. Feedback on work is clear, constructive and closely related to the grade requirements of the qualification.

382. Teaching at both GNVQ- and AVCE-level is clear and forceful. Teachers have sound knowledge and the ability to sustain a good pace of work, while maintaining a good rapport with students. Whilst some GNVQ students are not as well motivated as the advanced-level students, teachers combine firmness and humour to achieve an appropriate standard of work – as, for example, in preparing and making presentations on the reasons for maintaining or closing a railway line.

383. Teachers make good use of questions to develop and clarify students' thinking. They regularly check understanding and summarise learning points. Good use is made of personal experience and of case studies that involve local employers. Students had, for example, to research local retail outlets in preparation for computer-generated presentations on setting up their own business. In another lesson, data on a local biscuit firm was used to construct an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. The technique was then applied to assess the marketing potential of other organisations.

384. The most capable students on these courses discuss, question and make oral presentations competently. They work systematically both on their own and in groups. They maintain interest in the tasks set for them and acquire considerable competence in the use of ICT. Relationships with staff are friendly and mature. A minority of students on both the AVCE and GNVQ courses have poor communication skills and give the impression of lacking motivation. They contribute little to lessons and give little evidence of having the study skills necessary for work at this level. Their difficulties are compounded when teachers give over-long explanations or restrict the opportunity for full student participation in question-and-answer sessions.

385. The department, which encompasses other vocational provision as well as business education and key skills, is well led and organised. Policies, procedures, schemes of work, performance analyses and development plans are clearly set out in departmental and subject handbooks. The department has a clear

strategy, based on overall school policies, to enhance students' grades and to improve their vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, numeracy and wider reading around the subject. Staff are generous in giving additional time to support students.

386. Several teaching rooms have good quality displays, but the department does not have its own base rooms. There is no additional work experience for vocational students, but a good range of contacts with employers secures commercial and industrial visits and case-study material. Partly because of the need to familiarise themselves with the subject's recently revised qualifications and assessment, staff lack sufficient opportunities to extend employment contacts further.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- students achieve well in this subject.
- the quality of teaching is high.
- staffing, accommodation and learning resources are very good.

Areas for improvement:

- more opportunities for students to learn independently.

387. The focus of the inspection was the AVCE course in ICT. Four lessons were inspected, covering both year groups in the sixth form. This course was begun for the first time in the school in September 2000 and examined at AS-level in 2001. There are no earlier results for comparison. Students follow a part-course of three units, for which they can gain an AS-level award. Pupils in Year 13 take three extra units, for which they can achieve an advanced award (AVCE).

388. Results at AS-level in 2001 were below average: students achieved their expected grades and all but one student passed. When compared to their attainment on entry to the course, these results represent a good rate of achievement: students began the course with limited skills because of insufficient experience in Years 10-11. The overall standard of work of both the current Year 12 and Year 13 students is below the expected average level for the course, but students make good progress. The low level of results is partly the consequence of there having been no accredited courses in Years 10 and 11: students have therefore much ground to cover in the two years of the sixth form.

389. Many students are meeting database and spreadsheet work and learning about the workings of computers for the first time. They are coping well and making substantial progress. Year 13 students learned, for example, how to reduce the repetition of stored information by using a relational database in a scenario relating to the royalties an author receives. They also learned how to build a computer and install an operating system. Some struggled and had to receive a great deal of help, but were delighted with their success when they were able to get the system working. They had limited knowledge of computer systems but, as a result of individual help and support, learned quickly, gaining competence and confidence.

390. Students have a reasonable understanding of computer systems through their analysis of, for example, input, output and storage devices. They consider thoughtfully the impact of computers on society through the scenarios they model. Their responses to questions on data-protection show them coming to terms with ethical issues. In their individual projects they reach an average (and sometimes high) standard. This was well illustrated when Year 13 students learned how to improve their database skills: most had little knowledge of databases when they started the course in Year 12, but now set up a complex database with several tables of information, a topic specific to the new course.

391. Students have a good level of skill in word processing and desktop publishing, partly because they had experience of these elements before they started the course. For example, Year 12 students learn quickly about the different types of standard documentary formats used in organisations and critically

appraise the quality of documentation. Throughout the course, drafting and redrafting are well used to improve the quality of the final product.

392. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. Clear explanations from knowledgeable teachers help students to understand new ideas quickly. Detailed information sheets assist them to build up a good set of notes for future reference and revision. Staff effectively monitor and support individual students, ensuring that all understand the work and make sound progress. The regular checks on folders encourage students to maintain them in good order and correct previous errors. Lessons are well planned: they offer students interesting and relevant tasks that incorporate an appropriate range of software.

393. Much of the work is strongly led by teachers, because students are unfamiliar with many programs. Although this necessary approach restricts the development of independent working, project work ensures that students do work with more independence. Tests and assessments are regularly set and thoroughly marked. Through the provision of a mark scheme students learn how they can maximise their marks. Teachers give constructive guidance, when work is marked and returned, and keep detailed records of students' attainment and progress. As a result, students know clearly the standard of their current work.

394. The subject is well managed. All staff work closely together, with enthusiasm, to increase their familiarity with the new course. An appropriate priority, successfully undertaken, has been to develop suitable schemes of work and associated documentation to meet the requirements of the new syllabus. The formal monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice has relied upon the school's performance management procedures. Students like the subject and believe that they are taught and supported well. The subject is very well resourced. Teaching rooms are modern, of a good size and well equipped.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

395. The main focus was on travel and tourism, but the GCE A-level PE course and the Year 12 vocational course in sports science were also sampled; the latter course leads to Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC) accreditation. Only low numbers of students have as yet taken the A-Level or BTEC examinations. Many of those currently on both these courses (four and eight respectively) present some very good written work and have very good ICT skills: they use these extensively (or even exclusively in some cases) to produce coursework. Teachers present and monitor work very thoroughly, indicating clearly to students how they can improve. Students are generally confident and effective, when leading presentations. Most come to lessons well prepared, discuss issues willingly and make succinct notes.

Travel and tourism (V)

Overall, the quality of provision in travel and tourism is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- clearly structured lessons taught by supportive staff.
- students have the opportunity to improve their competence in a foreign language.
- the thorough organisation of the course.

Areas for improvement:

- providing sufficient intellectual stimulus where groups are small.
- more opportunities for students to learn independently.
- greater training opportunities for new members of the teaching team.

396. The school now offers the new travel and tourism syllabus (having previously offered leisure and tourism) at both Intermediate and Advanced (AVCE) levels. The AVCE course has just two students in Year 12 and four in Year 13. In previous years similarly small numbers have usually all passed, but without achieving high grades. In 2001, at AS level at the end of Year 12, three of the six candidates achieved grade D, two grade E and one failed. No candidates completed the AVCE in Year 13 in 2001. Normally all candidates pass the Intermediate-level course, but no candidate has gained a Distinction. Given their

modest level of achievement at the end of Year 11, students generally make good progress over three years to achieve an AVCE-level pass.

397. Current AVCE students are working at a standard that is around grade E. The draft assignments of Year 13 students are rightly noted by staff as containing insufficient information and failing to analyse adequately the requisite data and information. Some completed work shows evidence of a level of discussion and analysis that is appropriate for an advanced qualification. Most work is clearly, accurately and neatly presented.

398. Teaching is sound overall. Lessons are well and clearly structured. Students are fully aware of what is expected of them. Homework is regularly set. All lessons have a clear, logical progression, are appropriately paced and emphasise key learning points. Teachers support their students very well and have good relationships with them. In some lessons, however, they dominate lessons, expect students mainly to respond to questions and leave insufficient opportunity for them to think for themselves.

399. The best lessons actively engage students in discussion, sharpen their thinking and develop their ability to plan for themselves. Learning is regularly summarised and reinforced. The inclusion of work in modern foreign languages is a strength in the provision: for example, students prepared a role-play for meeting a visitor from another country in her own language.

400. Students take a strong interest in the subject and work conscientiously in lessons. When given the opportunity, they ask questions and explore topics satisfactorily. They tend to work more confidently on practical tasks than in extended discussion. One group, for example, applied themselves well to examining the contracts for booking holidays that appear in travel brochures, having first discussed with their teacher the main contractual terms. The size of groups – as low as one in the lessons observed – restricts both the learning opportunities that can be built into lessons and the stimulus of working with others.

401. The overall organisation of the subject is good. The staff handbook has well-prepared schemes of work that incorporate the opportunity to gain accreditation for key skills. There is regular, formal and informal liaison amongst the course staff, who are drawn from three different departments. The handbook also contains valuable guidance on teaching the programme. This is particularly useful, given the changes (including a temporary change in coordinator) in the teaching team this year. Under these circumstances, the team requires further training to give them added familiarity with both the units they teach and the overall operation of the course.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

402. This area of the school's work was sampled in three lessons. Small groups work towards the Intermediate and Advanced qualifications in health and social care. Attainment in previous years has fluctuated a little around the national average. Current written work varies from around to above pass level, but none is outstanding. Teaching is good. Staff are well prepared, support students strongly and sustain their interest. Combined Intermediate and Advanced groups are successfully coordinated and structured, so as to maintain effectively the level and working pace of students on both courses.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

403. There was no major focus in this domain, but art, music, dance and media studies were sampled.

404. **Art** is taught to GCE A-level. The five students currently in Years 12 and 13 are taught together. In 2001 all three students at AS-level passed with grades in the C-E range. Three students achieved grades D-E at GCE A-level. In all three sixth-form lessons observed the teaching was good. Students are actively encouraged to take a critical view of their own work and generally make good progress. This style of teaching results in an informative and constructive exchange of views between teacher and students about the quality and range of the two-dimensional studies the students had produced. The standard of drawing and painting is broadly average. Good use is made of traditional art and craft media and materials.

405. Just four students are currently taking **music** in the sixth form (two in each year group), an increase on

the take-up over the last four years. In 2001, out of 3 entries for GCE A-level none achieved grades in the range A-C, but two out of three students passed. In 2001 two students entered for AS-level: one achieved a B grade and the other achieved grade E. By the end of Year 13, attainment is broadly in line with course requirements. Students perform, compose and demonstrate aural skills and knowledge of musical styles satisfactorily. Aural and general musical knowledge are rigorously tested, especially in students' analyses of set works. Students achieve well and make good progress as a result of the good teaching they receive. Teachers have subject knowledge of a sufficiently high standard to extend the students in all the required examination areas. Teaching methods include a fair balance of practical and theoretical approaches.

406. All music students receive individual instrumental lessons which enable them to reach the required standard in performance. Compositions are frequently computer-assisted. Students participate in the good range and quality of extracurricular activities provided by a lively and thriving department.

407. The Year 12 **dance** lesson seen, as part of GCE A-level performing arts, was of a high standard. Students devised and prepared a dance for performance on the representation of death. The very good quality of teaching resulted in students producing a carefully planned sequence of activities. The lesson incorporated a swift introductory consideration of the appearance of death and led on to a sensitive consideration of shape, movement and motifs. The students were very keen and worked hard to improve their performance. Their standard of work was above average.

408. In **media studies** one lesson was seen in Year 12. The standard of both teaching and learning were good. The lesson was carefully organised to help students to understand the structure and content of examination questions and the use of grade criteria in the subject. The teacher's explanations were clear and students were suitably encouraged to range over all the criteria. As a result of the teacher's enthusiasm, there was a high level of motivation in the class and sound resultant understanding. Students worked well together.

HUMANITIES

409. The main focus was on geography and history, but **psychology** was also sampled. This subject has been introduced into the school this year at AS-level and has proved popular. One lesson was seen with each of the two groups of students. In both cases well-structured, relevant and stimulating material on the formation of attitudes was used well to reinforce and enhance soundly students' previous understanding of cognitive and behavioural psychology.

410. Students' written work shows a systematic coverage of the syllabus, regular checks of their notes and, through tests and practice questions, careful evaluations of their knowledge. Most students cope satisfactorily with this level of work, but some lack an appropriate style and depth of writing in their essays.

Geography

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

Strengths:

- teaching is thoughtfully planned and effective.
- the scheme of work is relevant, detailed and well written.
- procedures for assessment, including marking, are of good quality.
- the subject is very well led and organised.

Areas for improvement:

- improving the weak oral contribution made by students.
- providing more demanding work for the highest-attaining students.

411. The overall standard of work is above average. GCE A2-level examination results in 2001 were broadly in line with the national average. All students passed, but the overall quality of results was lower than

during the previous three years, when they were above the national norm. Students generally achieve better results in this subject, however, than in most of their other subjects and make good progress. Results in the AS-level examination taken at the end of Year 12 were broadly in line with the national average. The department analyses examination results carefully and has implemented clear strategies to improve standards further.

412. Students in Year 12 have an average knowledge of the subject and are learning to use this knowledge to explain how landscapes and places change. They understand clearly how and why cities grow. They use maps well to identify features and explain the relationships between them. One group, for example, used an Ordnance Survey map effectively to suggest a possible location for a new supermarket, giving sound reasons for their choice. They were less confident in understanding why people's views towards such a development may differ.

413. In Year 13, students have an above average knowledge of the subject. They clearly understand how major features of the earth's surface are formed and why they may change. They have a good background knowledge of the subject. In one lesson, for example, students clearly understood the main features of earthquakes. They used this effectively to gain an understanding of the complexities of measuring their strength and predicting when they may occur. The majority of students understand the contribution of the subject towards an understanding of the different levels of development in the world and how these differences may be measured.

414. Throughout, students extract information from resource material swiftly and efficiently. The quality of their note-taking is exemplary. They generally have an excellent grasp of geographical terms and use them effectively. Written work is usually of good quality: essays are well structured and contain sufficient detail and depth. Oral work, however, is weak. Few students contribute to lessons voluntarily or sustain a discussion; in consequence, they rely heavily on the teacher to achieve the depth of understanding required.

415. The quality of teaching is good overall. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and use it effectively to develop well-structured explanations and imaginative techniques that gain students' interest. Lessons are thoughtfully planned. A review of earlier work is often followed appropriately by a series of carefully structured activities. These encourage students to use the knowledge they have learned to address geographical questions and develop a deeper understanding of the topic.

416. In one lesson, for instance, students in Year 12 studied coastal features. The lesson started with a brisk review and a short video-clip of the area they were studying. Students then successfully used their knowledge to explain how the features of a section of coast were caused by the differing geology of the area. The lesson concluded with a useful overview of what had been learned.

417. Teachers have high expectations and set high standards for students by insisting, for example, on the correct use of terms and on a high standard of note-taking and recording. Work is pitched at an appropriate level, but the highest-attaining students are not stretched sufficiently with incisive questions or challenging materials. Few strategies are used to encourage students to make a more effective contribution to lessons. Marking is of good quality, comments are well directed and essays are rigorously reviewed, so that students know how they can improve.

418. Students are well motivated, keen, work hard and attend lessons regularly and punctually. They are interested in the subject and listen to teachers' clear and concise explanations carefully. They generally complete the work set diligently and maintain their files in good order. Students assimilate ideas quickly, as lessons are well structured and clearly presented. They are very positive about the quality of education in this subject and the progress they are making towards their targets.

419. The scheme of work is very well planned, building on the work that students have experienced in previous years. There are efficiently organised opportunities for fieldwork, culminating in a residential visit to North Wales. The procedures for assessment are good. Regular assessment enables teachers to provide well-focused information on how individual students may improve. Resources are of good quality. The subject is very well led and managed, and there is a strong commitment to improve standards still further.

History

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

Strengths:

- teaching is good: teachers have high expectations of students.
- thorough marking, with detailed comments, helps students to make good progress.
- teachers provide good opportunities for students to learn independently.

Areas for improvement:

- the active involvement and participation of students in discussions.

420. The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were broadly in line with the national average at grades A-E, although a lower than average proportion achieved grades A or B. In 1999 and 2000 the pass rate was above average; the proportion who achieved grades A and B was above average in 1999 and a little below average in 2000. Students tend to perform much the same in history as in their other subjects. In relation to their GCSE results, most students perform at least soundly. The results in the AS-examination, which students took for the first time in 2001, were above the national average for grades A-E, but no student gained an A or B grade.

421. The standard of work seen by students currently taking history in Years 12 and 13 was in line with that expected nationally. They demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. Students in Year 13 successfully evaluate the long- and short-term impact of past events. A sample of essays seen in a lesson showed good structure and valid arguments and, from the higher attainers, some in-depth analysis. The lowest attainers' essays, however, were largely narrative and descriptive. Most students make good notes that provide a sound basis for revision, ensuring that key points are highlighted and using bullet points to good effect.

422. Students in Year 12 show sound knowledge and understanding of the events they study. Their notes indicate that they have a sound grasp of concepts such as feudalism, vassalage and homage in early medieval Britain and Europe. They see motives for actions and explain causes of events – as, for example, in work on the reforms of the church in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Paired projects on the Crusades were researched well; the quality of presentations was generally good. Some pupils, however, misspell words which are in frequent use in their course of study. Students have a generally sound understanding of the different views of historians about issues in the past – as seen, for example, in their work on Anglo-Saxon culture and civilization.

423. Teaching is good overall and contributes significantly to students' largely good progress in both Years 12 and 13. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they communicate effectively. The work set is appropriately challenging and matched well to the requirements of the examinations. Work is marked to examination criteria. The usually detailed comments on marked work provide students with clear guidance and targets to improve their answers in the future. Teachers have high expectations of their students and ensure that they understand what is needed to reach the top grades. Students' notes are checked by teachers to ensure that they are maintaining a good standard.

424. Teaching methods ensure that students have opportunities to work independently and not rely too heavily on their teachers. Where appropriate, however, good whole-class teaching helps students to make significant progress. In a lesson in Year 13 the teacher used the examination board's mark scheme well to show how students could improve on the marks they had gained in practice essays. Very occasionally, the pace of learning is not brisk enough in teacher-led lessons. In another lesson, in which Year 12 students worked individually on sources about the motives of the Knights Temporal and others for their involvement in the Crusades, the teacher acted as a supporter, asking questions and helping students to understand the language and tone of the sources.

425. Teachers rightly emphasise the importance of students' oral contributions to lessons and give them good opportunities for oral work. Although some students take good advantage of these opportunities, some do not participate unless directly targeted by their teachers. Most students clearly work hard and come to lessons prepared for work, thus enabling teachers to move on to new work effectively. They generally work hard, when given tasks to complete in lessons, and their notes show that many spend much time writing up notes or word-processing them after lessons. They do not, however, display a strong enthusiasm for their work in lessons.

426. Students are helped to learn independently by the very good provision for history in the sixth-form resource centre. They have access to a large number and a wide range of books as a result of the department's commitment to buy books specifically for the resource centre. The good ICT provision in the sixth-form centre enables students to make effective use of the Internet for research.

427. The subject is very well led and managed. The head of department is committed to maintaining the increased take-up of history seen in the current Year 12. Careful thought has been given to the choice of course in the sixth form: the decision to teach an early medieval course is a well-reasoned one, providing continuity of historical skills from GCSE work, but in an entirely new time-context.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

428. The focus was on English literature, but English language was also sampled. In English Language GCE A-level examination results were above average in 2001 and students did as expected, considering their GCSE results. Three lessons were observed. The overall standard of attainment was average. Teaching and learning were good overall. Lessons were well structured, with supportive guidance given to students. An emphasis on the categorization of linguistic features enabled students to consolidate their learning well. Lessons were enlivened with interesting stimuli – such as different styles of textual material in the resource pack on soap.

English Literature

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

Strengths:

- examination results showed a significant improvement in 2001.
- students have a sound grasp of literary concepts and apply them well.
- teaching is very good overall: subject knowledge and planning are particularly strong.
- students work well together in groups, constructively sharing their ideas.
- the subject is very well led.

Areas for improvement:

- some students have only a small repertoire of textual quotations.
- some students are reluctant to speak in discussions.

429. The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 showed a significant improvement on the previous year's and were above average. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and an average proportion gained the highest (A or B) grades. Female students did much better than their male counterparts.

430. The standards of work of the current 15 students are average overall. In Year 13, students are achieving appropriately in relation to the predictions based on their GCSE results. In the lessons seen, students responded soundly to searching questions on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. In one lesson they quickly noted down their perceptions of characters, as they considered the theme of justice. In another lesson they quickly found examples to illustrate purity, for example. Most students have a thorough knowledge of the texts, although they are not always able to recall apposite quotations from memory.

431. The 19 students on the Year 12 course are achieving much as expected. In one lesson they studied *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and were required to access symbolism, imagery, contrast and description in the novel rather than discuss the story. Good prompts from the teacher enabled students to develop their own perceptions of the characters. In another lesson, students studying *A Streetcar named Desire* by Tennessee Williams worked capably in pairs to prepare an interview with either the playwright, a character such as Stella or Elias Kaman, a director. Students successfully acquire a perceptive understanding of literary analysis.

432. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very well as a result. Each lesson begins with a clear statement of objectives. Lessons are well planned to ensure that there are graded learning steps. Where appropriate, good use is made of an overhead projector to provide models of annotation which students can then use. Lessons are well timed and paced. Teachers show a very good knowledge of their subject in the depth of their questioning of students and in the ways they rephrase questions to make them more searching. Students regularly work very positively together in small groups. They are regularly called upon to use their existing knowledge and understanding of texts. Students' written work is of a sound quality overall. Teachers' supportive and detailed marking helps students to improve the quality of their work.

433. Students learn well. They concentrate hard and most contribute fully to lessons, regularly providing good textual detail and an enthusiasm for their study. In one Year 13 lesson, however, students held back too much during oral activities. Students use time well and expect to complete reading tasks between lessons.

434. The subject is very well led and managed. Teachers have a high commitment to the subject and are determined to ensure that standards continue to rise. The use of data on students' attainment guides teachers well and enables them to respond accurately to students' individual learning needs.

Modern Foreign Languages

435. The focus was on French, but **Spanish** was also sampled. Two students took the GCE A-level examination in Spanish in 2001, but only one student obtained a pass grade. Students do not begin the study of Spanish until Year 10 and less time is devoted to this subject than French. In the one lesson observed, the quality of teaching was good. After an oral warm-up session, the students worked productively in the language laboratory on a listening exercise about the environment. Effective questioning by the teacher ensured that each of the three students contributed well to the lesson and that they worked at a good pace. The lesson ended with the students identifying the positive and negative actions needed for environmental protection. The students worked hard, made good progress and reached a broadly average standard.

French

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

Strengths:

- students enjoy their set text and some topics.
- students learn well because they have positive attitudes and the teaching is good.

Areas for improvement:

- the provision of more oral materials to improve students' oral skills further.
- students do not have contact with a native speaker to help to improve their speaking.

436. Seven students took the GCE A-level examination in 2001. Two attained the higher (A and B) grades. They have both gone on to university to study French. Of the remainder only three candidates obtained a pass grade. Results are well below the national average. In relation to their GCSE results, these students underachieved: two students had poor records for attendance. Since the number of candidates and the results vary, no reliable trend is discernible. Three students attained pass grades in the AS-level

examination in French in 2001 – one at grade B and two at grade C. All three students have continued their course of study in Year 13 for the A2-level examination.

437. The overall standard of work of current students is average. In Year 13, students are achieving in line with predictions based on their GCSE results. In the two lessons seen, they displayed a good understanding of the teachers' use of the foreign language. They worked well in the language laboratory and successfully retrieved information from cassette about the reasons for the failure of the Fourth Republic after World War 2 and problems concerning long- and short-term employment contracts. Over time, students have acquired the relevant vocabulary to enable them to understand such topics and to write about issues as diverse as poverty in the Third World or racism.

438. Students' oral skills are not as well developed as their linguistic understanding. They did, however, talk quite competently about their plans for the future. During the course, students have consolidated their knowledge of different tenses and learned how to use the subjunctive. In one of the lessons they learned how to use the conditional perfect tense. Students complete exercises with the different tenses well, but they still make elementary mistakes when they write independently – as, for example, on the agreement of adjectives with nouns. Students have generally made a smooth transition from AS- to A2-level.

439. The overall standard of work of current students in Year 12 is broadly average. The vast majority are achieving in line with predictions based on their GCSE results, although one student has been disadvantaged by joining the class half-way through the first term and by irregular attendance. In the two lessons observed, students extended their vocabulary well to acquire relevant terms about the media (in a listening exercise) and about the emission of electromagnetic waves from mobile phone masts (in a reading exercise).

440. Students lack oral confidence in reading aloud and have some difficulty in trying to explain terms in French. They understand the key words in the topics they study as well as the French that teachers use almost exclusively in lessons. They extend their vocabulary in such exercises as linking noun to adjective to verb. Students have a sound knowledge of tenses in their written work. They write about such topics as family life, using some of the new vocabulary that they have learned but, as in Year 13, make mistakes in basic constructions.

441. Students' attitudes are sound overall. They are better in Year 13, where students are more confident and take a more active part in the lesson. All students expressed their satisfaction with the courses. The Year 13 students particularly enjoyed their set text about the experience of two Jewish brothers in Vichy-controlled France and the topic on racism. They have a good background knowledge of this period of French history. Students present their work and organise their files well.

442. The quality of teaching is good. Teaching is shared between the head of department and another teacher, both of whom are experienced specialists. Their teaching styles are very similar. All lessons are conducted in the foreign language: at times teachers have to work very hard to explain such abbreviations as DOM, TOM, CDD and CDI or other specific technical terms, without resorting to English. This ensures that the students themselves have to concentrate hard to work them out. Difficult words are linked to similar basic equivalents. Grammatical tenses are well explained – as in a Year 13 lesson, when the speaker on cassette used the conditional perfect tense by saying that he could have complained when his employment was terminated. Lessons are well planned and students have good opportunities to sharpen their aural skills.

443. There are no opportunities for students to improve their speaking with a native speaker. This is a particular disadvantage, since students also lack recent, first-hand experience of France. Some compensation occurs when students are set the task of researching topics on the Internet. Classes are small, with only three students in each of the two classes.

KEY SKILLS

444. The school makes good provision for the three key skills of communication, application of number and ICT in Years 12 and 13 at Level 2. Apart from those on GNVQ/AVCE courses, students are offered the opportunity to take key skills or (at GCE AS- and A2-levels) general studies in either year. The reintroduction of the higher Level 3 is under review. The overall standard of students' work is a little above average.

445. Specialist lessons are timetabled in all three areas of key skills and provide support that is appropriate to individual students' needs. Opportunities to incorporate experience and activities within other subjects as evidence of competence in key skills portfolios is not systematically used overall. Evidence from students' subject work is, however, drawn together at the end of the year to show competence in the strand on communication. Schemes of work and lesson plans clearly list key skills to be practised during lessons. All students' portfolios submitted in the summer of 2001 were approved for accreditation.