

INSPECTION REPORT

WHICKHAM COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Burnthouse Lane, Whickham, Gateshead,
Tyne and Wear.

LEA area: Gateshead

Unique reference number: 108414

Headteacher: Mr. N. Morrison

Reporting inspector: Mr. P. Livsey
1544

Dates of inspection: 19th to 22nd November 2001

Inspection number: 190344

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Burnthouse Lane, Whickham, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear.
Postcode:	NE16 5AR
Telephone number:	0191 4960026
Fax number:	0191 4880968
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. T. Hopper
Date of previous inspection:	4 th November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
1544	Mr. P. Livsey	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it?
				How high are standards?
				How well are pupils and students taught?
				How well is the school led and managed?
				What should the school do to improve further?
			Equal opportunities	
12503	Mr. M. Cundick	Lay inspector		Attitudes, values and personal development
				How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
16359	Mr. J. Farrow	Team inspector	Special educational needs	How well does the school care for its pupils and students?
			English as an additional language	
1622	Mrs. L. Aers	Team inspector	English	
22083	Mrs. K. Hinton	Team inspector	Science	
1576	Mr. G.W. Stephenson	Team inspector	Geography	
			Sociology	
18955	Mrs. C. Earlam	Team inspector	Art	
8751	Mr. J. Chidgey	Team inspector	Design and technology	
16431	Mrs. E. Graham	Team inspector	Health and social care	
22023	Mrs. J. Myers	Team inspector	Business studies	How good are the curricular and other opportunities?
1549	Mr. T. Robshaw	Team inspector	Mathematics	
17765	Mr. J. McElwee	Team inspector	French	
			Information technology	

The inspection contractor was:

Durham Local Education Authority

Education Department,
County Hall,
Durham.

DH1 5UJ

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33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Whickham School is a large 11-18 mixed comprehensive school with 1652 pupils and students. It is a specialist Sports College. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (9.8%) is broadly in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils speaking English as an additional language is low. Very few are from ethnic minorities. The percentage of pupils identified as having SEN is below the national average. The percentage of pupils with statements of SEN is well below the national average. The most recent intake was of above average attainment. The school is regularly heavily oversubscribed.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. Standards are high. Teaching is very good. The school is very well led and managed by the governors and leadership team. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- There is consistently good achievement by pupils and students, and standards of attainment are high.
- Pupils and students demonstrate very good attitudes and behaviour.
- The teaching at all stages is of high quality.
- The quality of what is on offer in the curriculum is very high.
- The school provides very effective support that helps all pupils and students make good progress.
- The enterprising and self-critical leadership and management of the school make the school a very good place to work, learn and develop.

What could be improved

- The careers education and guidance programme in the sixth form is not yet sufficiently broadly based.
- Some students in the sixth form engage to only a limited extent in discussion and independent work.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been good improvement since the last inspection. All key issues have been resolved, except that on collective worship, which has improved, but still does not meet statutory requirements. Standards of teaching and learning and of attainment have remained high. New curriculum initiatives have been skilfully integrated into the school's high quality provision.

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	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	B	(B)	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
	C
below average	D
well below average	E

() is a provisional grade

In 2000 at Key Stage 3 results for both boys and girls were well above the national average and well above those of similar schools. The 2001 Key Stage 3 results are also well above the national average and those of similar schools in all three subjects. At Key Stage 4 results for both boys and girls were above the average for all schools and for similar schools. The GCSE results in 2001 are again well above the national average and that for similar schools. The trend at both key stages since 1996 has been broadly in line with the national. Pupils achieve well in both key stages and make good progress, including in their literacy and numeracy skills.

Advanced Level GCE results in 2000 were above the national average and the school average over the previous three years were well above the national average. Indications are that the 2001 results are also above average. Advanced GNVQ results are also above the national average and improving. Students generally achieve well and make the progress that would be expected of them.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils and students respond very well to the school's provision. They show respect for staff and each other and take their work very seriously.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very well, both in lessons and around a busy and crowded school. There are few exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	The personal development of pupils and students is very good. They show respect for others and a willingness to take responsibility.
Attendance	Attendance levels are very good, and consistent across the year groups.

Pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn. They respond very well to the opportunities offered to them. Students in the sixth form are keen to demonstrate their maturity as independent learners, and respond well to the support they receive.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very 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.

Subject expertise is very good. Lessons are highly focussed on the intended outcomes, including assessment. The best lessons strike a balance between teacher and pupil activity. They provide opportunity for independent and collaborative work. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject. They let pupils know what is needed to make progress and how well they are doing. Lessons are well planned, with good structure and pace. Occasionally in the main school, and more often in some subjects in the sixth form, students are too passive, or are not given opportunities to work independently.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum meets the needs of pupils and students very well. It offers a very good choice of courses and opportunities to extend and enrich learning.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are very well included in the life and work of the school. They do well because teaching combines a clear understanding of their needs with high expectations.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes good provision for pupils' personal development, exploring moral and spiritual issues, and providing opportunities to exercise social skills and develop cultural understanding.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares very well for its pupils and students. The effective personal support and guidance sustains their motivation and encourages their progress.

The curriculum offers a broad, balanced and enriching experience for all pupils and students. Despite considerable efforts, the school does not fully meet the requirement for collective worship. Pupils' and students' progress is regularly tracked and any reasons for underachievement promptly tackled.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	The school is led by a strong and committed team whose members are thoroughly on top of both whole-school issues and their individual areas of responsibility.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is very active in the work of the school and makes its major decisions in line with clear priorities and after thorough evaluation of the options.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school's systems of monitoring and evaluation are very thorough. The outcomes are effectively shared with all parties and acted upon through the management plan.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very effective use of all its resources and has been successful in generating income and using it to enhance its provision.

The leadership team is enterprising, positive, but not complacent. Staffing and resources are sufficient for the needs of the curriculum, and in some key areas are good. There is great pressure on accommodation and some of it presents difficulties that the school works hard to overcome.

The school applies best value principles in tendering and purchasing, both in services obtained and methods of payment.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The high quality of teaching. How well the pupils behave. The good progress their children make. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information to parents.

The inspection supported the very positive views of the parents. The school provides a good range of information on pupils' progress and keeps its procedures under critical review.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**Sixth Form**

There are 323 students in the sixth form (the largest in the LEA) with more boys than girls and very few from ethnic minorities or speaking English as an additional language. The great majority have received their secondary education at Whickham. Most courses are at advanced level.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a good sixth form and it is cost-effective. Advanced Level results in 2000 were above the national average and the school average over the last three years had been well above the national average. Indications are that the 2001 results are also above average. Students generally achieve well and make the progress that would be expected of them. Teaching is good, and often very good. The sixth form is well led and managed. The curriculum and the support given meet the needs of its students well.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good and often very good.
- The range of the advanced curriculum is very good.
- There is an impressive spirit of hard work and achievement throughout the sixth form.

What could be improved

- The careers education and guidance programme is not yet sufficiently broadly based.
- Some students in the sixth form engage to only a limited extent in discussion and independent work.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Results are above average. Good subject knowledge and commitment by the teachers enable students to achieve well.
Chemistry	Satisfactory. Results are average. High expectations and good use of practical work enable students to achieve as expected. There is insufficient access to a range of resources or opportunities to develop independent learning.
Biology	Good. Results are above average. Good, well-focused teaching enables students to produce good standards of work and good results.
Design and technology	Good. Results are average. Good subject knowledge and interesting lessons by a well-led department enable students to achieve well.
Business studies	Very good. Results are well above average. Staff knowledge and commitment are very good.
Business vocational	Very good. Results are above average. Assessment is rigorous. There is very good development of theory and clear progression from Part 1 and into higher education and employment.
Information and communication technology	Good. This new course is characterised by good teaching, planning and delivery and effective deployment of staff.
Health and social care vocational	Good. Results are below average. The good specialist knowledge of the teachers and the effective management of the course enable most students to achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.
Art and design	Very good. Results are above average. Very good teaching and formative assessment enable students to achieve good results.
Art and design vocational	Good. Results are above average. Good teaching, which puts the units of work in a real life context, and very good formative assessment enable students to achieve well.
Geography	Good. Results are average. Good teaching, based on good subject knowledge, and employing a good variety of methods, enables the relatively small numbers of students to achieve as expected.
Sociology	Satisfactory. Results are below average. There has been a recent decline in the number of higher grades achieved. There is some very good teaching, but students' independent learning and their research and discussion skills are sometimes underdeveloped.
English Language	Good. Results are above average. Good teaching that provides opportunities to collaborate and contribute in class enables students to achieve good results.
English Literature	Good. Results are average. Good subject knowledge and teaching that allows students opportunities to express their opinions enable them to achieve well.
French	Good. Results are above average. High expectations, good relationships and opportunities to experience French culture enable the relatively small numbers of students to achieve as expected. ICT is underused for research and consolidating language.

Teaching and learning in the other subjects sampled in the sixth form was also good and often very good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are very well supported in terms of their individual learning and the information they receive about how well they are doing. The careers and guidance programme also has good features, but is not broadly enough based.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form team is rightly proud of the strengths of the provision, but keeps it under critical review. They are dedicated to the success of all their students and determined to provide the best for them.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of teaching and the challenge it sets them. The accessibility and support of the staff. The good choice of courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school's response to their views. The extent to which the school treats them as adults. The careers advice they receive.

The inspection supported the strong, positive views of the students. The school is aware of students' concerns about the degree of freedom in the use of study time and is continuing to discuss it with their representatives. The school is reviewing its careers education and guidance provision overall.

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

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

There is consistently good achievement by pupils and students and standards of attainment are high

1. The school provides for the full range of attainment, but the school's average standards, including in literacy and numeracy, are above the national average at 14 and 16 years old. They are generally higher than the national average on the sixth form courses. Pupils and students of all levels of attainment generally achieve well, having made good progress in relation to their prior attainment.
2. In 2000 at Key Stage 3 results for both boys and girls were well above the national average in all three subjects assessed, and well above those of similar schools. The trend since 1996 has been broadly in line with that achieved nationally. The 2001 Key Stage 3 results are also well above similar schools in all three subjects. At Key Stage 4 the 2000 results for both boys and girls were above the average for all schools and for similar schools on the basis of free school meals at 5 A*-C and well above on other indicators. In comparison with similar schools on the basis of prior attainment at Key Stage 3, results were above average except for 5 A*-C, where they were below. The GCSE results in 2001 are well above similar schools on all indicators. The trend since 1996 has been broadly in line with the national. The school's targets for Key Stage 4 this year were challenging and are so again for 2002. The trend is in the right direction and the Key Stage 3 results of the relevant year groups were well above average.
3. By the age of 14 higher-attaining pupils can handle concepts such as stereotyping in extended writing in their work in English, constructing well-structured arguments with correct use of paragraphing. They can punctuate complex sentences. In other subjects they can write in different forms, for example newspaper articles in geography, or sort points to construct an argument, for example in history. By the age of 16 higher-attaining pupils can use a variety of sentence structures and demonstrate good control of paragraphing and punctuation, and average pupils can structure an argument about a literary text. Pupils handle challenging material well, for example comparing 1940s wartime journalism with present day articles in a Year 10 English lesson. In Year 9 pupils engaged in lively group discussion of the purposes of education, after watching the film "Dead Poets' Society." A lower-attaining group in Year 8, discussing, in pairs, and then as a class, a set of adverts were able to link them with an intended audience and identify the persuasive techniques used.
4. By the age of 14 most pupils use number accurately. Graphs are often well presented to communicate information. In their work in mathematics lessons pupils often apply techniques and concepts at some depth in realistic and demanding situations. By the age of 16 higher-attaining pupils show well above average knowledge, understanding and skills, for example in algebraic techniques, methods of solving simultaneous equations, and drawing and using accurate graphs to solve cubic equations. Trigonometry is also well understood.

5. High achievement is consistent across subjects, years and groups of pupils. Higher attainers in Year 7 can demonstrate good recall of scientific fact, for example subdivisions of the vertebrates, and particular subgroups and their characteristics. Pupils in Year 8 in a design and technology (DT) lesson not only produced biscuits of high quality appearance and aroma, but could explain clearly why and how they had used the materials chosen. In history, pupils in Year 9 show good recall of facts and correctly identified a range of reasons for events in the 1930s of a demanding complexity.
6. A Year 10 art class, covering the full range of attainment, produced some excellent work, and showed commendable willingness to experiment. In a Year 11 PE lesson pupils showed very good understanding of the rules, skills and tactics of football, as well as a sustained level of motivation. In a religious education (RE) lesson in Year 11 a class with a wide range of prior attainment showed very good use of previous knowledge, commitment and concentration to discuss moral issues from a Buddhist viewpoint. Pupils with SEN attain higher standards at GCSE than in similar schools. They achieve well in relation to their own prior attainment. In Key Stage 3 they produce a good quantity of carefully presented, completed and extended independent work. In Key Stage 4 they produce some impressive and very readable examples of free writing.
7. Students in the sixth form also reach high standards and achieve well. Standards in the sixth form are dealt with in detail in the annex.

Pupils and students demonstrate very good attitudes and behaviour

8. Pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn. This is reflected in very good levels of attendance, consistent across all year groups, with a whole-school average of 94.25% currently since September. They respond well to the quality of teaching provided, behave well within the classroom, during break periods despite limited shelter and social areas, and when moving around the school. The rate of exclusion is very low, with no recent permanent exclusions.
9. Attitudes and relationships with other pupils and adults are positive, with a complete absence of evidence of oppressive behaviour. There is an atmosphere of respect for others, property, resources and the range of opportunity for academic and personal development offered by the school, including some roles of responsibility such as on year, school and sports councils, and an increasing range of extra-curricular activities. They work well both collaboratively and as independent learners. They respond well to opportunities to display their knowledge and apply themselves with enthusiasm to set tasks, including independent research to extend their learning. They appreciate the support and guidance provided by tutors and are confident to consult staff on any areas of academic or pastoral concern. This is reflected in the high standards achieved in both of these aspects of their personal development.
10. Sixth form students are keen to demonstrate their maturity as independent learners and thrive on the stimulus provided by the quality of teaching they receive. Attitudes in the sixth form are dealt with in detail in the annex.

The teaching at all key stages is of high quality

11. Teaching and learning is consistently satisfactory throughout the school, very often good, and often very good or excellent. Over three-quarters of the teaching is good or better and nearly one-third is very good or excellent. There has been improvement on the high quality seen on the last inspection.
12. Subject expertise is very good. Teachers know the structure of their subject well and also the criteria for success in external assessment. They commonly share these criteria with the pupils. This gives them a strong sense of where they are going and a context for what they need to do to improve.
13. Lessons are consistently well planned and structured. A good variety of activities and materials are deployed. The teachers set interesting tasks, for example comparing articles on past wars with today in a Year 10 English lesson and using interesting opening activities, for example in a Year 8 mathematics lesson on probability and number sequences. The best lessons are structured to enable pupils to work independently, for example a Year 8 English lesson working in groups on a news bulletin. In a Year 9 history lesson a group task was structured and explained very well, to enable pupils to engage in mature and informed discussion of the Reichstag Fire.
14. Teachers have high expectations and ensure that lessons are challenging and have a good pace. For example, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, and a Year 10 geography lesson on tectonic activity, the work was well linked to previous lessons, and explanations were just long enough to provide clear guidance on what was to be done next. In a German lesson with Year 9 the different activities had clear time limits and short but clear guidance notes. In a Year 7 PE lesson on passing and moving the teacher ensured good progress for the pupils by steadily raising the level of challenge throughout.
15. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject. In an excellent Year 8 mathematics lesson the delivery communicated this enthusiasm to the pupils and motivated their learning. In a very good Year 7 RE lesson the teacher introduced the problem of defining God in a way that stimulated lively discussion, and gave pupils the confidence to express their own ideas and opinions.
16. Teachers use questioning well, for example in a Year 11 science lesson to guide pupils through work on inheritance and the role of selection in evolution, building on their prior understanding, but insisting on the correct use of technical language. In a Year 9 history lesson on the League of Nations the teacher used a very good relationship with the class to press many of the pupils to share their views, while insisting on responses within the clear framework laid down. Teachers are good at prompting individuals or groups in their learning, for example in music in Year 9 while working on electronic keyboards; in geography while working on a project on a tour of Japan, also in Year 9; and in work on a Year 10 project in art.
17. Teachers give good feedback and encouragement to pupils both orally in class and in constructive day-to-day marking and assessment. Achievement by pupils, whatever their levels of prior attainment, is recognised and celebrated.

18. Teachers judge skilfully when to intervene to support or stimulate pupils across the range of attainment, for example in a very good Year 8 DT lesson, where the pupils were encouraged to become autonomous problem solvers. In particular, teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the learning of pupils with SEN. They make good use of clear, straightforward individual education plans. As a result, pupils with SEN sustain their involvement in learning well and frequently achieve commendable GCSE results.
19. Occasionally, in otherwise satisfactory lessons, pupils are too passive, or are not given opportunities to work independently. There is sometimes a limited range of styles with direction by the teacher predominant. This weakness occurs more often in otherwise satisfactory lessons in some subjects in the sixth form. Otherwise, the teaching in the sixth form is also good and often very good. It is dealt with in detail in the annex.

The quality of what is on offer in the curriculum is very high

20. The curriculum meets the school's aims very well. The courses provided meet the needs of all its pupils, as well as providing extended opportunities in line with its Sports College status. At Key Stage 4 in particular the variety and balance of the subjects and courses offered give all students the opportunity to develop as well rounded individuals.
21. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is good and meets statutory requirements. Subject courses in a number of areas are designed to provide pupils with work that builds upon skills and knowledge they have gained in primary school. Links established with primary schools in the areas of mathematics, English, science and physical education (PE) have had a strong impact on courses and teaching. The PE course has been developed to provide well for dance and build upon primary work in basketball and tennis. In addition the Key Stage 3 literacy and numeracy strategies are being implemented, particularly in Year 7. There is clear evidence of these impacting on the teaching and learning. In mathematics for example, pupils are provided with good opportunities to engage in mental and oral work. Literacy is addressed well across the curriculum as a result of a whole-school drive.
22. Students in Years 10 and 11 have a very good choice of subjects and opportunities to have their achievements recognised by external accreditation. The curriculum, together with after-school courses, is organised to ensure that the pupils do not restrict their areas of learning at this stage or take on too much work. For example, amongst the many clubs and other extra-curricular activities there is the opportunity to study dance or ceramics, but pupils are not allowed to follow both as examination subjects. As well as a range of GCSE courses, a strong feature is the inclusion of a good range of vocational courses for pupils aged 14 to 16. Established courses in GNVQ health and social care, business studies and ICT have been extended this year to include art. These courses attract a good number of pupils and meet the needs of those on them. Another good feature of the Key Stage 4 curriculum is the time given to PE and the range of opportunities that are provided within this for pupils to obtain a range of recognised accreditation, from coaching awards from particular sporting bodies to GCSE dance or PE. The mathematics course for two groups of the highest attaining pupils in the subject is structured to enable them to enter successfully for the GCSE in November of their final year and then to follow a GCSE statistics course. This provides a good foundation for further study in the sixth form.

23. The school's Sports College status has had a positive impact on the curriculum provided. It has resulted in improved facilities and increased opportunity for participation in a range of sports and is bringing about higher levels of involvement. Improved facilities like the dance studio and the designated classroom with good ICT facilities have enhanced the quality of provision for, and range of, both practical and theoretical work. Pupils have access to a good number of well-qualified coaches and teachers and are given high quality provision in a number of sports. In Key Stage 3, the curriculum builds upon the work on the focus sports (basketball, dance and tennis) undertaken by the school's staff in its local primary schools. This has led to more advanced coaching in these sports as well as to enthusiasm and commitment from the pupils in other areas of PE.
24. At Key Stage 4 all pupils spend 9% of their time studying PE. This core course provides opportunity for accreditation in the coaching of specific sports, and for the study of GCSE PE or dance when linked to after-school sessions. Good links have been established with the wider sporting community and sports providers, that enrich the school curriculum and increase the opportunities individuals have outside school. In addition pupils are provided with master classes, clubs and coaching sessions. As a result the school has been awarded, for the second time, Sportsmark status in recognition of the number of pupils participating in sport during and after school.
25. The richness of the school's curriculum extends to its good provision for pupils' spiritual, social, moral, and cultural development. As found at the last inspection the school does not meet fully the requirements for a daily act of collective worship, but it has been thoughtful in providing opportunities for fostering pupils' spiritual development. Opportunities are also taken within some courses and special events to raise awareness of other religions and cultures. One example is a story day with a member of the Sikh community. Multi-cultural and multi-faith work is emphasised in RE and at Key Stage 4 all follow a short course in RE which gives good emphasise to consideration of moral issues and providing pupils with the opportunity to reflect on their views and opinions. The school's approach to behaviour management also emphasises the benefits of reflection on an individual's actions. RE throughout both Key Stages 3 and 4 provides for moral and spiritual development. Social skills are also developed in the teaching approach used in many lessons and focussed on in more depth in some. Behaviour and attitudes towards each other, around the school and within lessons, show clearly that this provision has had the desired impact.
26. The quality of the sixth form curriculum is also high. It is dealt with in detail in the annex.

The school provides very effective support that helps all pupils and students to make good progress

27. Whickham is a very caring school that ensures that its pupils' health, safety and welfare needs are effectively met so they can achieve well. There are good procedures for monitoring attendance and tracking absence and the school works hard to improve further attendance levels that are already above the national average. Staff are kept well informed about child protection procedures and the role of the designated senior member of staff. Newly appointed staff are carefully inducted into child welfare issues and are kept aware of any procedures maintained in line with local arrangements.

28. The recent introduction of a year group based pastoral system in the main school has been implemented well and has further improved the system's capacity to identify, support and challenge pupils at risk of underachievement. In this way, the school has built upon its traditional high expectations by introducing a more systematic approach to a wide range of welfare provision, while continuing to maintain a clear focus on raising standards for all pupils.
29. The school monitors pupils' academic performance and personal development closely and arrangements for keeping track of their progress are very effective. Pupils known to be at risk of underachieving are identified early, before entry, through established partnerships with partner primary schools. They subsequently benefit from extra complementary support provided through the vulnerable pupil project, special educational provision, or access to a learning mentor. Following pupils' entry to school, increasingly effective use of baseline attainment and predictive performance data is made to set and pursue challenging individual learning targets for all pupils. This is already well established in Year 11 and is being consolidated in other years. All pupils benefit from regular reviews of their work with their tutors and decisive action is taken to tackle causes of under-performance or to celebrate commendable effort. Consequently, pupils of all abilities enjoy a good understanding of what they need to do to improve their work.
30. A strong feature of the school is the quality and range of provision for pupils with differing needs. Support for gifted or talented students is well established and builds effectively upon a clear and detailed analysis of their past achievements and future potential. Other provision such as access to a learning mentor or the learning centre are having a positive impact on the attitudes, behaviour and attendance of those students who are underachieving or are at risk of losing their commitment to school work. Social inclusion initiatives have enabled the school to be proactive towards pupils at risk of exclusion and allow support interventions to be tailored to their individual needs. Arrangements to provide a limited number of alternative places for pupils at risk of serious disaffection, run in partnership with Gateshead Education Welfare Department and Community Education Service, also illustrates the school's sensitive and sustained commitment to all of its pupils.
31. Provision for pupils with SEN is also good and complements pastoral and social inclusion activities well. Arrangements to manage their transfer from partner primary schools are well established and effective. In Key Stage 3, pupils with weaker reading skills make good progress and benefit from a corrective reading programme operated by learning support staff, while sixth form student volunteers operate an individualised paired reading scheme for older pupils. Teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the learning of pupils with SEN and are kept well informed through clear, straightforward individual education plans (IEPs). As a result, students with SEN sustain their involvement in learning well and frequently achieve commendable GCSE results.
32. The overall arrangements for providing support and guidance to pupils are good and play a major role in helping to raise the achievements of pupils of all abilities. Pupils are confident that when they need help it will be available both during and after school hours. They learn to share their teachers' high expectations and are actively encouraged to aspire to the best standards of academic and personal development they can achieve. Consequently, even in this predominantly mono-ethnic school, students experience an inclusive culture that succeeds in its intention of valuing all of its members. Students in the sixth form are also very well supported. Provision is dealt with in detail in the sixth form annex.

The enterprising and self-critical leadership and management of the school make it a very good place to, learn, work and develop

33. The head teacher, leadership team and the governors have succeeded in giving life to the school's most succinct expression of its values – "comprehensively better." The school is led by a strong and committed team, whose members are thoroughly on top of both whole-school issues and their individual areas of responsibility. The leadership team, whose membership has changed substantially since the last inspection, is enterprising and positive, but not complacent. The team is well structured, with clear job descriptions and clear lines of management to year and subject heads, both individually and collectively.
34. The school's systems of monitoring and evaluation are very thorough. The outcomes are effectively shared with all parties and acted upon through the management plan. There is a thorough analysis of data at all levels. There are annual performance review meetings with those responsible for the subjects. Performance is tracked against targets. There is a coherent framework of teaching observation and senior managers are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of provision. A review is built into the development planning process. The school has a system of parental surveys. It has responded also to external monitoring, for example in relation to its Sports College status.
35. The school has identified the overall priorities of raising achievement amongst middle to lower ability groups; improving independent learning, including homework; improving individual student target-setting procedures (particularly curriculum targets); and developing teaching and learning approaches to address the priorities above. The current school development plan, and that for the next two years, focuses on an imaginative priority to create and implement a modular framework for learning. The challenging objectives of the school development plan are an appropriate curriculum; effective teaching and learning; effective assessment, monitoring and intervention; and a supportive and challenging learning environment.
36. The governing body is very active in the work of the school and makes its major decisions in line with clear priorities and after thorough evaluation of options. Different funding streams are all reported to governors separately from the budget share so that particular projects can be set against them. They have strongly supported the successful expansion of the community use of the school on both social and financial grounds. The governors are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses in results overall and by subject. They use internal and external comparison to identify them and follow up any decisions to take action.
37. The school makes very effective use of all its resources and has been successful in generating income and using it to enhance its provision. It has successfully used different funding streams to establish a learning centre, despite not qualifying for the equivalent Excellence in Cities strand. Complex initiatives such as Sports College status, Excellence in Cities and the Key Stage 3 pilot have been integrated swiftly and effectively into the school's overall provision. Staffing and resources are sufficient for the needs of the curriculum, and in many subject areas are good. There is great pressure on accommodation and some of it presents difficulties that the school works hard to overcome. The school applies best value principles in tendering and purchasing, both in services obtained and methods of payment.

38. The school has a relatively large number of NQTs and experienced teachers new to the school or to their post within it. The comprehensive programme for NQTs is organised into modules, so other staff can access parts of the programme, to meet their individual needs. There is a specific programme of monitoring of the teaching of new staff. The school is a substantial and successful provider of ITT.
39. Leadership and management of the sixth form is also good, and is described in detail in the annex.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- 40. The careers education and guidance programme in the sixth form is not yet sufficiently broadly based**
41. This area is described in detail in the annex.
- 42. Some students in the sixth form engage to only a limited extent in discussion and independent work**
43. This area is described in detail in the annex.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

Sixth Form

44. Provide a broad-based, up-to-date and well-resourced programme of careers education and guidance by:
- auditing present provision;
 - drawing up a development plan;
 - drawing up detailed schemes of work;
 - providing new teaching materials, including for ICT use;
 - establishing a wider range of links with universities, FE and training providers.
45. Develop students' discussion skills and promote independent working by:
- specific guidance on discussion techniques across the curriculum;
 - dissemination of best practice in promoting active learning and independent working between the sixth form courses;
 - promoting the use of ICT across the curriculum on the basis of good practice current on some of the sixth form courses.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	30
	Sixth form	75
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		30

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	2	12	10	6	0	0	0
Percentage	7	40	33	20	0	0	0

Sixth form

Number	4	13	38	20	0	0	0
Percentage	5	17	51	27	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. [When the total number observed in either the main school or the sixth form is substantially less than 100, add] Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for [enter Years [] – [] and/or the sixth form here] as each lesson represents more than one [two, three, etc] percentage point[s]. [Where the total is close to or greater than 100 in both, use only the first sentence.]

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1329	323
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	131	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	14	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	196	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	31

Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving
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65

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.9
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	142	122	264

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	96	111	110
	Girls	103	92	94
	Total	199	203	204
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (77)	77 (72)	77 (71)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (40)	50 (51)	45 (46)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	99	108	110
	Girls	101	191	92
	Total	200	199	202
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (72)	75 (73)	76 (74)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	45 (33)	52 (50)	44 (39)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	137	130	267

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	79	131	133
	Girls	86	127	128
	Total	165	258	261
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	62 (55)	97 (96)	98 (99)
	National	50 (47)	89 (91)	95 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	46.1 (45.3)
	National	39 (38)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	91	65
	National		NA

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	58	57	115

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	17.8 (18.1)	17.8 (15.9)	17.8 (17.8)	5.0 (4.0)	NA	5.0 (4.0)
National	(17.6)	(18.4)	(18.2)	(2.6)	(2.8)	(2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	30	90
	National		NA

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	1
Pakistani	4
Bangladeshi	6
Chinese	2
White	1639
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	36	0
Other minority ethnic groups		

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)	106.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	281

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	23.4
Key Stage 4	20.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001
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	£
Total income	4,628,434
Total expenditure	4,746,650
Expenditure per pupil	2,828
Balance brought forward from previous year	312,942
Balance carried forward to next year	194,726

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	20.9
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	16.7

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.9
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	1652
Number of questionnaires returned	440

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	33	59	6	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	42	52	3	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	24	62	5	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	63	12	3	1
The teaching is good.	32	60	3	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	54	15	4	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	43	4	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	38	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	22	56	15	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	31	54	5	1	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	34	56	5	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	32	48	10	1	9

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

46. Results in 2000 were above the national average and the school average over the last 3 years has been well above the national average. Only communication studies; sociology and health and social care were below average. The average points score at A Level remained the same in 2001. The pass rate is also higher than the national average. The level of attainment in the GNVQ courses is also high and rising. These results have been achieved while the average attainment on entry of students following the advanced courses has fallen. Data indicates that in 2001 the expected value was added. 59% of leavers in 2001 went into higher education, a rise on last year. The retention rate is high. Students generally achieve well and make the progress that would be expected of them. The school has set challenging targets and is on track to reach them.
47. Students generally have good knowledge and understanding of the content of the courses they follow. In biology their understanding of explanations is good and they have a good grasp of processes. However, in chemistry lower attaining students have a less sure grasp of the abstract principles. In DT all students can follow the criteria laid down for their designing and making. The higher attainers demonstrate high quality solutions to design problems and show creativity and flair. Knowledge and understanding of other artists is good on the GCE course, but students' knowledge of professional and industrial practice is limited on the AVCE course. Students have a secure understanding of concepts in business studies. They have a broad knowledge of the services involved in health and social care. In sociology students who continue into Year 13 understand the principles and issues involved, for example those underlying the study of poverty. In French, high attainers can talk and write at length on topics requiring a high level of knowledge.
48. Students have a good level of skills appropriate to their courses. For example, in mathematics techniques are secure and used within increasingly demanding and complex questions. In biology and chemistry students show good organisational and practical skills. In GCE art, drawing technique is good and colour is used with confidence. Students experiment confidently with different media. In ICT students are comfortable with the main features of Microsoft Word. In geography students can manage a wide range of information and produce accurate maps. In English language and literature students use terminology accurately. Higher attainers can construct their own writing skilfully in a range of genres. On the French course most students can express themselves on a range of everyday topics. Highest attainers can express their thoughts cogently and coherently.
49. In ICT the highest attaining students can work independently and research critically. There is good independent research in art. They research well for individual and group presentations in English literature. On the health and social care course most are beginning to make judgements as to what to select for inclusion in their coursework. They can take part in debate or plan together in small groups in business studies. They generally collaborate well in activities in English.

50. Some students' oral communication skills in discussion and presentation are underdeveloped, for example in vocational art, sociology, geography and English language. Independent learning and research skills are not well developed in sociology and geography and in French the students' use of ICT is underdeveloped.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

51. Students are keen to demonstrate their maturity as independent learners and thrive on the stimulus provided by the quality of teaching they receive. They appreciate the guidance and support received from tutors in the selection of courses, review of progress and setting of targets to maximise their achievement potential. This is reflected in the high academic standards achieved and in their self-confidence. Some students, however, have concerns that they are not consistently treated as mature adults and they question the restrictions placed on access to social areas during some non-teaching periods. They do, however, apply themselves with enthusiasm to their studies both in contributions to classroom discussion and independent research to extend their knowledge. They welcome opportunities to take on roles of responsibility both as individuals and collaboratively in organising school events such as the annual charity week.
52. Virtually all students entering the sixth form do so as an automatic first choice and levels of attendance are consistently good. This is reinforced by the number of students from other schools who select Whickham in appreciation of the wide range of courses of study available commensurate with their career ambitions.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

53. Teaching and learning are good and often very good. They are consistently at least satisfactory, good or better in three-quarters of the lessons and very good or better in nearly a quarter. Lessons are generally well planned, with good structure and pace. Where teams are involved, as in health and social care or ICT, links are made clear to students. Teachers have high expectations and their students respond well to them. The teachers generally have a good knowledge of their subject and of course and examination requirements. This encourages the students to focus on the intended outcomes in terms of course assessments. They give clear explanations, for example in mathematics and biology. These enable students to recall previous work and set up new tasks. In chemistry this is helped by good use of visual aids. In DT a range of interesting exemplar materials is used to challenge students' thinking. They provide clear written assignments in vocational business studies and specific guidance in lessons, for example prompt cards in one geography lesson to aid group discussion.
54. Efforts are made to support students' learning by relating activities to real life situations, for example in a mathematics statistics lesson and in vocational art; by drawing on personal experience in geography and on contemporary society and experience in sociology; by emphasising current affairs on the French course; and by exploring wider social and moral issues on the English courses. Teachers make good use of topical material to illustrate theory in business studies and of video material and role play on the health and social care course. The best lessons strike a balance between teacher and pupil activity. They make place for students to work in lessons to extend or consolidate learning, and set tasks that will require best use of private study time or work at home. They provide opportunity for independent and collaborative work, for example in business studies. Good use is made in this respect of ICT in both business studies courses, as well as on art and DT courses.

55. Teachers are often enthusiastic about their subject and this communicates itself to the students. Their relationship with the students is generally good and often very good. Students are confident in the quality of the teaching offered. The teachers know the students well. They use skilful questioning to draw out key points, for example in English literature; to ensure that all students understand, for example in biology; or to match challenge to individual needs, for example in sociology. They let students know what is needed to make progress and how well they are doing. Written comments on work in mathematics are helpful and challenging. In art regular updates are given against course requirements. One-to-one tutorials provide detailed technical advice in art and support to students' learning on the health and social care course. In ICT also, effective intervention and advice enable individual students to develop their independent learning.
56. In some otherwise satisfactory lessons, students are too passive, for example in mathematics and biology, because of very directive teaching. Sometimes they are not given opportunities to work independently, for example in chemistry. ICT is underused in science, French, geography, sociology and mathematics to support independent work by students.

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

57. The curriculum in the sixth form is well managed to ensure that breadth and balance is maintained. 28 Level 3 courses are offered currently, giving a wide range of combinations in both Year 12 and Year 13. Students can make choices from 5 columns and across both year groups. This means that they can choose additional one-year courses in either year of study. The school's own evaluation of subject choices shows that 89% of students in Year 12 had selected subjects across domains. Key skills are not offered formally for assessment. However, students can access an ICT course. Clear guidelines are given for entry to the sixth form and students are generally satisfied that they had received objective and factual guidance with regards to combinations of subjects. The school attracts a number of external students at 16 as a result of its wide curriculum.
58. The school has, in the past, offered a variety of Level 2 courses, but found that retention was poor – most leavers going into local employment or training. There is currently only one ICT intermediate course available. The school analyses careers progression data and is confident that other provision exists in the local area.
59. The school is sufficiently large to ensure that a good range of courses can be maintained, including minority subjects such as music. The numbers are sufficient to ensure that the range of courses can be preserved, including minority subjects such as music. The school conducts a review each year and projects numbers on courses, based upon Year 11 choices. No student who was interviewed expressed concern about the lack of choice. On the contrary some had altered their original selection in order to remain in the school and study combinations which worked in the option columns for time-tabling purposes.
60. The senior managers responsible evaluate the curriculum rigorously via a number of whole-school working groups and by obtaining student feedback. Adaptations have been made as a result.

61. Subject managers select the mode of assessment for modular courses effectively to ensure that students have the best opportunities to achieve. The sixth form management team has an overview of arrangements and has a forum for debate with subject managers in the whole-school curriculum group, as well as in the sixth form curriculum group.
62. The school has reduced teaching contact time for each subject to 4 hours. This ensures that students taking 4 or 5 subjects are able to access the enrichment curriculum and have time to work in the dedicated study area. Evidence was gathered during the inspection to show that teachers expect extension work and research to be conducted in this private study time. Students generally use the time effectively for this purpose. Study skills and time management are planned into the pastoral programme, as well as stress management. A carousel of enrichment activities is available. The head of sixth checks attendance and negotiates the programme with students.
63. Sports College status has had a big impact on the breadth of the curriculum offered and on the number of pupils following courses in sport and PE. There are 3 groups studying A level, other students AS level and many are involved in a community sports leader course. A range of courses has been provided to these sixth form pupils to enable them to establish or assist with clubs for younger pupils. This extensive list includes tag rugby, tennis, netball, mini-soccer, dance and basketball. Some of these give the opportunity for students to gain sport-specific accreditation. The students' physical well-being is provided for through a "Passport for Fitness" scheme.
64. Provision for pupils' personal and social development is good. Students organise a large and enterprising charity week each October. They support main school pupils in corrective reading and other activities. They coach sports in partner primary schools. They themselves participate in a wide range of sports and musical and other performances. Lessons often give opportunity for reflection and discussion of contemporary issues. Moral aspects are emphasised within many courses. In health and social care moral dilemmas are discussed and pupils are asked to think about the points they make, as when the teacher asked the challenging question "If we conclude that, could we be accused of racism?"

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

65. Arrangements for assessing students' attainments and progress in relation to their courses are good. Most students enter from the main school, and the arrangements build upon the good assessment practice also established there. Assessment information, including GCSE predictions and subsequent results, are used well to inform initial planning for individual students. Students are effectively inducted into the sixth form. Tutors quickly assess the initial progress of continuing and new entrants and, in the event of unsuitable course choices, advise students of alternatives that are more appropriate.

66. Year tutors and subject departments liaise well and keep good records of the progress students make in their courses and the effort they demonstrate. Regular reviews of individual students' progress, by proactive teachers with high expectations and comprehensive knowledge of their courses and assessment objectives, help them to form a clear and realistic understanding of how well they are doing. Students and their parents are then kept well informed of students' standards and achievements and any areas of concern or underachievement that need to be addressed. Target-setting is a purposeful, established feature of the evaluation process between students and tutors. Consequently, students are well motivated by this ongoing dialogue and they admit it helps to keep them on track. The school is effective in assessing and identifying students' individual learning needs and providing appropriate additional support where required.

Advice, support and guidance

67. Good quality support and advice is maintained throughout the sixth form for all its students. They receive sound, impartial advice that effectively guides them towards courses appropriate for them. Before students join the sixth form, their designated year tutor uses predicted GCSE grades and other assessment information to advise and guide them towards course choices that offer them a reasonable chance of success. They are also supported in re-evaluating their initial choice of courses in the first month or so of their time in the sixth form. This re-negotiation allows them scope to modify their initial decisions as they see how they are working out in practice.
68. The provision of careers education and guidance (CEG) is under-developed. There is effective support and guidance to those students interested in applying to university and an innovative system for completing and tracking UCAS forms on-line. However, there is no broadly based programme of careers education to guide students in making appropriate choices for progressing beyond the sixth form. CEG reference materials and ICT research facilities are too limited, and, other than on GNVQ courses, there are no opportunities for work experience. The school is aware of the weakness and the new CEG co-ordinator has made a good start in the role. She is aware that a full audit of the subject, development plan, detailed schemes of work and new teaching materials, are required.
69. Students' progress continues to be closely monitored and is subject to regular review to ensure that any underachievement is quickly identified and difficulties addressed. The school also works closely with the careers' service to ensure that students are properly advised and supported in their applications to university or employers.
70. Tutorial support for students is also good. Tutors and subject teachers quickly establish an overview of how well individual students are coping with their studies and help them understand what they must do to improve. In particular, they review progress regularly to identify difficulties and deal with them before they get out of control. Students clearly trust their tutors and course leaders and feel confident about raising issues of concern about their programme of study or other personal difficulties. This is partly because the school has established arrangements that help tutors and students bond quickly in Year 12 so that they become well known to each other early in the students' sixth form career. They then go on to enjoy continuity of support throughout the remainder of their courses.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

71. There is a strong endorsement by parents of the quality of education provided by the school and of its expectations of its students in all aspects of their academic and personal development and the standards achieved. They are kept well advised of their progress through formal consultation evenings and regular reports. Staff generally respond promptly to individual enquiries. The induction process for entry into the sixth form is recognised as very effective. The school has a very positive ethos with a balance of academic and extra-curricular activities. The overwhelming view is that Whickham is a very good school.
72. Students are confident in the support and guidance provided by staff and are appreciative of the quality of teaching they receive. They welcome the challenges they are set, the regular review of their individual progress and the targets set to ensure that they achieve their full potential. They have, however, some concerns regarding the breadth of careers guidance they receive and the perception that they are not always treated as responsible young adults. This is partly allied to restrictions on the use of social facilities at certain times. The predominant view, however, is that Whickham is a very good school and they would recommend others to experience the quality of education provided in the sixth form.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

73. The new head of sixth form is an assistant head teacher and fully involved in the corporate work of the leadership team. He attends a sixth form curriculum group and also the whole-school curriculum group, where all subjects are represented. This ensures that the sixth form is seen within the context of the whole school. He is himself head of Year 12 and is supported by an experienced head of Year 13 who has moved up with the students. There are clear job descriptions and time and facilities to manage the sixth form as a separate element of the whole school. The sixth form team is rightly proud of the strengths of provision, but keeps it under critical review. Particularly, they keep under review the hours available for subject delivery, the tutor system and student target-setting, advice and guidance, attendance and attitudes to the entitlement curriculum, the issue of early leavers, and progression routes. The students are seen as part of this management process through the representative school council. The team are dedicated to the success of all their students and determined to provide the best for them.
74. The school's thorough systems of monitoring and evaluation apply equally to the sixth form. There is a thorough analysis of data at all levels. There are annual performance review meetings with those responsible for the sixth form courses. Student performance is tracked against targets. There is a coherent framework of teaching observation and senior managers are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form provision. A review is built into the development planning process. The school has a system of parental surveys and students are interviewed on aspects of the sixth form experience. The school has responded also to external monitoring in relation to its Sports College status.

75. The school has identified the overall priorities of raising achievement amongst middle to lower ability groups; improving independent learning, including homework; improving individual student target-setting procedures (particularly curriculum targets); and developing teaching and learning approaches to address the priorities above. The department plans include objectives for the sixth form where appropriate. These include objectives for improved information collection and tighter academic monitoring in the sixth form.
76. The very active governing body is well aware of the strengths and weaknesses in results in the sixth form overall and by subject. They use internal and external comparison to identify them and follow up any action decided on. The provision of sixth form study facilities was a decision that was carefully considered. The facilities are well used by the students, and are also part of the school's income generation through community use.

Resources

77. The sixth form is cost-effective. Its good results and high quality of provision are obtained at less than the staffing costs the numbers would justify. The school management is aware of the imbalance based on staffing costs, but facilities and resources provided recently for the sixth form correct it to some extent. There is no evidence of courses not running because of cost implications, or of shortages that could be resolved on this scale of funding. Staffing and resources are sufficient for the needs of the sixth form curriculum, and in many subject areas are good. There is great pressure on accommodation and some of it presents difficulties that the school works hard to overcome. The school applies best value principles in tendering and purchasing, both in services obtained and methods of payment for the sixth form as for the main school.
78. The school has a relatively large number of NQTs and experienced teachers new to the school or to their post within it. The comprehensive programme for NQTs includes induction into the work of the sixth form. The programme is organised into modules, so other staff can access parts of the programme, including the sixth form element, to meet their individual needs. There is a specific programme of monitoring of the teaching of new staff. The school is a substantial and successful provider of ITT, and students in higher education work with sixth form classes on a regular basis.

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

79. In the inspection, 15 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.
80. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2000.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	3	100	63	100	17	4.67	1.56
Chemistry	1	100	53	0	8	2.00	1.08
Biology	2	100	53	0	6	1.00	0.97

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	58	93	89	36	45	5.93	5.99
Chemistry	12	100	89	25	42	5.00	5.87
Biology	20	100	88	40	34	5.80	5.28
Physics	14	93	88	29	41	5.29	5.72
Design and technology	29	93	92	31	29	5.66	5.37
Business studies	29	100	91	41	30	6.41	5.34
Economics	13	92	88	54	36	6.62	5.41
Business vocational	21	-	-	-	-	11.14	10.78
Health and social care vocational	21	-	-	-	-	8.00	10.69
Art and design	26	100	96	54	45	6.92	6.42
Art and design vocational	3	-	-	-	-	14.00	12.66
Geography	12	100	92	42	37	5.83	5.73
Sociology	37	89	88	16	37	4.32	5.46
English language	29	90	90	38	29	5.52	5.19
English literature	19	89	96	37	36	5.89	5.90
German	7	100	92	86	41	8.29	5.88
General studies	27	96	85	59	28	7.33	4.85

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

AS/A2 MATHEMATICS

81. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Results are rising and are now above average.
- Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE grades.
- Course work is of a good standard.
- Leadership and management of the department are good.
- Teachers have good subject and examination knowledge and commitment to their work. This leads to sound, and sometimes good, teaching.
- Mathematics attracts and provides for a large number of students.

Areas for improvement

- Develop teaching to provide students with more opportunities to work independently within lessons.

82. The department does well for its A level students. Results are rising and are now above average. Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE grades. Course work is of a good standard. Leadership and management of the department are good. Teachers have good subject and examination knowledge and commitment to their work. This leads to teaching that is consistently satisfactory and sometimes good.

83. Standards are high. Students achieve well in mathematics in the sixth form. Attainment and achievement are improving. Results in 2001 were high, 47% gained an A or B, 98% A-E. These results are an improvement on the previous year. In 2000 the overall performance in mathematics at A level was broadly in line with that found nationally. The proportion of students attaining a pass grade was above the national figure. However, the proportion of students attaining the higher A/B grades was below the national figure. Boys and girls perform equally well, although a much higher proportion of boys than girls follow the course. Over recent years students' performance at A level relative to that in their other subjects has been improving; it has always been broadly in line with the national average. In work seen the Year 13 students have made progress in the sixth form and are making sound and appropriate use of techniques covered in Year 12 within the solution of demanding and complex questions, for example, calculus and statistical methods. Similarly, algebraic techniques are secure.

84. The teaching of A level mathematics is all at least sound and in some lessons it is good. Within the approach used there are few weaknesses and a number of strengths are apparent. These lead to the students making good progress from GCSE. In the lessons the teacher leads the whole class in explaining the topic or questions and the students make notes on new work or techniques and examples of methods and calculations. What they have learned is then consolidated through application in homework activities. Features that make this an effective teaching approach are introductions that are interesting and quick, resulting in the students engaging and listening intensely. A statistics topic was made real through reference to a race night and this resulted in students commenting on and thinking about possible outcomes. Clear explanations help students recall previous work and gain confidence in their ability to do the work. Teachers' good and secure subject knowledge provides students with accurate information and methods. They also have good knowledge of examination and course requirements. Work is marked consistently and comments made lead to improvement. In the best comments seen the written statements challenge and help pupils to achieve better work. In lessons, teachers respond well to the pupils' questions, and their answers help students to have better understanding. However, sometimes in lessons there is a lack of demanding involvement or challenge. However, one lesson did progress to more challenging content once the teacher judged that the fundamentals had been understood. After the introduction to a theorem to find factors the lesson quickly moved on to look at how to use this to find an unknown coefficient. This resulted in the students asking detailed questions of the teacher to support their understanding, as well as increasing the pace of learning. However, in many lessons the teacher makes a greater contribution to the lesson than the students. In only one lesson did students undertake any mathematics where they were not working directly with the teacher. This occurred when the students were asked to derive for themselves an expression for the change in kinetic energy from the momentum equations the teacher had derived with them. This led to the students having a clear view of their understanding of what had been explained. Other approaches to teaching were not observed and little was seen of alternative resources being used, for example ICT, although the sample of work showed that students used word-processing for coursework and that some use is made of graphical calculators.
85. Mathematics is a popular subject, attracting a large number of students at A level. In lessons students have a good attitude, and have good relationships with teachers and each other. They pay good attention; only on a few occasions do they lose concentration. Students want to achieve, apply themselves well to coursework and homework, make clear notes and present work well. They are sometimes passive receivers of learning, giving only limited responses.
86. Mathematics is well led and managed by a knowledgeable, committed head of department who has a supportive group of mathematics teachers. Systems are in place to enable him to be aware of students' progress and the quality of teaching. Courses and resources are provided and organised to meet students' needs. These, and a willingness to take opportunities to improve the provision in the department through training, are resulting in high standards and achievement.

SCIENCES

87. The focus was on chemistry and biology. The science department also offers an AS and A Level course in physics. Results in physics over the past few years have been around the national average. Numbers of students, mostly boys, taking the course have been steady and the current number continuing with the A2 course in Year 13 has remained at a viable level. Two lessons were observed and teaching was judged to be good and very good.

AS/A2 CHEMISTRY

88. The quality of provision is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- High expectations of students' achievements.
- Some good teaching with good use of practical work.
- Good proportion of the highest grades in AS Level examination in 2001.

Areas for improvement

- Numbers of students continuing with the A2 course are low.
- A significant proportion of the teaching is dominated by teacher exposition, with little interaction between teacher and students.
- There is insufficient access to a range of written resources and laboratory based ICT.

89. GCE A Level results have been satisfactory for the past few years. The proportion of high grades is lower than the national average, but almost all students achieve as well as expected, when taking account of their GCSE results. Results were particularly good for the AS Level examination. Of the fourteen students taking this course, half gained the highest grade A or B. Unfortunately, few have continued with the subject by progressing on to the A2 course.
90. The standards of work of the current students range from very good to well below average. Highest attaining students demonstrate very good understanding of the subject; they give correct oral answers to teachers' questions in lessons and written answers to past examination questions are done well. Lower-attaining students lack confidence in answering questions orally and written answers are often unsatisfactory or not available. This was particularly evident in a Year 13 lesson about the energy holding particles together in compounds, where the abstract ideas were understood well by high attaining students but lower-attaining students were much less sure of the principles. In practical lessons, both Year 12 and Year 13 students show good organisational and practical skills. They handle delicate apparatus with care and make accurate observations, such as in a Year 12 lesson involving the titration of an acid and an alkali. Coursework based on practical investigations shows that, for examination purposes, higher-attaining students are capable of very good quality work, using all the scientific processes needed, for example, to find out the energy transfer involved in reactions between a metal and an acid. Work from other students is much less strong and shows below average understanding of both scientific processes and chemical theories.

91. All teaching is at least satisfactory and some is good. Teachers make the learning objectives clear to the students and have good subject knowledge. Explanations are clear and often make good use of visual aids. However, in several lessons the teacher's oral exposition occupied almost all of the lesson time and there was very little time for students to think for themselves. Questioning of students is sometimes helpful but too often the majority of the class is unresponsive and the teacher allows one or two students to provide all the answers. In practical lessons teachers are well prepared and students have clear instructions, either given orally by the teacher or provided by reading the textbook. Pace of lessons is generally appropriate for the lesson content, although in one case the lesson over-ran into lunchtime and the end was rushed. In the majority of lessons the relationship between the teacher and students is not strong, and there is little interaction between teacher and individual students.
92. Students' written work includes an appropriate combination of notes taken during lessons, information sheets, exercises and calculations, reports of practical work and past exam questions. The quantity and quality of work differs widely for high and low attaining students in both Year 12 and Year 13. High attaining students produce a large quantity of work of a very high standard. Their files are well presented and organised and provide students with a good record of work to assist their revision. Low attaining students produce relatively little work, often of an unsatisfactory standard. Some of their files are disorganised and provide no useful record for revision. Some of the notes are checked by the teacher whilst exercises and past questions are thoroughly marked, with corrections and advice for improvement. Information about student progress is satisfactory and targets are set for their final examination grades.
93. Students' work and learning in chemistry are satisfactory and most are well prepared for the examination. They are attentive and the majority complete the work set. Although most are articulate speakers, they often lack confidence in offering ideas in a whole class situation. Strong teacher direction limits opportunities for developing independence, both during lessons and in individual study time. Students clearly enjoy the practical activities but a number report finding theoretical aspects of the subject difficult. This perceived level of difficulty, combined with the lack of interaction in some lessons, is likely to contribute to the poor retention rate.
94. The head of department provides satisfactory leadership. He holds very principled views about how the subject should be taught and sets high standards. His selection of syllabus provides a good scheme of work on which teachers base their planning. Textbooks are provided, but students do not have enough access to a wider range of resources, including laboratory based ICT.

AS/A2 BIOLOGY

95. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Results are good and are above the national average.
- The subject is popular and increasing numbers of students take it at both AS and A Level.
- Almost all teaching is good; lessons are well structured with a strong focus on the main learning points and the demands of the examination.
- Students are well motivated and, when opportunities arise, work well together.
- Standards of written work are good.

Areas for improvement

- The range of teaching styles is limited; there are insufficient opportunities for practical work and other kinds of active learning.
- The strong emphasis on examinations detracts from the inspirational aspects of the subject.
- Too many lessons are taught in classrooms.
- There is insufficient access to a range of written resources and laboratory-based ICT.

96. GCE A Level results have consistently been good and remained so this year. All students gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the highest grades, A-B, was above the national average. The majority of students are female and they do particularly well. Almost all students achieved as well as expected, when taking account of their GCSE results. A large number of students took the AS Level examination for the first time this year. National comparisons cannot yet be made but a reasonable proportion gained the highest grades. Very few dropped out of the course and the majority have continued with the subject by progressing on to the A2 course.

97. The standards of work of the majority of current students are also above average. In the lessons seen the majority of students demonstrate good understanding of the subject. They are able to follow teachers' explanations and take their own notes as the lesson proceeds. Most students can give clear oral answers to questions addressed to them personally, although few have the confidence to volunteer answers. Short tests and written answers to past examination questions also show that the majority of students are developing good understanding. This was particularly evident in a Year 13 lesson about cells when students were able to explain how different cells function. Little practical work was seen, but in one Year 12 lesson students showed good organisation and practical skills whilst carrying out a rather tricky procedure in order to measure volumes of gas produced in an enzyme reaction. Coursework based on practical investigations shows that, for examination purposes, the majority of students are capable of good quality work, using all the scientific processes needed, for example, to find out how different shore-line habitats affect limpets. A minority of students are managing less well and at times have difficulty in recalling earlier work or give superficial answers and explanations.

98. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. Teachers make the learning objectives clear to the students, have good subject knowledge and generally have appropriate lesson plans. Explanations are nearly always clear and often make use of good questioning of students. This is particularly effective when questions are addressed to named students so that they all contribute, as in a Year 12 lesson about cell membranes. Students are expected to make their own notes as the explanation is built up and the majority are successful in this. In the one practical lesson observed the teacher gave very clear instructions for carrying out the procedure and organised the class well. A particularly effective teaching strategy was seen in a Year 13 lesson, about transmission of nerve messages, which involved students working in pairs on a sequencing task. Active learning of this kind, however, is underused by the department. Pace of lessons is generally brisk and time well used. There is a strong focus on the demands of the examination, which makes assessment expectations clear to students, but detracts from the inspirational aspects of the subject. Relationships are good and there is good interaction between teachers and students. In the one lesson which was only just satisfactory explanations were superficial and the teacher spent too little time interacting with students whilst they worked, unassisted, from the textbook.
99. Apart from their own notes, much of the written work demanded of students is in the form of answers to structured questions. This gives students plenty of opportunities to practice past examination questions, often given as homework. Quick tests are used well in some lessons for students to recall earlier work and for the teacher to check their understanding. Coursework is in the form of extended written reports of practical investigations with diagrams, calculations and graphs. There is a limited amount of other practical work. Student notes are not checked by teachers, but marking is usually thorough, with corrections and advice for improvement. Teachers have good information about student progress and set targets for their final examination grade.
100. Students work well in biology and their learning equips them well for the examination. They are attentive, complete the work set and generally enjoy the subject. When given the opportunity they co-operate well with each other. Although the majority are articulate speakers, they often lack confidence in offering ideas in a whole class situation. Strong teacher direction limits opportunities for developing independence, both during lessons and in individual study time.
101. The head of department provides good leadership and management. He has established a supportive climate within the department, which is encouraging of both staff and students. He is keen to keep up-to-date and use the best of current practice. Schemes of work related to the new syllabus have been started, but need considerably more work. Textbooks are provided but students should have access to a wider range of resources, including laboratory-based ICT. The department is short of laboratories, resulting in too many lessons being time-tabled in classrooms.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

AS/A2 DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY (PRODUCT DESIGN)

102. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Students' achievements in both designing and making are good.
- Teachers give good guidance and advice to individual students.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good.
- Teachers use good exemplar materials to make lessons interesting and to challenge students' thinking.
- The department is very well led.

Areas for Improvement

- Lesson objectives are not shared sufficiently with students.
- Some lessons are too slow to start.
- Students have virtually no opportunity to experience Computer Aided Design/Computer Aided Manufacture (CAD/CAM) within the department.
- The workshops need updating.
- Some practices in the workshops are not as safe as they should be.

103. The department has successfully maintained the overall standards of achievement and good teaching since the last inspection, despite the difficulties created by the introduction of a new course last year. The department consists of committed, knowledgeable and experienced teachers who are very well led by the senior curriculum manager.

104. Results are average overall and good for the higher grades. Students make better progress in the graphics option in Year 12 because students who choose the materials option come from a more diverse range of experiences at Key Stage 4. The overall achievement, however, is good for most students who, by the end of the course, reach standards as high as in the other subjects they take. Higher-attaining students follow very carefully the examination assessment criteria for their coursework and the accompanying good advice given to them by their teachers. Their portfolios of work demonstrate high quality solutions to design problems, and despite working within the confines of a systematic marking procedure these students are capable of demonstrating flair and creativity in solving design problems. Although their freehand sketching, formal drawing work, presentation and layout are all equally strong, their range of rendering techniques is limited and should be extended. Average and lower-attaining students can follow the assessment criteria used for designing and making their work, but they tend to make basic errors with their design comments, and do not recognise the practical and realistic consequences of their designs.

105. Teaching ranges from satisfactory to very good and is good overall. The planning and preparation of lessons is good although teachers do not share the lesson objectives with the students. Teachers are experienced subject specialists and use their knowledge effectively in giving good advice to individual students to help them improve their grades. In some better lessons teachers use interesting exemplar materials to challenge students' thinking when analysing products. In one very effective lesson, for example, the teacher used a range of everyday plastic products to identify their different uses and properties, and their most likely method of manufacture. Where teaching is otherwise satisfactory, lessons are sometimes too slow to get going.
106. When teaching is very good students demonstrably enjoy their lessons. They participate individually by giving an in-depth analysis and feeding back to the group on an aspect of product design. This is accompanied by students listening to each other's experience of their research, in an uninterrupted and respectful atmosphere. There is good rapport between teachers and their students.
107. The department consists of experienced and committed teachers who are very well led by the senior curriculum manager and who pull together in the interests of their students. Teachers are ably assisted by a technician, who has established and effectively manages a stock control system for the department. The technician is under-utilised in supporting in the classroom situation. A variety of resources and exemplar materials are available and used effectively by teachers to make lessons interesting. Some of the machinery in the workshops has not been installed correctly and raises health and safety issues. The school is taking steps to address these. The workshops' accommodation is adequate, although workshops need upgrading, and there is too much space being used for storing out-of-date machinery and furniture. Displays of students' design work around the department are excellent. The department has good access and provision in ICT which is well used by students for research and presentation work, and for helping them to learn at their own pace and level of ability. However, there are too few opportunities for students to use computers to manufacture products. Links with the local special school have resulted in some excellent products being developed for their disabled pupils, providing learning opportunities for the students. This could be repeated and strengthened to include designing products in collaboration.

BUSINESS

AS/A2 Business Studies

108. Provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Maintenance of standards which are well above average.
- Subject knowledge and commitment of staff.
- Rigorous assessment.
- Individual target-setting with students.
- The quality of teaching.

Areas for improvement

- Feedback is generally comprehensive, although there is inconsistent use of explicit written guidance to facilitate further improvement.

109. A level pass rates are consistently above average, with 100% of students achieving at least a pass grade. The percentage of students gaining grades A and B are consistently well above average. In 2001 65% of students achieved these grades. When compared with their GCSE results upon entry students are consistently performing better than expected. In 2001 the first cohort to sit the new AS examination achieved a 100% pass rate. Of the 20 students who completed A level in 2001, 18 progressed to university (of whom 11 are studying on business-related courses) and 2 moved into related employment.

110. The standard of work of current students is also above average. Teachers keep careful records of GCSE point scores on entry, ALIS predictions and modular assessment records. They have high expectations of their students and can demonstrate that many achieve better than expected results. Students play an active and mature part in debate, using appropriate business terminology and concepts. Students are able to make links between areas of work covered by different teachers and in different year groups. In one lesson students demonstrated a secure understanding of product life cycle. In another lesson Year 12 students worked in small groups to prepare a business plan – successfully drawing together various aspects studied since the beginning of the course.

111. Teaching is good overall and students respond by making very good progress. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and are highly focused on the need to perform well in the next modular assessment. There is excellent use of questioning. In the best sessions teachers plan carefully to vary the pace and style of delivery and ensure that learning is monitored. The timetable is managed to make best use of individual teachers' expertise. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use topical material well to extend analysis of theory. Opportunities are given for students to engage in extension work independently and to share the outcomes with their peers. Students are encouraged to use ICT for research in their own time and good use is made of the resources available within the department.

112. Assessment is rigorous and up-to-date and is used to negotiate individual targets with students. The latter are unanimously able to state their current level of performance when questioned. Written feedback, whilst generally comprehensive, varies in its

effectiveness for giving guidance for further improvement.

113. Students work co-operatively in groups and are prepared to engage in debate and give feedback. Teachers make sure that all students engage in discussion, in a supportive atmosphere.
114. The subject is very well led and managed. The teaching team has high aspirations and there is evidence of a joint commitment to the maintenance of very high standards. Good practice is shared, as is an examiner's knowledge and experience. Team meetings are held regularly and used to develop the work of other school working groups. Resources are well-deployed.

AVCE Business

115. The quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Assignment briefs clear and well-planned.
- Assessment rigorous.
- Very good development of theory.
- Progression from Part I awards and to higher education and employment.

Areas for improvement

- Some students have inadequate ICT skills.
- The 'vocational' nature of the course is under-emphasised.

116. AVCE pass rates have been maintained at 100%, with the average points score consistently higher than the national average. In 2001 50% achieved a distinction grade.
117. Current students are performing well and have high expectations of value-added attainment. Assessed work shows good development of skills and understanding during the course. Students are all aware of their current performance level through regular negotiations with their subject teachers.
118. Teaching is good overall. Planning is systematic, focused on unit assessments and shared with students. Teachers adapt the pace and planning to cater for the entry profile of students and this results in good progress. Excellent assignments are written in plain English and give students clear guidance as to expectations and deadlines. Theory lessons are well structured to ensure that the objectives are clear and that learning is checked. There is excellent preparation for the unit tests with detailed and effective revision guidance. Good use is made of open questioning. Some students make good contributions to discussion, while others are more reluctant and lack confidence. There are good opportunities to use ICT during lessons and for independent research. Students' skill levels are varied and some are slow to produce a finished piece of work. Although there is evidence of work in students' files which is based upon research in local industry the vocational nature of the course has become somewhat diluted. The emphasis observed was one of theoretical development and not of practical application.

119. Good assessment sheets enable the teacher, student and verifier to see clearly where evidence has been found and the standard judged. Oral assessments are used well. Teachers know their students well, including their entry profile and their unit assessment standards. They have very high expectations of value-added attainment. In 2001 all 12 students progressed to higher education or employment.
120. Students work well in groups and are prepared to engage in debate and give feedback. Good development of numeracy skills was incorporated into one Year 13 lesson on data capture for marketing purposes.
121. The subject is very well led and managed. A co-ordinator has been appointed to ensure that assessment and verification meet awarding body standards. External verifier reports are highly supportive of the team's approach and commitment. Resources are well-deployed, including teacher expertise. Contact with local industry is insufficient.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

AVCE ICT

122. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching based on professional engagement with students.
- Effective deployment of staff.
- Planning and delivery of the course.

Areas for improvement

- Strategies for helping all students to adjust to independent learning.
- Ensuring students understand and can apply the criteria for each unit.

123. The focus of the inspection was on the AVCE course in ICT. Since this has just been introduced, lessons observed were all of Year 12 groups. Recruitment to the courses, both 3-Unit and 12-Unit, has been strong. Judgements were made on observation of classes, scrutiny of written work and dialogue with students and teachers.
124. Both the full and 3-Unit courses are fully subscribed. Students are already working towards completion of the first unit. There is a wide range of prior attainment, and since a number of students come from different secondary schools, their experiences of ICT are significantly different also. Most students are making good progress, although some are finding it difficult to adjust to the format of the course and the responsibilities it brings for ensuring they meet deadlines and complete work.
125. The written work of higher-attaining students shows awareness of register of written language and the need to bear in mind the target audience. There is good planning and excellent critique of different documents showing sensitivity to the reader. By contrast some weaker students find it more difficult to meet the criteria because their documents are short and there is little evidence of thorough research. The best students already have a notion of fitness for purpose and of the importance of careful and rigorous planning and quality control. This will serve them well in the practical parts of the course. These students are showing the ability to work independently and research critically. These are the qualities that should be encouraged.
126. Organisation is a problem for some students and this is reflected in the content and layout of portfolios. There is a correlation between the appearance and the content: the best students have arranged their work in such a way that they can find and refer to specific documents as, and when, they need to. One of the best PowerPoint presentations seen combined useful content with attractive presentation. The layout of many documents is very professional and shows that students are very comfortable with the main features of Microsoft Word.
127. Teaching is good in all lessons. This is because teachers have high expectations and expect all students to remain on task. They manage students very well and ensure that targets are met. They work with individual students and intervene effectively with probing questions and helpful advice.

128. There is a monitoring system in place and assessment grids ensure that all staff who teach one group know how each student is working and where they are in their assignment. Teachers will find it useful to anticipate problems and respond to these early by preparing and delivering whole-class lessons, for example on the workings and structure of flowcharts, or the importance of readability of documents. Many students work on the course at home, but since not all have access to the Internet, the CD-Rom version of the course is available to those who have a computer. Facilities are also available in school for continued study. The best performing students have worked out an efficient way of combining work at home with work in class: they do much of the foundation work at home and use class time to consolidate and check with the teacher.
129. Relationships between staff and students are very good. Students respond to high expectations. They know that the teachers will help them if they have a problem, and they work maturely. They look forward to working with Newcastle United on Unit 4, and there will be other opportunities for work-related experience as part of the course.
130. Leadership and management of the course are good. Planning for the delivery of the course is very good so that there has been effective deployment of teachers to deliver the course. Available expertise currently matches the content of the units.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

AVCE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

131. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Most students achieve well in relation to their GCSE attainment.
- Overall the teaching is good.
- Teachers have good specialist knowledge of the units they teach.
- Students have a positive view of the course.
- The course is effectively managed.

Areas for improvement

- Help lower-attaining students to organise their research and to be more discriminating in what they include in portfolios.
- Help students understand and use the links between different units of work more effectively.
- Placements could be better organised to give students opportunities to use them to contribute to several units of work.

132. Standards overall are a little below the national average, but students achieve well because they are motivated by a course that they see as relevant and the teaching is good. Almost all students who start the course complete it and a good number achieve merit and distinction grades. For example, in the most recent results, over half of students gained these higher grades. The department has been successful in attracting a number of male students to the course in the last two years.

133. First year students have made a good start to the course. Most are achieving well in relation to their attainment at GCSE. They are responding to the good opportunities provided for them for independent research. They are beginning to make judgements about what information is relevant to include in their course work. For example, students in Year 12 used information gathered during visits to a nursery and interviews with nursery staff creatively to begin a guide to the job of nursery nurse. Second year students have a broad knowledge of health and social care services. Their course work indicates that many of them have acquired a good range of skills and knowledge through lessons and in real work situations. However, a small minority of lower-attaining students is badly organised and their course work is insufficiently focused on the assessment requirements of the course.

134. Overall, teaching is good and results in good learning for students. The course as a whole is well planned and is delivered by a team of specialists with good knowledge of the subject matter of the units of work for which they are responsible. In many cases students are helped to understand the links between the units. There are examples where opportunities are missed for teachers to build on the skills and knowledge of previous units of work and to take advantage of the course structure to make the work more relevant. For example, students reported that they found it difficult to find suitable subjects for their research into the physical aspects of health. The school should investigate how placements already arranged could be better used to support this unit of work.

135. In lessons, teachers use a good range of resources and carefully chosen teaching methods to motivate and interest their students. A good example was a Year 13 lesson in which video material was used effectively to illustrate the difficult decisions that health professionals make on treating patients. This good teaching is helping students to become confident communicators who are able to sustain a balanced debate in lessons. A very good example was a Year 12 lesson in which students played the role of a primary care group management board making some difficult moral decisions. The teacher provided very skilful management of the session, so that students were able to evaluate the contributions made by all members of the group.
136. Assessment is thorough across the units. Students are given regular feedback on how well they are doing. The majority of students benefit from good quality individual tutorials and one-to-one support in lessons, which is helping them to understand how they can improve their work. However, a small minority of students would benefit from even more support to help them organise their time and independent research more effectively.
137. Overall the quality of course work is good and provides good evidence that students are encouraged to work independently, many of them using ICT with confidence to research and present their work.
138. The subject is well managed. The systems for monitoring, evaluating and verifying standards are firmly in place. Overall, the team delivering the separate units applies the agreed procedures consistently and the team leader has a good overview of standards across the department. The small number of areas for development are recognised and there are good indications that the subject teaching will continue to improve as teachers become increasingly familiar with the new syllabus.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

139. Two art and design courses are offered in the sixth form - A Level and AVCE. Both courses were inspected in detail.

AS/A2 LEVEL ART AND DESIGN

140. The quality of provision is **very good**

Strengths

- High standards.
- Very good teaching which prepares students well for the examinations.
- Very good use of formative assessment, which keeps students informed of their progress and how to improve.
- The wide range of staff expertise, facilities and good resources provides breadth and depth in the curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- The new AS/A2 syllabus is delivered in a very structured way, which allows students few opportunities to be adventurous in their work and take risks.
- Introduce more flexibility into the highly structured format of the course to enable students to develop their individuality of expression.

141. Over the past three years results in A level art and design have been above the national average. In 2001 all students passed the A level examination and two-thirds of them achieved grades A-C. In the new AS level examination in 2001 three-quarters of students achieved grades A-C. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' portfolios during the inspection shows that standards are high overall with some examples of very high attainment. Students across the ability range achieve their potential and both boys and girls show good progress and achievement throughout the course.
142. Drawing from direct observation is good, with most students able to represent scale, proportion and volume accurately, although there is little evidence of an innovative approach. Students use colour with confidence and assurance, painting in acrylic, oils and watercolour with a range of styles and techniques. Some students have developed their ideas into textile pieces, using a range of processes successfully. Others specialise in ceramics and have experimented with the effects of different glazes and firing, refined their hand-building techniques and learned to cast their pieces.
143. There is a very good standard of research and experimentation, which effectively inform students' personal response. Students show increasing independence organising their research. For example, individuals have visited local artists' studios, made first-hand observational studies in an old people's home and a dance studio and taken their own photographs of local features. Knowledge and understanding of the work of other artists is good and developed through both theory and practice. One student had been inspired by David Hockney's big landscape paintings, visited the Yorkshire landscape for source material and experimented with ways of applying colour, using printing and paint techniques to develop her 'homage'.

144. Teaching is good overall and often very good or excellent. Lessons are well planned and the course very well structured to prepare the students for the examination, including working to a set brief within a time constraint. Teachers have high expectations and provide very good or excellent one-to-one tutorials where students are given clear and detailed technical advice and ideas to follow up which challenge them to extend their work. They are given regular verbal and written updates on their progress against the course requirements, which helps them move on.
145. Students respond well to their teachers' evident commitment and expertise. They organise their work effectively and show maturity and independence in pursuing their ideas. They are confident and articulate and discuss their work and that of other artists with enthusiasm, using correct subject terminology.
146. The department is well managed and well resourced. The A level groups share teachers and this staff deployment is well managed, with good communication between staff on planning and assessment, which provides continuity and variety for students. The team of staff includes experienced fine art, textiles and ceramics specialists with very good subject knowledge, which is a strength of the provision. Good use is made of opportunities to work with artists-in-residence and of visits to galleries, including an annual trip to Paris.

AVCE ART AND DESIGN

147. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching within a well-planned structure that puts the units of work in a real life context.
- Very good use of formative assessment, which keeps students informed of their progress and how to improve.
- The good range of specialist staff provides a broad practical curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- Vocational element of the course - links with industry, understanding of professional practice and careers information need review.
- Opportunities for students to develop and practice their verbal communication skills should be improved.

148. Over the past three years results in advanced GNVQ art and design have been high. In 2001 all students passed the examination, with a third achieving a distinction and over a half gaining a merit. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' portfolios during the inspection shows that the attainment of the present small cohort of students is lower than expected. At this point in the course, towards the end of the fourth term, Year 13 students' standards of attainment are low, and there are gaps in their course work, such as in observational studies. In Year 12 the curriculum has been reviewed to ensure that a foundation unit provides opportunities to refine and develop basic skills, including work from direct observation. Students in Year 12 are attaining a satisfactory standard.

149. Students use a broad range of materials and processes to produce both two and three-dimensional work, often informed by their study of the work of other artists and designers. Research and investigation are generally good and sketchbooks show evidence of annotated experiments in wet and dry media, textiles, printmaking and mixed media, including ICT. A Year 12 student used "Photoshop" confidently to combine his colourful two-dimensional painting with a digital photograph to explore how it might look as an external mural on the school building. Others have studied the work of architects such as Gaudi and Frank Gehry, constructing card reliefs and sculptures and developing ideas for jewellery, stimulated by looking at the teacher's own sketchbook and resources. One student explained how he was interested in the "linear patterns" he had identified in various buildings which inspired him to produce his balsa wood maquette.
150. Students' knowledge and understanding of professional practice and careers in art and design is limited and more opportunities for industrial links and work placement should be developed. Most students show a lack of confidence in talking about the course and their work. Better opportunities should be provided to help develop their verbal communication skills through presentations and discussion.
151. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. Lessons are well planned and the course very well structured to prepare the students for the examination. Teachers have high expectations and provide good one-to-one tutorials where students are given clear and detailed technical advice and helped to see how their work relates to a real life context. They are given regular verbal and written updates on their progress against the course requirements, which helps them move on.
152. The department is well managed and well resourced. The AVCE groups share teachers and the deployment of art and design staff is well managed, with good communication on planning and assessment. Links with teachers of other elements of the course, such as key skills and professional practice, need to be reviewed. The team of staff includes experienced fine art, textiles and three-dimensional specialists with very good subject knowledge, which is a strength of the provision. The students benefit from a range of external visits, such as the "Centre for Life", local galleries and the annual trip to Paris.

HUMANITIES

153. The inspection focussed on geography and sociology, but history and psychology were also sampled through lesson observations. Teaching in these lessons was at least good; fortified by good subject knowledge and quality planning, leading to appropriate teaching styles to engage students, which results in effective learning.

GEOGRAPHY

154. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching throughout the department featuring many strengths.

Areas for improvement

- Development of students' independent learning, research skills, discussion and oral presentation skills.
- The use of ICT within the subject.
- Ensuring that good quality fieldwork assignments are completed.

155. A Level examination results are broadly in line with the national average. At the time of the last inspection results were above the national average. However, as the number of students taking geography examinations in recent years has been very low, meaningful comparisons cannot be made.
156. From lesson observations and the scrutiny of students' work, standards are average. This is the same as for the last inspection, when students were "working in line with the expectation for pupils of that age". Geographical skills are taught systematically as students progress through the courses. However, in the current Year 12, not all students studied geography at Key Stage 4, so some are lacking basic skills and background knowledge. Year 13 students can manage a wide range of geographical information from various sources, for example to give some detailed case studies in their work on forest management and resulting issues. They accurately produce maps showing locations of the three forest types. It is important that all students complete good quality fieldwork assignments, which contribute to the final examination grade.
157. Teaching is good with many strengths and high standards have been maintained since the last inspection. Teachers are well prepared for lessons and effectively employ a range of resources. Good subject knowledge and awareness of examination requirements are well used to help students improve the quality of their work. In a lesson on the causes and effects of flooding, the teacher used personal experience and knowledge to describe the situation in Bangladesh. Students were then given good information on how to answer examination questions on this topic. All lessons are well planned and the aims are shared with students. A good variety of teaching strategies is used and lessons are planned with balance between the teacher talking and students working. Teachers have good relationships with their students and use this to encourage them to improve skills and discussions and oral presentations. In one lesson on management within an eco-system, the teacher had carefully prepared cards giving prompts with key points on views of different interest groups, to aid group discussion and presentations.

158. Learning varies from satisfactory to good. Where it is good, students are well challenged, encouraging them to think about topics, to extend their knowledge and understanding and develop insights and conclusions. This was evident in a Year 13 lesson on the world economy and “the north-south divide”, where they gave some good examples of reasons for migration. In some lessons learning is not as effective, despite the good quality of teaching. In these lessons students’ lack of knowledge or skills affects the quality of learning. Year 12 students have very limited ability to carry out discussions. There is evidence of some improvement in Year 13, but overall discussion skills are weak. Teachers are aware of this weakness and are trying to improve students’ performance. Oral presentation skills are another area requiring improvement. The weakness was evident in a lesson on types of forests, where students had done some good work producing useful case studies, but in their presentations they just read their notes at great speed without making eye contact and did not use their detailed maps. Independent learning and research skills are not well developed. Attitudes to learning are very positive and students appreciate the efforts of their teachers. Overall, progress and achievement are satisfactory.
159. Management and leadership of the subject are satisfactory. Monitoring of students is sound and individual target setting is developing well. Classrooms in the department provide good learning environments with some useful displays of work, maps, diagrams and photographs. ICT is an area for development in the subject. Students use computers to produce their fieldwork assignments, but there is little other evidence of ICT use. Schemes of work do not include ICT and the department has very limited facilities.

SOCIOLOGY

160. The quality of provision is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Some very good teaching, which is well planned and delivered.
- The quality of learning in some lessons, where teaching styles enable all students to participate fully.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment in examinations, particularly at higher levels.
- The quality of some teaching.
- Development of students' independent learning, research and discussion skills.
- The use of ICT within the subject.

161. A Level examination results are below the national averages in terms of overall pass rates and particularly in the proportion gaining higher grades. There has been a big drop, year-on-year, in the proportion of students gaining A or B grades, from 48% in 1998 to only 7% in 2001. In recent years female students have attained higher standards than males, but in the latest results for which comparisons can be made, 2000, they attained at the same level. Students' performance in sociology was better than in their other subjects in 2000.

162. In lessons and in students' work, standards vary between average and below average. Although they are at an early stage of the course, many Year 12 students are working at a level below average. Sometimes this is a direct consequence of the quality of teaching. Year 13 students are working at the expected level. Year 12 students have made a slow start to their course. Many do not have high achievement at GCSE and are finding it difficult to adjust to the expectations of A Level work. None of them has studied the subject before and many are struggling with the language of sociology and the concepts and theories they have to embrace. They have not yet begun to develop the critical and analytical skills required. In these early stages, their overall achievement is satisfactory.

163. Almost half of last year's Year 12 group, many of whom were higher-attaining, did not continue to study sociology for a second year, into Year 13. For those students who have continued into the second year of study, their achievement is good. They demonstrate understanding of the principles and issues underlying micro and macro aspects of social life, for example in the study of poverty, where they quickly gained knowledge and were able to use it effectively. They are able to use evidence, although it is usually provided for them, to explain theoretical questions. Essay outlines are provided to help them improve the quality of their writing and to familiarise them with the required standards for the end of course examination. They demonstrate some understanding of sociological methodology, but this has to be developed further as the course progresses.

164. The quality of teaching varies from very good to just satisfactory. Where teaching is very good, it is a strength of the subject. Teachers' breadth and depth of subject knowledge is variable, which has a direct effect on the quality of teaching. Where there are very good, detailed knowledge and understanding of the concepts, theories and principles, there is confident command of teaching material that results in good quality learning. Where subject knowledge and understanding are less secure, teaching is superficial, lacking the detail required for good, effective A Level lessons. Very good teaching features well planned lessons, with clear, specific learning objectives, which are shared with students. There is variety in the lessons with good balance between teacher input and students working. Questioning technique is well used to draw responses from students. The complexity of questions is matched to the abilities of individual students, to include them all. Explanations are clear and precise, definitions are used to develop students' understanding. For example, great care was taken to explain the differences between absolute and relative poverty. Good examples from contemporary society are used and related to students' own experiences to aid their learning. Good use of the main textbook is interspersed throughout lessons and short dictation to ensure students record important facts. There is good challenge requiring students to develop intellectual capacity.
165. Where teaching is just satisfactory, lessons are not well planned, include some broad aims rather than clear, specific objectives and lack focus for the teacher. Work is insufficiently demanding and students are provided with information and not encouraged to think for themselves and use initiative. This does not motivate and enthuse students and results in them working at low levels. Questioning is general, not specific and does not require much thought and detailed responses. Clear explanations and specific definitions are not given.
166. Students' learning varies from very good to satisfactory. Where it is very good, time is used effectively and teaching styles enable all students to participate fully, increasing their knowledge, skills or understanding. Where learning is not good, it can be a direct consequence of the quality of teaching, but can also be due to lack of knowledge or skills of students, resulting in them working at low levels. For example, Year 12 students' discussion skills are very limited and they have difficulty in expressing their ideas, despite some good teaching support. This was evident in a lesson on how mass media can be manipulated, where the teacher struggled to get useful responses from them. Year 13 students' skills in this area are better, but still below expectation. For all students, their independent learning and ability to carry out research are not well developed. Students' attitudes to learning are positive, particularly in Year 13 where they are more familiar with the language of the subject and have better understanding of the intellectual demands.
167. Management and leadership of the subject are satisfactory. The new AS syllabus was successfully introduced last year and new resources purchased to support it. However, the subject is not well funded and additional texts are required. ICT is not well used in the subject. Its use is not planned in schemes of work and there is a shortage of computers and programs. There is some good monitoring of students and individual target setting is developing well. However, there is not enough rigorous monitoring of teachers' planning and teaching.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

AS/A2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE

168. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- At A Level, results were above average in 2000, and high for AS Level in 2001.
- Teaching is good and the staff provide useful checklists and examples of texts.
- Students are well prepared for written assignments.
- Students are given the opportunity to collaborate and prepare presentations in class.

Areas for improvement

- Some students find it difficult to contribute to discussion.
- Some students identify linguistic features but do not analyse their effect.

169. Results were above average in 2000, and high for AS Level in 2001. Teaching is good. Some students find it difficult to contribute to discussion, but all generally achieve well.

170. Results for English Language A Level were very high in 2000, as they were above the national average. However, they dropped in 2001, although results in the new AS examination at the end of Year 12 were very high, with 13 students attaining full marks in one module. These students are now in Year 13, building on the progress they have already made in the study of language use. Their knowledge of different text conventions leads them to construct their own writing skilfully in a range of genres. Lower-attaining students have a less precise use of language, but nevertheless it is clear that all students have made progress since starting the course.

171. Higher-attaining students in Year 12 can already use linguistic terminology accurately, for example lexis and syntax, and can write well-structured analysis of texts. However, a significant proportion of students is less secure in their use of terminology. In discussion, students can identify language features in texts, but do not always move on to analyse the impact of these on an audience. Standards at this stage of the course are average.

172. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and emphasise the value of the correct use of terminology. They set up tasks so students can work together and control the outcome. Students in Year 13 use this opportunity well, but some in Year 12 find it difficult. All students have been given useful checklists of linguistic features and well-chosen examples of different types of text. Staff prepare students well for written assignments, with clear reference to assessment criteria. Teachers are able to focus on a range of social and cultural issues through the study of language, for example, the language of power and historical language change reflecting social change.

173. Students collaborate well and although some do not contribute much to discussion, others enjoy giving examples of language use. Students listen carefully to the teacher and to each other. They keep their own language diaries, in order to record new or unusual constructions as soon as they meet them.

174. Overall, leadership and management are good. The course is well structured. Teaching teams are carefully organised. Teachers who are new to this A Level course are paired with more experienced colleagues. Staff have good knowledge of their students' progress, carrying out regular assessments. They have detailed data available on students' previous results and predictions.

AS/A2 ENGLISH LITERATURE

175. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Results were at the national average in 2000 and 2001 and currently achievement is good.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and teaching is consistently good.
- Teachers set up a range of learning situations to enable students to articulate independent opinions.
- Students collaborate well.

Areas for improvement

- Some students need to comment more closely on the effect of the writer's language.
- Some students need to be drawn further into discussion.

176. Results were at the national average in 2000 and 2001 and currently attainment is above average. Teaching is consistently good and students achieve well.
177. In 2000, results in English Literature were at the national average, with 37% A/B grades. In 2001, results were still on the national average, although with fewer A/B grades. Currently, standards are above expectations, with a significant proportion of students, especially at AS level, predicted to achieve higher grades. In Year 12, the highest-attaining students can already use appropriate literary terminology confidently and give detailed analysis of texts. In Year 13, they can also make use of a range of critical writers. Some students who may not achieve higher grades can give a clear account of a text, but do not comment in enough depth on the effect of the writer's language. When students are asked to prepare presentations, either in groups or individually, they can give a lucid and well-researched account. One student used knowledge she had gained of Christian imagery, applying it well to a Shakespeare sonnet. Some students, though not all, give extended answers directly in discussion. There are more female than male students taking the course, but both are represented amongst the highest attaining.
178. Teaching is consistently good. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and good planning. They use skilful questioning to guide discussion and draw out key points. They set up well-devised tasks to enable students to articulate independent opinions. In one good example, students worked in groups which had been carefully planned in order to give those who were usually quiet in lessons the chance to express themselves. Teachers create the opportunity to look at wider social implications of texts, for example discussing the position of women in society at the time of Webster's "The White Devil".

179. Students respond well in their lessons. They collaborate effectively. They listen carefully to the teacher and to each other, especially when a student has prepared a presentation. They find sixteenth and seventeenth century poems and drama relevant, as well as modern novels.
180. Leadership and management are good. The course is well organised. There is a clear structure for the teaching teams, with each teacher covering specific text and modules. The structure of the courses (AS and A2) is made clear to students. Staff teaching the course are familiar with the assessment objectives, and these are built into planning. Teachers have good knowledge of their students' progress, carrying out regular assessments. They have detailed data available on students' previous results and predictions.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

181. The focus of the inspection was on French. Results have been above average since the last inspection. French attracts fewer students than German, and, although numbers have fluctuated, groups continue to be viable. A greater number of boys is included in the course than is the case nationally.

FRENCH

182. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Results at AS and A-level remain above the national average.
- Teachers have high expectations and their relationships with the students are very good.
- The transition from GCSE to advanced level is well planned.
- Opportunities to experience French culture.
- Planning and production of materials.

Areas for improvement

- Strategies for teaching grammar.
- More opportunities for students to evaluate and learn from their own mistakes.
- Setting formal targets against clear criteria.
- Investigating the potential of ICT.

183. The numbers of students embarking on the A level French course has been consistent over the last few years, and rates of retention are good. Results in AS Level in 2001 were considerably better than the national average, and all of those who sat the examination achieved their potential. Grades were well above the national average. Fewer students continue into the A2 course, but those who do achieve good results. Over the last four years the number of higher grades (A or B) has been above the national average.

184. Standards are above average overall, but there is a wide range of prior attainment, and some of the less confident students lack the vocabulary and grammatical knowledge that they need in order to express themselves confidently and fluently. By contrast, the most able students are able to talk and write at length on a variety of themes that demand a high level of knowledge and maturity. Most students can express themselves on a range of everyday topics with reasonable pronunciation and intonation. Tasks are challenging but take into account that the students have limited experience of more abstract topics. By the end of Year 12 some students still suffer from poor manipulation skills and limited vocabulary. The department is addressing this challenge by setting more formal and focussed targets for the students.
185. By the time they reach Year 13 most students have made good progress and have adapted to the rigours of the advanced level course. The very best work seen shows a high degree of sophistication coupled with a disciplined approach and these students can express their thoughts cogently and coherently. Sometimes, however, fluency is achieved at the expense of accuracy, and this hampers the overall progress, particularly of lower attaining students who do not always understand the grammatical concepts that underpin effective language learning. Students who are less experienced in managing their own learning would benefit from more specific, short-term targets to take them through the medium and long-term objectives of the course.
186. Teaching in the sixth form is never less than satisfactory. Teachers have high expectations of students and they respond to these expectations. Careful planning ensures that students are able to bridge the gap between GCSE and A Level. The reading scheme is an effective way of introducing students to a more challenging and lengthy tasks, which are at the same time intrinsically interesting. A lot of hard work has gone into its preparation. Marking, though thorough and helpful, needs to challenge the students more to reflect on their performance and to make their own corrections. The department is already setting itself the task of agreeing more formalised targets with the students, and identifying clear criteria to measure progress. The department is also aware of the need to find ways of improving listening skills.
187. At the last inspection good relationships and high expectations were deemed to be noteworthy features of all lessons, and this is still the case. Relationships between the teachers and students are very professional and this means teachers can set challenging tasks and students respond. Students are used to lessons being conducted in French and this encourages them to use it themselves. They are mature and interested in their progress. Although they have access to a range of resources to assist independent learning, they would benefit from more access to ICT, not only for research purposes, but for consolidation of the structures of the language. The department now has several computers, but ICT is, as yet, little used, although the teachers recognise its potential for practising grammar and developing writing skills. Attitudes to language learning remain positive, and several students go on to study French and other languages at university level. Students appreciate their visits to the Tyneside film theatre, and the emphasis on current affairs in the course makes the students reflect on a wide range of issues within contemporary society.
188. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Curriculum teams plan together and mutual observation takes place. Dual linguists are encouraged and several students are studying both French and German in the sixth form. The department manages to attract more boys onto the course than is the case in the majority of sixth forms, and this is commendable.