

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **ARCHBISHOP ILSLEY CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

Acocks Green, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103541

Headteacher: Mr S O'Donnell

Reporting inspector: Ms J Allcorn  
1068

Dates of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2001

Inspection number: 190592

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Secondary
School category:	Comprehensive
Age range of pupils:	11 –18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Victoria Road Acocks Green Birmingham
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Martin Jones
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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1068	Jan Allcorn	Registered inspector	Special educational needs	What sort of school is it? (Characteristics) How high are standards? How well is the school led and managed? School improvement and overall effectiveness
14214	Gillian Smith	Lay inspector		Attitudes, values and personal development/attendance How well the school cares for its pupils How well does the school work in partnership with parents Resources for learning
2893	John Manning	Team inspector	Media studies	
6044	Roger Perkins	Team inspector	Mathematics	
30596	Jack Brown	Team inspector	Science- Sixth form physics	
30215	Helen Feasey	Team inspector	Geography	
10895	David Wasp	Team inspector	History Equal opportunities	
3534	Ann Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical education	Sixth form
11969	John Hardy	Team inspector	Design and technology	Accommodation
19026	Brian Downes	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8204	John Sheffield	Team inspector	Art and design	
20692	Richard Evans	Team inspector	Music	
18673	Richard Wilkins	Team inspector		How well are pupils and students taught? How well does the school care for its pupils and students? Assessment Staffing and efficiency Key Stage 4 curriculum
23393	Brian Dower	Team inspector	English	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Archbishop Ilsley is an 11-18 Roman Catholic secondary school. It has 1275 boys and girls on roll and is larger than most secondary schools. It is situated in the Birmingham suburb of Acocks Green, but a significant number of its pupils come from the inner city: some from less advantaged families than others. Most of the pupils are white, many with an Irish cultural heritage. One in 10 pupils is from other ethnic groups, but very few have English as an additional language. Traditionally the car industry and other manufacturing industries have been the main employers in the area, but in the last ten years this has declined. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals has significantly increased in the last few years and is now much higher than that nationally. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is average, but below average for those with a statement of need. National test results indicate the attainment of the pupils on entry to the school is average, but the school's testing shows too few pupils are in the highest ability band and a significant number has reading and writing difficulties. Recently, the school has had some difficulties in recruiting staff, especially in mathematics.

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

Archbishop Ilsley is a good and effective school. It has a very positive learning environment based on the values of the Catholic faith. Pupils behave well. Over the last three years, standards have improved significantly and at GCSE overall performance is now consistently in line with that nationally. Pupils achieve well and do much better than pupils in similar schools. Sixth form students also do well. All this is due to the strong leadership of the headteacher and his senior management team who set high expectations of staff and pupils. Teaching is good and the school supports new and temporary staff well to ensure standards do not fall. The school makes very good use of its funding and other resources. It provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- The leadership and management of the school by the headteacher and his senior staff are very good.
- Pupils achieve well and results in national tests for 14 year olds and at GCSE are much better than those of pupils in similar schools.
- Provision and management in the sixth form are very good and the students make good progress.
- Pupils and students want to learn, get on well with each other and with their teachers, and by the time they leave school at 16 or 18 years are sensible and mature young people.
- Teaching throughout the school is good overall. The teachers' effective planning enables pupils to make good progress in lessons.
- Provision for pupils' personal development and the support, care and guidance the school gives pupils are strengths of the school.

#### **What could be improved**

- Results in science in national tests for 14 year olds, at GCSE and at A-level and are not yet high enough.
- Standards in French and design and technology at Key Stage 4 are below average.
- Pupils' attendance is below the national average.
- Although pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall, the monitoring and recording of their progress and attainment is not systematic enough to ensure specific needs are fully met.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school was last inspected in 1996. Since that time a new headteacher and chair of governors have been appointed. They have put in place effective strategies to improve the work of the school. Standards are now considerably better than at the time of the last inspection. The quality of teaching is significantly better. All the key issues from the last inspection have been well addressed. The role taken by the governors is more effective and they are now much better involved in the work of the school. Standards and equipment in information and communication technology are better, although some subjects still need to make more use of computers. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are now very good. French still has weaknesses. but the school continues to address

these effectively. Clear improvements have taken place in mathematics and in music. Overall the school has made very good progress since the last inspection.

#### STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	A
A-levels/AS-levels	D	C	*C	

#### Key

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

*\*Indicates the summer 2000 result as the national comparison for 2001 is not yet available.*

*Similar school comparisons are made with schools with an equivalent percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals.*

Throughout the school the overall trend is one of improvement in results in national tests. This is particularly good given the fall in reading ages of pupils entering the school.

Results for 14 year olds in the national tests for English, mathematics and science have significantly improved since the last inspection. In summer 2001, overall performance was just below that nationally, but well above that of similar schools. Results were best in mathematics and English, where the proportion of pupils at the expected level or above was in line with that nationally. It was below the national average in science. However, in all three subjects too few pupils gain the higher levels and this brings the overall performance down. In the last few years, boys' performance has improved to be as good as that of girls. In summer 2001, it was equivalent to that of girls in English which is against the national trend. This is because the school has clearly focused on improving boys' literacy skills to raise standards.

GCSE performance has improved over the last few years and has been consistently in line with that nationally. It is well above that of similar schools and pupils make better progress than other pupils do nationally in their GCSE years. A higher proportion of pupils than nationally gained a pass in both English and mathematics in summer 2001; an excellent achievement. Results are not as good in science. Pupils do best in art and design, and geography and worst in French and science. Boys do badly in design and technology, and girls in science. Although overall girls do better than boys, as they do nationally, the boys results are much closer to those of the girls than is found nationally. The high proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes is an indication of the good progress made by all pupils, including those from different ethnic groups and with special educational needs.

At A-level in summer 2000, results improved to be in line with those nationally for the first time and early indications are that the 2001 results will also be close to the national average. Students do well in English, history, geography and media studies, but results in biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics have been too low.

During the inspection, standards seen for 11-16 year olds and sixth form students were generally in line with those expected nationally. They are above average for 14-16 year olds in art and design, and geography and for sixth formers in media studies, sociology, history and art. However, in design and technology in French at Key Stage 4 and in music at Key Stage 3 they are below average. In both music and design and technology, pupils enter the school with very low skills, but they make good progress during their first three years. Standards in science are improving because of new management and better teaching. They are now close to nationally expected levels for 14 and 16 year olds. In the sixth form, they are appropriate for the students' abilities. Pupils are developing sound literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills and these contribute satisfactorily to pupils' standards in other subjects of the curriculum.

#### PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good – pupils work hard and enjoy school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good and often very good. Pupils respond well in lessons and concentrate on their work. Given the lack of space in parts of the school pupils move around and behave extremely well. Only one pupil has been permanently excluded in the last year.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils get on very well with each other and their teachers. Bullying is rare. Pupils contribute very well to the life and work of the school and the community. By the time they leave school they are mature and sensible young people.
Attendance	Below the national average, even though the school has very good strategies in place to make sure all pupils attend school regularly.

#### TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good throughout the school. Nearly all lessons seen during the inspection were at least satisfactory. Three quarters of lessons were good or very good and a small number were excellent. Strengths are clear planning of lessons, motivating and interesting activities, and high expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. Pupils respond well in these situations and make good progress in their learning. Where lessons are less successful, work is not always well matched to pupils' learning needs and pupils do not make enough progress. Throughout the school teaching in English, mathematics and science is good. A significant proportion in English is very good. Teaching is particularly strong in history and geography. In the sixth form, students' learning is significantly improved by the opportunities provided for them to work together on projects and also independently. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of the good planning of many subject teachers and the additional support they receive in lessons. Teachers now provide much better opportunities for the most able pupils to reach high standards than they did at the time of the last inspection. Reading and writing skills are well developed across the curriculum, especially for boys. Subjects such as history and geography make a significant contribution. Pupils have good opportunities to use information and communication technology. However, these opportunities could be better in some subjects. Numeracy skills are used well in science and geography.

#### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a very good range of learning opportunities for pupils and especially for students in the sixth form. The work related curriculum option for 14-16 year olds effectively meets the needs of a substantial minority of this age group.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported in lessons and through small classes in English and mathematics. Pupils with behaviour problems have specialist programmes. However, the monitoring and recording of pupils' progress is not rigorous enough. Not all staff use these pupils' targets as a basis for lesson planning.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The school makes appropriate provision when required, although numbers are small. Currently, only one pupil is at the early stage of learning English. The school encourages these pupils to take GCSE in their first language and most achieve well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The spiritual life of the school is strong. Through the actions of staff, worship and the curriculum, pupils have very good opportunities to reflect on the purpose and meaning of life. They are clearly taught right from wrong and have very good opportunities to work together. Their cultural development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. It is a strength of the school. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development and attainment.

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



<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership and management of the school by the headteacher and other senior managers are particularly strong. Throughout the school staff are committed, hard working and caring of the pupils and students. Improving pupils' achievement is a high priority.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are committed and clearly involved in the work of the school. They know its strength and weaknesses and give good support to the headteacher.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Pupils' and students' progress is very well monitored as is the quality of each subject area's work. The school knows very clearly its strengths and where its work needs to improve.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are satisfactory overall and used well. The finances are managed very efficiently with appropriate procedures to ensure best value is obtained. The school provides good value for money.

#### PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are happy.</li> <li>• A very caring learning environment based on the values of the Catholic faith.</li> <li>• School has high expectations.</li> <li>• Standards are improving.</li> <li>• Leadership and management are good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very few parents had adverse comments, although a very small number did feel communication with parents could be better and there should be more information on their child's progress. Nevertheless, these parents were very happy with the school overall.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree with parents on what pleases them most about the school. However, inspectors did not agree overall with what parents would like to see improved. They had considerable evidence from parents that the school responds quickly to their concerns. The information parents get on their child's progress is consistent with that provided in most schools. Their child's annual report gives both parents and their children a chance to respond. However, teachers' comments could be more specific about what pupils can do and what they could do to improve.

*(368 parent questionnaires were returned and 64 parents attended the parents' meeting)*

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form of this large comprehensive school has 150 students. Numbers are rising slowly. It provides a good range of <sup>1</sup>AS and A2 courses and an increasing range of vocational courses. About half of all students from the main school continues their education post 16 and most stay in the school. A few students join the sixth form from other schools. The small number of ethnic minority students reflects the composition of the main school. Most students entering the sixth form follow two year A level or advanced vocational courses (AVCEs). Courses in the sixth form are open to students of all abilities and consequently some students commence a two year course with quite modest GCSE results. Few students are of the very highest ability. A range of vocational courses at Intermediate level is offered. The school is beginning to develop joint courses with other Catholic schools for subjects where numbers are too small to be viable in one school.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form is a strength of the school. It successfully provides post-16 Catholic education for 17 to 18 year olds. It is cost effective and provides good value for money. Teaching in the sixth form is good. A-level performance has been in line with national figures for summer 2000 and 2001. The school provides a good range of courses to meet the interests and abilities of the students. These courses are constantly under review and increased each year, particularly the vocational courses. Students' personal development is very good and is supported by an extensive programme of additional studies and the personal and social education programme. There is an active social life in the sixth form organised by the students. Staff teamwork is a significant feature and senior managers and tutors provide very good guidance and support for students.

**Strengths**

- Leadership and management of the sixth form are very strong.
- Students make good progress from GCSE and achieve well.
- Teaching is good overall and very good in English, history, geography, media studies and vocational courses.
- Students enjoy being in the sixth form and attendance is good. They leave school as mature well-balanced young people.
- The range of opportunities in subjects and out of class activities is very good and provides rich opportunities for personal development.

**What could be improved**

- There is no provision for students wishing to study design and technology courses in the sixth form.
- 'A' level results in the three sciences (biology, chemistry and physics) are below other subjects, although inspection evidence shows good improvement.
- Equipment and books for popular subjects such as media studies, history and geography are not adequate for future needs.

*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.*

<sup>1</sup> From September 2000 the two year A-level course was replaced with the one year Advanced Subsidiary Course to be followed by the one year Advanced 2 course.

## 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	<b>Good.</b> Pass rates have been in line with national averages at A-level over the last few years, although few students obtain higher grades. Teaching and learning are improving and the subject is becoming more popular. Current Year 13 students work at levels expected for the course. Year 12 AS results were low last year, mainly because some students had comparatively low GCSE grades for entry to the course.
Chemistry	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Despite results being below the national average in recent years, teaching and learning seen during the inspection were satisfactory. Students are making the progress expected based on their GCSE results. A newly appointed head of science is currently using assessment data effectively to improve the match between teaching methods and the students needs.
Physics	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Although results were well below average in 2001, current students' achievement is satisfactory and in line with their GCSE results. A newly appointed head of department has revitalised the teaching and attitudes to physics. Targets for students are not yet focused specifically enough on what they need to be able to do.
Media Studies	<b>Very good.</b> Media studies is a successful subject in the sixth form and is growing in popularity. Standards are very high at both AS and A2 level. Very good teaching provides students with a solid foundation for their own learning
Art	<b>Good.</b> Committed good quality teaching helps students to reach their full potential and encourages an imaginative approach. Examination results for the AS examination in summer 2001 were above average.
Geography	<b>Very good.</b> Standards improved considerably in 2001 and are better than would be expected from GCSE results. Teaching is very good and the assessment of students' work is a particular strength. Fieldwork experiences provide valuable practical experience for students.
History	<b>Very good.</b> Student performance in recent years has been above national averages. Historical skills of a high order are developed. The quality of teaching is always good or very good and sometimes excellent. Student attitudes are very positive and mature. The provision for history is well managed and students' progress is monitored thoroughly. There is some shortage of resources in Year 12.
English	<b>Very good.</b> The quality of teaching is good. The leadership of the department and the commitment of staff have resulted in significant improvement. Strengths of the teaching are the pace and challenge of the work.
German	<b>Satisfactory.</b> No pupils currently take the subject in Year 13. Standards are steadily improving. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The Catholic consortium arrangement is very beneficial to the students.

In other subjects work was sampled. The teaching seen was always at least satisfactory and usually good. The provision for sociology is very good. The subject is taught with expertise and rigour. A-level performance has risen steadily and the subject is increasingly popular as a sixth form course. Standards are high and the subject is very well managed. The provision for psychology is good. The subject is popular and taught well. All students entered for the A-level examination in the last two years have been successful, although few have achieved the highest grades. In biology, two lessons were sampled along with students' work. Results in biology are better than chemistry or physics though still below the national average. Current students are making good progress. Performance

studies results have been disappointing recently, but the good management of the subject should lead to an improvement in standards.

The GNVQ courses attract an increasing number of students and the courses are very well led and managed. Teaching in both the health and social care course and the travel and tourism course is very good. Students are keen to do well. In Business Studies (AVCE) students in Year 13 show a good understanding of the business environment. Teaching is effective in both years. Students start the course with minimal business knowledge and they progress well to achieve good grades after two years. Teaching in the supporting areas of key skills and A-level general studies is satisfactory. In some subjects, students receive very good support in learning how to take notes and draft extended pieces of work. Information and communication technology is used well in history and geography although not as well as it could be in the sciences and mathematics. Excellent teaching was seen in a Year 13 Personal and Social Education lesson where a team of tutors helped students prepare for the next stage in their careers.

#### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The quality of support and guidance in the sixth form is very good. The system of tutorial support and year co-ordinators provides good personal support for students. Information about sixth form courses is good and students have good advice from subject teachers. There is good support for students in Years 12 as 13 as they make choices about future careers and employment. Students have very good information about the progress they are making and are set clear targets to help them achieve as well as they can.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Management and leadership of the sixth form are very effective. There is a very good plan for the development of the sixth form and to raise standards. There is a strong focus on raising standards through monitoring of teaching and students' progress. Equal emphasis is placed on the personal development of students.

#### STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and would recommend it to others.</li> <li>• Students feel the school responds positively to their views and suggestions for improvement.</li> <li>• They feel they are helped to settle in quickly and make the change from GCSE to A level work.</li> <li>• Teachers know them well and provide good help and support.</li> <li>• Teaching is good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The range of enrichment activities is not wide enough.</li> <li>• More advice is wanted about future options.</li> <li>• Students do not always feel well informed about their progress.</li> </ul>

The strengths identified by the students are supported by inspection evidence. The enrichment programme was curtailed last year because of the demands made on students by the new Curriculum 2000 arrangements. The school has reintroduced many activities this year and these now provide good opportunities for students outside their subject choices. Advice about higher education choices is very good. When the current vacancy for the Head of Careers post is filled, greater emphasis should be given to other opportunities in further education, training and employment. Students are well informed about their estimated and possible grades. The Year 12 and 13 co-ordinators appointed from this term have a clear role to support students and to ensure they make good use of their personal information and make the best possible progress.

#### COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

are equivalent to 'very weak'.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

##### **Main school**

- 1 Since the last inspection standards for 11-16 year olds have significantly improved. For 14-year-olds overall performance in national tests in English, mathematics and science has risen from considerably below average to close to the national average. For 16-year-olds GCSE results have stopped fluctuating and for the last three years show sustained improvement with overall performance in line with that nationally. Pupils now do much better in national tests than pupils in <sup>2</sup>similar types of school. Pupils achieve well, as although Key Stage 2 results indicate attainment on entry to the school as average, the school's rigorous testing shows that too few pupils are in the highest ability band and in a significant number of subjects standards are below those expected for pupils' ages. Additionally a higher than expected number enter the school with significant difficulties in reading and writing. The school's recent testing shows that these difficulties are increasing and inspectors observed in Year 7 a small number of pupils with very weak skills in reading, writing and number.

##### **Key Stage 3**

- 2 In 2001, overall performance in national tests for 14-year-olds in English, mathematics and science was just below that nationally, as it was in 2000. Although the proportion of pupils achieving the nationally expected level in English and mathematics was in line with that nationally, too few pupils achieved at the higher levels. This reflects the ability profile of pupils on entry to the school. Pupils did not do as well in science, where results were below the national average at the expected level and well below at the higher levels.
- 3 Standards seen during the inspection for current 14-year-olds are in line with those expected nationally in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. For all three subjects this is the result of improved teaching and subject management over the last three years. These have been better for English and mathematics than science, where improvements have been more recent. However, all pupils make good progress and achieve well for their abilities. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by small groups in English and mathematics and by in-class support in science lessons. Setting in mathematics and science and well planned extension materials in English help the most gifted to achieve higher standards. There is, however, the potential to improve results at the higher National Curriculum levels.
- 4 In other subjects pupils, make at least satisfactory progress throughout Key Stage 3 and in most good progress because of skilled teaching. However, the standards reached by Year 9 pupils depend to a considerable extent on the level of skill and the experiences with which they entered the school in Year 7. In art, geography, history, information and communication technology and physical education, pupils achieve well and reach the standards expected for their age from a below average starting point in these subjects in Year 7. Standards reached by 14-year-olds in design and technology and music are below average, but even so these represent at least sound and often good progress from very limited experiences in some primary schools. In

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<sup>2</sup> *Similar schools are schools with the same proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.*

modern foreign languages, pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve standards in line with those expected for their age by the time they reach 14 years. Smaller classes in the lower ability band and occasional in-class support help pupils with learning difficulties achieve well. In art, geography and history, good planning and well targeted activities particularly help these pupils make good progress.

#### **Key Stage 4**

- 5 Performance at GCSE over the last three years has been in line with the national average. Standards are now much more consistent than at the time of the last inspection when they varied year upon year but were mainly below average. Pupils do much better than pupils in similar schools and progress since Year 9 for summer 2001 entrants was particularly good. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, was above the national figure. This included a high number of pupils on the special educational needs register with either learning or behavioural difficulties: a good indicator that this group of pupils does well. Almost no pupils leave the school without obtaining at least one GCSE qualification; a much better performance than in most schools. Although the school does not have a high proportion of pupils within the upper ability range, it nevertheless has an average proportion of pupils achieving five or more of the highest A\*-C grades. This is a good achievement and compares very favourably with pupils from similar schools. However, too few pupils gain the highest A\*/A grades.
- 6 In 2001, nearly all pupils achieved a GCSE pass grade in English and mathematics. This is an excellent achievement. At the higher A\*-C grades results for English language have been in line with national figures for the last two years. Given the high number of pupils of all abilities who enter for English literature, results are good even though slightly below the national average. In mathematics, consistent improvement resulted in A\*-C grades close to the national average in 2001. This is a significantly better performance than at the time of the last inspection. Developments in the teaching and management of science have yet to give better results in science. The proportion of pupils achieving the highest A\*-C grades is below average, although it improved in 2001 from that in 2000. Pupils do less well in science than they do in most other subjects.
- 7 In most other subjects, performance at the higher A\*-C grades was close to the national average, although below in design and technology and considerably below in French. However, pass rates are good. The best GCSE results in 2001 were obtained in art and design, and geography, where the proportions of pupils achieving the highest A\*-C grades were significantly above national averages. Although results were good in German, drama and media studies, the low number of entries makes comparisons with national averages less significant. In 2000, pupils did best in history, geography, physical education and English compared to their performance in other subjects. They did worst in French and science. Boys did not do well in design and technology, and girls in science. Results in French have been affected by weaknesses in teaching and those in design and technology by staff absence.
- 8 Standards observed during the inspection were, overall, in line with those expected nationally. Pupils achieve well and in most subjects make good progress. Good support in lessons from learning support teachers and assistants and good planning and sensitive help from subject teachers ensures pupils with learning difficulties achieve well. The current Year 11 pupils are predicted to achieve GCSE results in line with national averages in most subjects next summer.
- 9 In English and mathematics the standards of Year 11 pupils are as expected for their age and recent improvements in the teaching of science are raising standards in this

subject close to the national average. Standards are well above average in geography and above average in art. Standards are still below expected levels in French, as they were at the time of the last inspection, with weaknesses in teaching still needing to be addressed. They are also below average in all aspects of design and technology except textiles, where they are good. In the last two years the English department has entered groups of pupils early for either GCSE English language or English literature. This is across the ability range. Initial analysis indicates some very positive benefits not least for pupils' confidence and motivation. Currently, no other subject enters pupils early for GCSE and a few parents indicated disappointment in this. However, the small number of pupils whose first language is not English have the opportunity to gain a GCSE qualification in their first language. These languages range from Arabic to Italian. Good results are obtained.

- 10 Girls perform better than boys at GCSE as they do nationally. However, the gap between the boys' performance and that of girls in the school is less than that nationally. In national tests for 14 year olds, boys have performed as well as girls, and sometimes better, in the last two years, which is against the national trend. Boys do particularly well in subjects such as English, history and geography. Girls do less well than boys in science, both in the National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds and at GCSE. During the inspection, girls and boys were seen to be equally involved in most lessons, especially when teachers made clear efforts to involve all pupils equally. In a few lessons the girls showed some reluctance to respond to the teacher's questioning. However, there was no evidence that this and the higher number of boys in some year groups affects negatively girls' achievements. The boys do well and make the progress they should. The high focus in recent years on improving boys' reading and writing skills has significantly contributed to their comparatively better performance in English and the humanities than boys nationally. It has raised their standards in all subjects.
- 11 Overall, pupils' literacy skills (reading, writing and spelling) are satisfactory, although a small number of pupils have very poor skills. By the time they reach 16 most pupils read well. In subjects such as English, history and geography, pupils are given good support to develop their writing skills, such that they can write well at length. Where teachers have good questioning techniques, pupils improve their listening and speaking skills. Most pupils are confident in expressing their views and do so clearly. However, some pupils are less fluent.
- 12 Most pupils have sound numeracy skills and use these satisfactorily in other subjects. In science, pupils regularly record data, carry out calculations and draw and interpret graphs successfully. In design and technology, they measure and mark out materials accurately. In geography, younger pupils demonstrate good map-work skills and older pupils satisfactorily handle census data to analyse socio-economic patterns.
- 13 Pupils have sound information and communication technology skills. They use word-processing, desk top publishing and spreadsheets to good effect in English, modern foreign languages and food technology. They use computers competently to control machines and for design work in design and technology and search the Internet for information for project work in other subjects. Cameras and editing equipment are used well in media studies and most students use electronic calculators with confidence.
- 14 The good progress that pupils make is due to good teaching, pupils' positive attitudes towards learning and the rigorous way in which the school monitors pupils' performance as they progress through the school. This includes twice yearly

individual reviews with their form tutor or a senior member of staff. Pupils discuss where they need to improve and any support needed. This has a positive impact on how well pupils achieve. Underachievers are identified and receive support from the learning mentors or other senior staff. The comparatively small number of ethnic minority pupils is well integrated and the school is confident that they perform as well as they should because of the pupil interview procedure. However, the school should analyse their achievements as a separate group to ensure all is as it should be.

- 15 The school uses its data on pupils' performance to set clear targets not only for individual pupils but also for year groups as a whole. These are appropriately ambitious. In 2000 and 2001 they were achieved at GCSE. Results were slightly below what the school had hoped for in tests for 14-year-olds, though these continue to improve. The trend in improvement over the last years has been at least as good as that nationally, if not better.

### **Sixth form**

- 16 Standards in the sixth form have improved significantly since the last inspection. For the last two years overall performance in A-level examinations has been close to the national average. Given that a significant number of the students start their A-level courses with slightly lower GCSE grades than is often desirable these results represent good achievement. This reflects the clear commitment to raising standards of the headteacher and his senior management team and the improvement in teaching and learning throughout the school. The better use of information on students' performance to monitor their progress and to plan work to meet their learning needs has also contributed significantly to the current good achievement of sixth form students. Boys and girls did equally well in 2001 although boys did slightly better in 2000.
- 17 At A-level in 2001 the pass rate in nearly all subjects was close to the national average, but less so for the higher A-B grades. However, results at the higher A-B levels have been consistently in line with national averages in business studies, English and history over the last two years. In 2001, results in media studies were particularly good with two out of the three students gaining the highest A-B grades. In geography, general studies and art and design, results improved from the previous year. Sociology and psychology both had good pass rates. Students do least well in the science subjects (biology, chemistry and physics) where pass rates have been very low for the last three years. In mathematics in recent years the numbers of students entering the examination have ranged from four to 19. Although pass rates have been in line with national averages, too few students have gained the higher grades.
- 18 In summer 2001 Year 12 students sat the new AS examinations for the first time. In most subjects pass rates were in line with national figures. The proportions of students gaining the highest A-B grades were below those nationally in most subjects. However, in media studies, art and design and general studies they were significantly above and in English in line. These results represent very good achievement. Lower results in business studies and performance studies are attributed to some students having no previous experience of these subjects, for example in performance studies the elements of music and dance. Mathematics pass rates were well below the national average, but a significant number of students taking the course had started with a limited range of skills and this is reflected in the low results.



- 19 The range of vocational courses being offered by the school is becoming increasingly popular and students do well in the AVCE business studies and travel and tourism courses. The Intermediate and Foundation GNVQ courses in health and social care, business studies and leisure and tourism have achieved pass rates well in line with national averages. The very good management and teaching of these courses contributes significantly to these good results. Many students enter these courses with comparatively low GCSE grades and one or two were on the special educational needs register in the main school.
- 20 During the inspection the standards observed for students currently in Years 12 and 13 were, overall, at least in line with those expected nationally for all courses. Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results. Standards are particularly good in art and design, English, media studies, history and geography. These confirm in Year 13 the good results obtained in these subjects in the AS examinations last summer. All these subjects are increasingly popular with students and this and the standards achieved are a direct result of the very good teaching and leadership in these subjects throughout the school in recent years. Standards observed in the sciences show improvement; although in physics and chemistry, groups are still small. This makes comparisons with national figures unreliable. As in the main school, improved teaching is having a positive effect on standards. A similar improvement in teaching has taken place in mathematics. In both mathematics and the three sciences, better leadership and management now contribute to better standards and students achieve at least satisfactorily in relation to their previous attainment.
- 21 As in the main school, students' progress is well monitored. This is essential as the school's very positive policy of an open sixth form means some students start sixth form AS courses with lower skills than generally accepted. The school needs to keep this situation under review. There are no significant differences in the performances of male and female students, although few girls opt for the sciences and mathematics. Students from all ethnic groups do as well as they should.
- 22 Most students enter the sixth form with appropriate literacy skills and these support soundly their achievements in other subjects of the curriculum. Teachers are well aware of students' literacy needs and through their teaching ensure they have the skills required to complete extended written tasks, research activities and note taking to a good level. This was particularly noticeable in subjects such as history, geography and English.
- 23 Students use numeracy skills satisfactorily in other subjects, but there are variations across the ability range. In science, students are highly competent in a range of mental and written calculations and use scientific calculators capably. For example, a physics student used calculations to compare forces in electric and gravitational fields. In sociology and psychology, students use statistical data appropriately to interpret population growth. Some GNVQ students have quite limited calculation skills and these sometimes hinder the standards they can achieve.
- 24 Sixth form students have good access to computers and use them well. They research the Internet for information and use them to complete longer assignments. In history, they use the Power Point programme to make presentations to other students. Although they use graphical calculators well, the use of computers in mathematics and science is not yet as well developed as it could be.

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

## Main school

- 25 Pupils of all ages have very good attitudes to learning and are well behaved. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, are highly motivated and are keen to benefit from the increasingly wide range of learning opportunities available. They come to school in a positive frame of mind and are very proud to belong to Archbishop Ilsley Roman Catholic School. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults are very good and are based upon mutual trust and respect. Pupils feel confident about asking their teacher for help or clarification when it is needed. This atmosphere of support and understanding helps pupils to learn well and to make good progress in their work. During lessons, pupils work well together in small groups or pairs. For example, during a lesson that dealt with the most productive way to use their time, Year 10 pupils all recognised that they could make improvements. Conferring in pairs, they realised that effective organisation and planning are indeed the best routes to successful study habits.
- 26 Pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school is good. Most of the pupils know exactly what is expected and boys and girls behave equally well. The result is a lively but harmonious community. This school has a very good atmosphere and this has a very positive effect upon pupils' learning. Pupils respond well to the school's high expectations of good behaviour that are well blended with praise and rewards. Although bullying does occur on a few occasions, pupils feel confident that teachers deal with such behaviour firmly and very effectively. During the inspection, unsatisfactory behaviour was seen in a few lessons. This was usually because a small minority of the pupils lacked motivation and they were reluctant to undertake the work that had been planned. Very occasionally this was because the teaching was not good enough.
- 27 Although a few pupils become too boisterous, most behave sensibly and consider others when moving around the school. The school is very popular and space is limited. Originally built to accommodate fewer than half the number of pupils currently on roll, some of the corridors and stairs are not wide enough. In between lessons, they become very crowded, but because of the pupils' good behaviour this causes no major problems. The canteens are too small and at lunchtime pupils form a long queue in the playground and wait patiently for their turn. When in large groups such as assemblies, pupils behave very well; they listen attentively and respectfully. They respect each other's feelings and are tolerant of each other's mistakes. There has been only one permanent exclusion during the school year preceding the inspection.
- 28 Relationships between pupils and with their teachers are very good. In keeping with its Mission Statement, the school builds upon Christian values and pupils are encouraged to show respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others. During lessons, pupils are able to discuss their values and beliefs without fear of mockery or intimidation. Although the school is predominately white with about two-thirds of its pupils from an Irish Catholic background, one in 10 pupils are from other ethnic groups. All pupils mix freely and this reflects the school's successful policy of ensuring all pupils receive fair and equal treatment. Members of staff provide very good examples of how to behave and talk to the pupils with respect and consideration. Pupils, in turn, speak highly of their teachers and this sense of common purpose helps to create a stable and calm atmosphere within which pupils can learn well.
- 29 Pupils with special educational needs generally have positive attitudes towards their work and school and leave school with appropriate qualifications. Those with

learning difficulties receive good support in lessons and staff and fellow pupils respond positively to their needs. Pupils with behavioural difficulties learn how to modify their behaviour. Older pupils in Years 10 and 11, who are particularly focused on leaving school and getting a job, appreciate how the school provides learning opportunities that they find purposeful and relevant. The opportunity to attend the local further education college one day a week for work related courses in their own clothes with their computerised student pass is very much valued. They feel they are treated like adults.

- 30 Pupils' personal development is very good. Even the youngest pupils are mature in their thinking and confidently discuss their values and beliefs. For example, Year 7 pupils considered the most effective way to deal with bullying. They thought about the bully's motives and considered what they would do if they were the victims. They used this knowledge to write a letter to an incoming Year 6 pupil. They provided wholehearted reassurance that Archbishop Ilsey School was a 'telling school' and that any such problems would be quickly resolved. Through the system of personal reviews, pupils track their own progress and help to decide upon their personal and academic targets. This gives them a very good insight into how they can improve their work. Pupils willingly accept responsibilities within the day-to-day life of the school. For example, Year 9 pupils undertake reception duty and, at the start of the academic year, Year 10 pupils act as 'buddies' for the new Year 7s. They participate well in the school council and value the opportunity to have a 'voice' in running the school.
- 31 Attendance has been below the national average for several years and is unsatisfactory. This is partly because there are a few pupils in some year groups, particularly Years 8, 9, and 10, who have very low attendance and this has a large impact upon the overall figure. The level of authorised absence is also high and too many pupils lose time because of family holidays. The incidence of unauthorised absences has almost halved since the last inspection because of the school's efforts to improve pupils' attendance. It is just above the national average. A few teachers in GCSE classes commented on some pupils' poor attendance lowering standards of achievement. There is no difference between the attendance of boys and girls. The number of pupils arriving late to school is higher than the school would like, but reflects the wide catchment area and the heavy traffic locally in the morning. Overall, pupils are punctual to lessons during the day.

### **Sixth form**

- 32 Sixth form students have very positive attitudes to their work and to school. This is reflected in the fact that around half the pupils from Year 11 stay on for the sixth form. As part of the inspection process, students were asked to complete a pre-inspection questionnaire. An analysis of their responses gives a very positive picture. They are overwhelmingly positive about what the school does for them, but they also question constructively and are looking for possible improvements. Almost every student who returned the questionnaire indicated that he or she feels that teachers are available when they are needed and that the school takes their views into account when making plans for the future.
- 33 Students are conscientious, mature and sensible. Although some are shy when addressing the rest of their class, most are confident and articulate. Helped by the very good guidance programme, most will be ready for the next stage in their education by the time they leave. Nine out of 10 feel that they are well taught and that the work is set at the right level. Students willingly undertake the work that is

asked of them and many use their initiative and decide to do more. They are co-operative and relationships with each other and with members of staff are very good.

- 34 Students' personal development is very good. They are confident and well motivated. They behave sensibly and can be relied upon to get on with their work both at home and at school. Through coursework, they become increasingly accustomed to working independently and they cope well with the additional demands that are placed upon them. Students are keen to take on responsibilities around the school. They make a valuable contribution to the welfare of others by holding lunchtime 'drop in' sessions for any of the younger pupils who may want to discuss a problem. Once a fortnight, students undertake voluntary work within the local community. This ranges from helping the younger pupils with their reading to working in local primary schools or residential homes for the elderly. In addition, sixth form students host discos for local primary age children and the funds raised are used to prepare an annual lunch for local senior citizens.
- 35 Attendance is good overall. On a day-to-day level, however, some lessons suffer from poor attendance and this affects the work that can be covered by the rest of the class. In addition, some students are late in arriving and this can disrupt their teacher's initial introduction to the lesson.

## **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

### **Main School**

- 36 The overall quality of teaching is good and has significantly improved since the previous inspection. This improvement reflects the strong emphasis on good teaching and learning in the school's development planning. Teaching was good or better in three-quarters of the lessons seen and in a third of these was very good or excellent. Very few lessons seen were unsatisfactory.
- 37 Teaching in all three of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is good across the age range. In English there was also a substantial amount of very good teaching. In English and mathematics, significant improvements have occurred since the last inspection, when teaching in mathematics was unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3 and in English had some unsatisfactory elements at Key Stage 4. In science it is now good rather than satisfactory. In English and mathematics the leadership and management of the heads of department have a very positive impact on the good teaching now seen and raised standards. The more recent management changes in science have improved teaching and are now beginning to raise standards in this subject.
- 38 In most subjects, pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. There is a clear link between the best teaching and the highest standards. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is very good in history and good in all other subjects, except for design and technology and modern foreign languages where it is satisfactory. At Key Stage 4, teaching is very good in history and geography, and again good in other subjects, with the exception of design and technology and modern foreign languages, where it is satisfactory rather than good. There is a small element of unsatisfactory teaching in French and in design and technology at both key stages. The lessons lack pace and work is not matched to pupils' learning abilities. It is usually too easy. Standards in both these subjects are not as good as they are in other subjects by the time pupils reach 16 years. Since the previous inspection, teaching at Key Stage 4 has improved in art and design and physical education. It has considerably improved in

music at both key stages. In modern foreign languages, teaching has improved overall in spite of weaknesses remaining in French.

- 39 Teachers know their subjects well and, as part of their planning, identify clear intentions for the lesson. They frequently share these with pupils and because of this the pupils understand what is expected of them in a lesson and what they should be able to do by the end. Pupils are encouraged in the closing session to reflect on what they have done and this makes their learning secure. In a Year 11 information and communication technology lesson, for example, pupils designing a web page were told clearly at the beginning of the lesson the result expected and the skills and techniques to use. As their work progressed they recorded each stage of the process. This enabled them to judge their finished result against the targets set at the beginning of the lesson. Similarly, in a Year 9 English lesson, where pupils were drafting and re-drafting their own crime fiction, learning objectives were made clear at the start, both orally and through wall display. At the end of the lesson, these objectives were well used as a basis for discussion and review of what pupils had gained from the lesson. Pupils identified for themselves what they could now do that they could not do at the start of the lesson and how they could make their written work better. End of lesson sessions are used well in mathematics to give pupils immediate feedback on what they have learnt in the lesson and this reinforces their understanding of new ideas covered.
- 40 Most teachers have high expectations of pupils and this is illustrated in the best lessons by the teachers' very good use of sharply focused questions to extend in depth pupils' understanding. In a Year 10 art project on portraiture, pupils made very good progress in understanding the use of line and texture because of skilled questioning and discussion of well prepared examples of the work of the German Expressionists. Many teachers use discussion as a means of helping pupils to clarify their thinking. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson, pupils investigated the 'Towers of Hanoi' game in small groups. At the end of the lesson the teacher through skilful questioning agreed with pupils a winning strategy, expressed algebraically, that always worked.
- 41 Generally, teachers make good use of time in lessons. They achieve their aims through a variety of interesting and challenging activities that catch and hold their pupils' interest. Good use is made of visual aids and artefacts to bring learning alive. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson on the First World War, pupils were led to a very good understanding of the characteristics of trench warfare through artefacts, a machine gun, helmet and gas mask, and through 'role-playing'.
- 42 Teachers' planning for the development of pupils' literacy skills is good and many examples of good practice were seen. In a Year 9 geography lesson, pupils developed their speaking skills through role-play in a debate on nuclear power. In design and technology key words and technical terms are displayed prominently in teaching areas and they are referred to in lessons. In science a good emphasis is placed on the correct use of scientific vocabulary and spelling and opportunities for extended writing are provided. There is impressive provision in history where each year group has history dictionaries and key words are always used at the start of lessons. Word walls are a feature of most classrooms and are the result of the work of the learning assistants. A number of subjects contribute satisfactorily to pupils' skills in calculation, measurement and the interpretation of graphs. Good work was seen in geography and science. Information and communication technology is effectively used in design and technology and English, but not as well as it could be in mathematics and science.

- 43 The school has a clear policy and framework for setting homework, which is well adhered to. Homework is used well especially in Key Stage 4 to consolidate and extend pupils' learning in the classroom. Most parents are happy with the amount set.
- 44 A very significant improvement since the previous inspection is the use of assessment to guide teachers' planning. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give them clear and helpful guidance on what they need to do to improve. This is a particularly good feature of work in English, mathematics, history, geography and music. Teachers regularly assess what pupils know and understand through tests and by other means. They now use the outcomes of these assessments to help planning, both at departmental level and for particular classes and pupils.
- 45 A wide range of strategies is successfully used to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. In some cases, teachers prepare alternative materials for groups of different abilities. In others, they vary the level of questioning to ensure that all pupils work at a level that meets their needs. Good efforts are made to ensure girls and boys respond equally and that pupils from all ethnic groups are well integrated. Teaching in the small bottom English and mathematics sets in Years 7-9 is good and makes a significant contribution to improving these pupils skills. There is good use of information and communication technology to support pupils' learning in these groups. Where individual pupils receive direct classroom help, teachers and support assistants generally work closely together to the benefit of the pupils. These measures help to ensure that pupils with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school. In some subjects, teachers could make better use of these pupils individual education plans.
- 46 At the time of the previous inspection, concerns were expressed about the level of work in most subjects for higher attaining pupils. They were not given sufficient opportunities to explore subjects in greater depth and to reach the highest possible levels of learning. Most teachers now recognise the potential of their pupils and ensure that work is stimulating and hard enough. In history, for example, higher attaining pupils are helped to raise their achievement through extra tasks that extend their knowledge and understanding and through other activities such as drama workshops and visits.
- 47 The school's very high commitment to improving teaching and learning has had a very positive impact on improving the standards pupils achieve.

### **Sixth form**

- 48 Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. In three-quarters of the lessons observed it was good, very good or excellent, which is a high proportion. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In the subjects inspected in some detail, teaching was judged very good in history, geography, English and media studies. This reflects the good standards achieved by students in these subjects. The teaching seen in the vocational courses was also very good. In sociology, psychology, mathematics and art, teaching is good and in German, chemistry and physics, satisfactory.
- 49 A strength of the teaching is the good relationships that exist between students and their teachers. Students feel teachers know their individual strengths and weaknesses and tailor their teaching styles and methods accordingly. This creates a good climate for learning in which teachers encourage students to explore more deeply their knowledge and understanding of a topic. The students respond well and work hard and at a good pace such that a high level of learning takes place. On the

few occasions when the teaching did not involve and challenge individuals in this way, a small number of students did not contribute as strongly as they might. Teachers have good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for their subject as well as a good knowledge of examination requirements. Lessons build carefully on students' prior knowledge. This is then developed using a range of methods to motivate and sustain their interest; including brainstorming, discussions, presentations and video material. As a result, students are well prepared for examinations.

- 50 In many lessons class discussions show students' eagerness to respond and the confidence and maturity of their contributions. This was a strong feature in history and some mathematics lessons. Teachers skilfully help students to analyse data, their own opinions and the views of others when coming to conclusions. When this practice is followed up by well thought out homework tasks, individual projects and research activities the students develop good independent learning skills. The use of information and communication technology skills in many subjects encourages this independence.
- 51 A weakness in lessons, that were otherwise satisfactory, was insufficient encouragement of students to work independently, express their own views and arrive at their own conclusions. For example, in practical situations in science students are not encouraged to find things out for themselves. Whereas in media studies the learning from practical situations and from group work is an essential element of the learning process and leads to high achievement.
- 52 Teachers in all subjects give good attention to the development of students' literacy skills. There are frequent opportunities for discussion and debate and for extended writing in investigation and research work in subjects like history and geography. Students are guided in writing notes in logical sequences and in structuring their essays. Subject terminology is well used in history, sociology and psychology. In science subjects, mature discussions take place with students. One student gave a lengthy but clear explanation of how to calculate forces in gravitational and electric fields.
- 53 The assessment of students' work and progress in subjects is good. Particularly good practice was seen in geography, where detailed marking of work and rigorous monitoring of individual progress ensures students are well aware of the standards they achieve. Discussion with students indicates they have a very clear view of their target examination grades and what they need to do to improve. The good teaching is helping them achieve as well as they can. Teaching in the sixth form has continued to improve since the last inspection.

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

### **Main school**

- 54 **The school provides a very good curriculum that is effectively organised to meet the needs of all pupils and meets statutory requirements. It well supports their academic, personal and physical development. Pupils with learning difficulties receive the help they need. Gifted and talented pupils have additional activities to develop their specific skills. Older pupils who find the traditional school subjects less interesting as the world of work beckons have opportunities to take courses relevant to their future needs. Boys and girls and pupils from all ethnic groups have equal access to all curriculum subjects.**

**Support is provided for pupils whose families find trips and extra-curricular activities too expensive.**

- 55 **The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a well-balanced range of activities covering all the subjects of the National Curriculum plus drama, religious education and a programme of personal and social education. Pupils can pursue two foreign languages in Year 9, taking either Spanish or German alongside French. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has significantly improved since the previous inspection and now meets statutory requirements**
- 56 There has been very good improvement to the Key Stage 4 curriculum since the previous inspection, when it was too narrow. In addition to the appropriate common core of subjects taken by all pupils and the suitable range of options, the school has introduced vocational, work-related and certificated courses. The new GNVQ course in information and communication technology, equivalent to four GCSE subjects, has proved very popular with lower and average attaining pupils. A number of these pupils also spend one day a week at the local further education college taking courses such as motor vehicle maintenance, health and beauty and catering which lead to NVQ qualifications. These pupils are very positive about the courses they take and the adult environment of the college and these good attitudes to learning are reflected back in the school in their other subjects. All Key Stage 4 pupils participate in a careers programme of which they and their parents speak well. The success of the Key Stage 4 curriculum is shown by the above average proportion of pupils who achieve five or more passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics.
- 57 Learning opportunities for pupils with special educational needs are generally good. In English and mathematics, small groups at Key Stage 3, additional classroom support from learning assistants and before and after school sessions help the weakest pupils make good progress. Learning support in other subjects has been expanded through additional learning support assistants funded by the Excellence in Cities fund. Pupils with a statement of need receive the support to which they are entitled. All pupils have an individual education plan that sets them targets for improvement, although these are not always well used by subject departments. The best practice occurs where subjects build on these and identify the specific support pupils need in their own subject. Good practice was seen in geography, where the department has constructed its own special educational needs register that identifies pupils' needs in their subject. The good support that staff provide for pupils with special educational needs is shown by the high proportion of these pupils that obtain five or more GCSE passes. One pupil with Down's Syndrome gained six GCSE passes. Last summer a visually impaired student gained college entrance to study GCSE A-level music.
- 58 The school identifies clearly its gifted and talented pupils. Named staff have responsibility for co-ordinating provision, and for organising activities such as the gifted and talented summer school. The school works with a number of organisations on accelerated learning schemes, and is using some of the strategies, such as Learning Curve, to support pupil achievement. The Excellence in Cities funding supports additional activities for identified pupils such as extra music tuition for gifted musicians.
- 59 The school's planning reflects the high priority given to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The government's national Key Stage 3 strategy to improve pupils' basic skills is being appropriately implemented. The school has a



well thought out literacy policy and effective strategies are in place to teach literacy skills in all subjects. Most subjects make good contributions to the improvement of pupils' writing, reading and spelling skills. Over the last six months marked strides have been taken in developing and putting in place a strategy for developing pupils' numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics

- 60 The school provides a rich variety of extra-curricular activities to support pupils' learning in the classroom. These include a range of visits, field trips, residential experiences, retreats, activity days, musical and dramatic activities, and sports clubs and competitive teams, and opportunities to work with and for the local community. Pupils' learning is supported through good access to the Resource Base, library and computing facilities during lunchtimes and after school, and through homework clubs. Pupils value these opportunities and the participation rate is good.
- 61 The school has excellent links with partner institutions and the local community. These enrich the curriculum. Membership of the local Catholic Partnership plays a key role in improving the quality of teaching and learning, through collaborative curriculum development and the in-service education and training of teachers. Links with primary schools have improved since the previous inspection and are now very good. There are named staff for primary links in core subjects and the school has adopted the Birmingham scheme of cross-curricular work, 'Moving on Up', which primary pupils begin in Year 6 and complete in Year 7. The school organises summer schools to help weaker pupils transfer successfully to secondary school, and mathematics and technology days for Year 6 pupils. There are excellent links with local colleges of further education and with initial teacher training consortia, including the universities of Birmingham, Central England and Wolverhampton, and Newman College.
- 62 The school's provision for pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. This includes a very well planned programme of personal, social and health education that is taught by a committed team of experienced teachers. The lessons seen during the inspection were of a high standard. This programme is well supported by assemblies, the award system, residential experiences, work experience, visits, extra curricular activities and opportunities for pupils to take responsibility both within school and the local community. All this is underpinned by the strong spiritual life of the school. The school is a worshipping community and its daily work and life are very clearly based on the values of the Catholic faith. Parents were very positive about this aspect of the school's work.
- 63 Pupils have very good opportunities for prayer and reflection through services in the school chapel, school assemblies and tutor time. They respond well to these, listening attentively and joining in prayer with respect. Pupils' spiritual life is also enriched through other opportunities to explore their personal beliefs and their significance in their lives. These include retreats, missions and religious education lessons. The school now plans more effectively than at the time of the previous inspection for pupils' spiritual development in lessons. Many subjects provide good opportunities for pupils to reflect on their lives and the world around them. For example, in English pupils explore feelings and responses to events through books and poetry. Music encourages pupils to express feelings in a non-verbal way, while in geography the study of the natural world helps them appreciate the world around them. Science encourages respect for the sanctity of life, both human and non-human.

- 64 Provision for pupils' moral development is very good and for their social development excellent. Pupils are clearly taught right from wrong and to treat each other with respect. The behaviour policy is very clear and effective strategies include appropriate rewards that value pupils' achievements and personal successes. The excellence of the school's work in addressing bullying and racism has been recognised by the school gaining the national <sup>3</sup>Healthy School's Award. Teachers provide very good role models and this encourages very good relationships between all members of the school community.
- 65 The school expects and strongly encourages pupils to support the work of both the school community and that outside the school. Year 9 pupils take turns to work on reception and to undertake minor administrative tasks. The 'Young Writers' group works with children in primary schools to develop their literacy skills. Year 10 pupils support new Year 7 pupils as 'Buddys'. The School Council has an active voice in making suggestions to improve the work of the school. Pupils raise money for a wide range of charities such as children's hospices, MENCAP and CAFOD.
- 66 In the classroom the personal, social and health education programme gives pupils very good opportunities to explore a wide range of moral and social issues within a Christian framework. These include their health, relationships with the opposite sex, smoking and drug abuse, race and culture. In history, Year 10 pupils explore how the first World War changed the role of women in society. Geography regularly presents pupils with key social issues for discussion concerning the environment, transport, trade and aid in the third world, and the impact of tourism on developing societies. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their social skills through group and pair work in the classroom. Sports clubs and teams, outdoor and adventure activities, field trips and educational visits also contribute. Pupils benefit particularly from residential experiences in Years 7, 8 and 10 at Malvern, Alton Castle and Soli House respectively. Year 9 pupils have a day at Newman College to develop team building skills.
- 67 The school provides good opportunities for pupils' cultural development. Art and design, English, drama, music, media studies and the performing arts all contribute well. Outside the classroom the highly successful school choir performs at national venues and the flourishing steel band is popular in the local community. Pupils have good opportunities to learn instruments and the school supports this activity financially. It has recently improved the number and range of instruments for pupils to play. School productions every two years develop pupils' drama skills in the context of performing for an audience. There are regular visits to the theatre, museums and art galleries as part of pupils' curricular experiences.
- 68 A range of activities and curriculum experiences develops pupils understanding of other cultures and beliefs. Planning for this is much better than at the time of the last inspection and is satisfactory overall. Some subjects make a particularly good contribution. In art, pupils study aboriginal, Japanese and Native American Indian designs when creating masks. History covers the struggles of the black people in the Americas. In music, pupils study Chinese and Indian music and the blues. There is a gospel choir. Religious education introduces pupils to the beliefs and customs of the Jewish and Moslem faiths. English addresses issues of race through the study of books such as 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. In modern foreign languages, both in lessons and clubs, and through visits to European cities, pupils learn about the customs and way of life of other European people.

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<sup>3</sup> The Healthy Schools Award covers pupils' personal well-being as well as their physical well-being

- 69 The Irish cultural heritage of most of the pupils is well celebrated as it was at the time of the last inspection. However, the school has now a greater awareness of the need to raise the pupils' understanding of the multi-cultural city in which they live. It provides more opportunities for pupils to take part in activities outside the school's immediate area. These including debating competitions and visits to schools in the inner city. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the major faith communities is sound, but are not yet developed in sufficient depth. Similarly, their understanding of the contribution of cultures other than Western European to present day society is not as strong as it could be.

### **Sixth form**

- 70 The sixth form curriculum provides very well for students' interests and abilities. The school has concentrated on A-level provision and a range of appropriate vocational courses. These complement very well other local provision. Given the relatively small size of the sixth form the school offers a sound range of courses at AS and A2 levels. There is a choice of traditional and newer subjects such as performance studies, psychology, sociology and media studies. There is no provision for students to follow sixth form courses in design and technology at present. Vocational courses are offered at A-level in travel and tourism and business studies and at Intermediate level in health and social care, travel and tourism and business studies.
- 71 The school has developed its curriculum to ensure very good access to courses for students with a wide range of interests and abilities. Good course planning ensures that students build on existing knowledge and experience. Improvements are well under way for 2002 and include an A-level vocational course in information and communication technology to provide continuity with the new information and communication course in Key Stage 4. The school is extending curriculum provision through co-operation with local Catholic schools, particularly in subjects with small numbers. This has started this year with joint provision for German teaching. There are opportunities for students to retake some GCSE courses.
- 72 Students follow a well planned programme of complementary studies, including Christian Living and personal and social education. These make an excellent contribution to their personal development and provide opportunities for reflection on a wide range of cultural, moral, social and spiritual issues. Pupils also have opportunities to go on retreats and an exchange with a school in the United States of America. Subjects such as English, history, geography and media studies explore a wide range of moral and social issues. For example, in media studies how the media presents male and female roles in society, in geography the study of immigrant communities, and in English the views of the first world war poets. Students are expected to help in the local community and the school. There are a head girl and head boy who lead the sixth form council. Sixth formers also take the young leaders course.

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

### **Main school**

- 73 The provision for pupils' welfare and guidance is very good. This is because of the very effective pastoral system that provides pupils with very good support both academically and personally. The pastoral system continues to be a strength of the school as it was at the time of the last inspection. It is well led by the pastoral director and the key stage co-ordinators. Teachers know their pupils well because

year teams remain constant throughout pupils' time in the school. Relationships between pupils and members of staff are very good and this helps to ensure any emerging difficulties are identified and addressed at an early stage. Pupils say they feel well supported by the school and would confidently go to the staff for help. New Year 7 pupils settle in well. Very successful summer schools provide both personal and learning support for pupils who may find difficulties in changing from a small school to a large one. One parent spoke very positively about how her child had benefited from this opportunity. All Year 7 pupils are provided with a 'Year 10 buddy' and Year 7 pupils have written very positive accounts of how this helped them in their first weeks in a new school. Child protection procedures are in place and fulfil requirements. Health and safety concerns raised at the time of the last inspection have been dealt with and current health and safety procedures are good.

- 74 Through the excellent personal, social and health education programme, pupils have opportunities to learn about the skills they need to make decisions about their future lives in and out of school, to cope with any bullying and to manage their work. Careers guidance forms part of this programme and pupils receive very good advice on courses, careers and jobs that they can take up on leaving school. This guidance, along with a work experience placement at the end of Year 10, prepares pupils well for their life after school and the world of work.
- 75 The school has very good procedures for ensuring pupils behave well. Its high and consistent expectations ensure pupils know what is, and what is not, acceptable. Teachers by their own example provide pupils with good role models. Good behaviour is rewarded through merits and certificates. Strategies for dealing with bullying are very effective and parents and pupils are confident that such behaviour is dealt with firmly. The school recently received the National Healthy School's Award in recognition of the very good work that has been done in challenging racism and bullying. Work displayed around the school clearly indicates that both are unacceptable. The school provides particularly good support for pupils with emotional and behavioural problems. Good behaviour management programmes developed with the local education authority, Bridge Centre, and the Zacchaeus Behaviour Support Centre help these pupils to get on with other pupils, to control their tempers and to make their feelings known in a more acceptable way. Pupils at risk of expulsion may make a fresh start at other schools in the local Catholic Partnership. The fact that only one pupil has been permanently excluded in the last year and very few pupils are temporarily excluded more than once shows the success of these strategies.
- 76 Although it has not yet been successful in raising pupils' attendance up to the national average, the school has very good procedures in place for improving pupils' attendance. The monitoring of pupils' attendance through the computerised system is very rigorous and all parents are contacted on the first day of absence if no message is received. Pupils' planners are also used to keep an ongoing record of attendance and good attendance is rewarded through class and individual pupil certificates. These strategies have been effective and have almost halved the number of unauthorised absences. Pupils whose attendance gives cause for concern are promptly reported to their head of year and if necessary the pastoral director. A close eye is kept on how pupils' absences affect their standards of work.
- 77 Procedures for monitoring and assessing pupils' academic progress have significantly improved since the last inspection. They are now very good. The school makes very good use of pupils' results in standardised and national tests to predict future performance. This data, together with data from the thrice yearly interim pupil assessments and end of year examinations, provides a complete record of each

pupils' performance and progress in all subjects. This is circulated to all relevant staff, both subject staff and those staff responsible for a pupil's personal development. It ensures pupils are performing as well as they should. Pupils who are underachieving are identified and an individually tailored action programme is implemented.

- 78 The monitoring of pupils' personal and academic progress is well co-ordinated by the heads of year. As part of this process pupils have regular interviews with their tutors. They are able to reflect upon their personal strengths and weaknesses and how well they are doing. As a result, the pupils have a very clear idea of the level at which they are working and the grades they are likely to achieve. This helps the pupils, with their tutors, to identify where they need to improve and the action they need to take. Where pupils are having difficulties or underachieving they can be referred to the learning mentors. The appointment of these through Excellence in Cities funding has had very beneficial results for the pupils. Pupils hold them in high regard and very willingly 'drop in' to see them.
- 79 Procedures for monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs are not rigorous enough. Whilst regular reviews take place, both for pupils with a statement and those without, the outcomes are not sufficiently well recorded. All departments have copies of pupils' targets in their individual education plans, but there was little evidence of how most departments use these and feedback to the special educational needs co-ordinator on each pupil's progress. The good teaching in most subjects, classroom support and smaller groups in the bottom ability band ensure most pupils with special educational needs make good progress. However, where pupils do not make the progress they should, perhaps because of a specific learning difficulty, insufficient evidence is available to identify clearly future support and possible strategies.

### **Sixth form**

- 80 This school provides very good educational and personal guidance and support for sixth form students. During Year 12, they are supervised closely, but this tapers off and students are granted more autonomy as they move into Year 13. This includes working at home if they are not required for a tutorial or lesson. Students like being in the sixth form and feel that the school helps them to settle in quickly. Almost nine out of 10 students who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire feel that the advice they receive is helpful and constructive. The range of courses suits their talents and career aspirations well. They also feel that teachers are encouraging and are very willing to help them if they have difficulties with their work. There are effective procedures to ensure students' health and safety.

### **Assessment**

- 81 The very good assessment procedures in the main school continue into the sixth form. Co-ordinators for Years 12 and 13 are responsible for students' pastoral guidance, as well as maintaining an overview of their academic progress. Individual students who are at risk of underachieving are picked up by referral or by monitoring of the academic records. Students' personal targets are regularly reviewed and this information is well supplemented with assessment data from the subject areas. At this stage of education the school shares with students the detailed information from school testing procedures as part of the target setting process. This gives students real control over their future progress. Teamwork within the sixth form is very good and this has a positive impact upon the effectiveness of the school's personal and academic support and guidance.

### **Advice, support and guidance**

- 82 The advice and support on future careers is very good. Through the personal, social and health education programme, pupils of all years are very well prepared for life after school. This culminates in a very popular careers convention in Year 11. During this event, pupils obtain useful information about a wide range of careers, for example within the police force or nursing, and are addressed by several external speakers. Career advice and guidance within the sixth form follows on smoothly from this programme. Students have an initial interview with the various leaders of the subjects they have chosen. This ensures that students have a good idea as to whether or not their choices are suitable and of the extent of their likely success. Very good advice and guidance on careers then follows at key points throughout sixth form. Students are encouraged to prepare CVs, practise writing letters of application and to complete their record of achievement. There is a careers notice board that includes job vacancies and the school invites local employers and training providers to give presentations to students. Links with local universities are good and the advice provided about entry to higher education is of high quality.

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

### **Main school**

- 83 This school places great emphasis on working closely with parents. It sees a close partnership between home and school as fundamental to its drive to raise standards. Many of the parents, and some of the teachers, were themselves pupils and this helps to provide a close 'family' atmosphere. Many of the home/school ties go back a long way. This school is very popular and receives more than double the number of applications than it has places. Parents hold the school in very high esteem and most parents support their children well in their studies. Links between home and school are good and parents' support plays an important part in encouraging their children to work hard and to achieve a good standard of work.
- 84 Around one third of parents completed the pre-inspection questionnaire and their responses indicate that they are pleased with virtually every aspect of the school's work. Views expressed by parents who attended the parents' meeting were equally positive. There are a few specific concerns; some parents would like to receive more information about the progress their child makes and one or two felt that the school did not respond well to their concerns. However, overall, inspectors considered the school provided appropriate information for parents and responded well to parental concerns.
- 85 Most parents take a keen interest in their child's progress and attendance at consultation evenings is good. All parents receive an interim report during the autumn and spring terms. These detail assessment grades, along with an indication of the effort the pupils are putting in and their response to homework. Parents are able to approach staff at any time to discuss their child's progress and they play an important part in setting their children's targets for improvement. There are also formal consultation evenings during the school year when parents are able to discuss their child's progress with the individual teachers concerned. The special educational needs staff are always available at consultation meetings to answer any questions parents may have. Most parents of pupils with special educational needs attend their child's annual review. Overall, the level of information provided on their child's progress is comparable with similar schools. The pupils' annual reports, however, could be more specific about what children have learned and what they need to do in

order to improve. In addition, there are several omissions from the school prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents.

- 86 The school prospectus is parent-friendly and well presented. It gives parents a lot of useful information about the organisation of the school and the aims and values it seeks to promote. In addition, parents of pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 receive exceptionally detailed guides about the subjects their children are to study, along with information on assessment procedures, marking and the frequency and nature of homework. Parents are clearly advised on how they can provide help at home. Sixth form students produce the fortnightly school newsletter, 'The Link'. It updates parents on what has been going on in school and gives details of forthcoming events. This level of information puts parents in a good position to provide help and support. In the same way that the school keeps parents well informed about their child's lives at school, it does everything it can to promote a two-way dialogue. Parents indicate that members of staff are approachable and that they would feel comfortable should they wish to air any suggestions or complaints. Pupils' personal planners provide the main channel of communication between home and school and parents are expected to keep an eye on and sign their children's personal planners each week. Parents were, overall, positive about the use of the diaries.
- 87 Parents' involvement in the day-to-day life of the school is good and this encourages their children to work hard and to do their best. The Archbishop Illesley parent teacher association although small is very active. It organises various fund-raising and social activities and these have recently included dances for parents and friends, discos for the children and family skittle evenings. The levels of term time holiday and authorised absence, however, were too high at the time of the last inspection and this is still the case. The intermittent and occasionally prolonged absence of these pupils inevitably means that they miss out on the class work that is undertaken during their absence. The school closely monitors the impact of absence upon the standard of individual pupil's work.

### **Sixth form**

- 88 Parents and students express very positive views about the sixth form at this school. Students enjoy their last two years at school and this positive view is reflected in the fact that few choose to go elsewhere for Years 12 and 13. Students say that they receive lots of individual attention and that teachers know them well and treat them as adults. They are confident that teachers are available when they are needed and that the school considers their views when planning for the future. Nine out of 10 of the sixth form students feel that the school helped them to settle in well at the start of Year 12 and would recommend this school to a friend. They would like to see only a few areas improved.
- 89 Almost half of the students who completed the questionnaire are disappointed that pressure of work during their Year 12 resulted in the cancellation of many extra curricular activities. Fortunately, many have since been re-instated. A similar proportion feels that they would like to receive more advice about their future options. Inspectors do not agree with these concerns and think that the careers advice provided by this school is very good. One third of students feel that they do not receive enough feedback and advice on the progress that they make. Again, inspectors do not agree. Students receive very clear information in Year 12 about how they are getting on, as well as their estimated and predicted target grades at 'A' level. During their two years in the sixth form, students have one-to-one interviews with their tutors, as well as with the newly appointed co-ordinators of Years 12 and 13 and the head of sixth form. These help to provide students with high quality

advice and guidance about opportunities in further and higher education, training and employment.

## HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- 90 Archbishop Ilsley is a very well led and managed school. It provides a positive learning environment for pupils that clearly promotes the values of the Catholic faith. This is evident in the very good relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves, and in the pleasant and friendly atmosphere around the site and in the classrooms. The school is an inclusive community where each individual is valued. The school has high expectations of pupils in terms of their academic achievements, personal development and behaviour. In this it succeeds. Parents are very pleased with the management of the school, its values and its expectations of pupils.
- 91 The headteacher and his senior management team provide strong leadership and are a cohesive team with a clear commitment to raising standards. They work well together, are hard working and take pride in what they achieve. Responsibilities are clear and one of the headteacher's strengths is his ability to delegate tasks effectively whilst retaining an overview of each individual member's work. This has enabled the team to continue to work well during the long absence of one of the deputy headteachers. Priorities for improvement are well focused, manageable in number and agreed after systematic surveys and consultation with staff. The consultation process results in a whole staff commitment and understanding of the school's aims and values and priorities, in particular that for improving teaching and learning in the classroom. Whole school priorities are then reflected in the pastoral and subject development programmes. All this has had a positive effect on pupils' achievements in the last three years and is shown by the sustained improvement in examination results throughout the school. Since the last inspection very good progress has been made by the school in improving its work, especially the standards pupils achieve.
- 92 The senior management team is well supported by the year team leaders and subject heads of department. At the time of the last inspection the pastoral care of pupils was a strength of the school and it continues to be so. However, the leadership provided by subject heads was only identified as good in three areas. These areas of geography, history and English are still strong, but new appointments and clearer expectations and monitoring by the senior management team have improved the leadership in all subject areas. The impact can be seen particularly in improved results in art and design and mathematics and in developing work in design and technology and science.
- 93 The school has very good procedures in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its work, in particular the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and the standards pupils' achieve. Throughout their school career, pupils are regularly tested and future grades predicted. Class teachers, form tutors, subject heads and year heads then monitor pupils' progress to ensure no-one is underachieving. Heads of department regularly review examination results with the senior management. Well planned and regular reviews of subject departments and other aspects of the school's work, such as the use of the homework diaries, contribute to this process. The senior management with the support of external advisers and another subject head in the school undertakes these. However, opportunities for subject heads of department to observe work in the classroom in their own subject area are more limited, although they monitor their department's work in other ways. All this is much better than at the time of the last inspection. The



school clearly knows where its strengths and weaknesses lie. Consequently, it is able to share good practice and to take action to address less satisfactory aspects of its work.

- 94 The school has a high commitment to equality of opportunity for all its pupils. It clearly recognises the interests and learning and personal needs of all its pupils, whatever their background or ethnic group, through the wide range of learning opportunities and support programmes it provides. This results in pupils making good progress both academically and personally. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties or behavioural problems are generally well met. This includes a commitment to good support within the classroom and smaller groups in English and mathematics in Years 7-9. Pupils who do not always behave well are supported and encouraged through specialist programmes. The introduction of Project 40 (ICT) and courses at the local further education college for 14-16 year olds well meet the needs of those pupils for whom a work-related curriculum is more relevant and motivating. More able pupils are identified and supported through the Excellence in Cities programme. There are no restrictions on pupils entering the sixth form. All are welcome whatever their previous achievements. Boys and girls results are monitored and analysed closely by the school. The progress of pupils from different ethnic groups, pupils with special educational needs and pupils identified as gifted and talented are carefully monitored on an individual basis, as is the progress of all pupils. However, the school does not yet analyse separately the results of each of these groups of pupils to identify sufficiently any strengths and weaknesses in its provision for them.
- 95 There has been good improvement in the work of the governing body since the previous inspection. At that time the governing body did not play an active enough part in the strategic management of the school, and the development planning process was insufficiently developed. The creation of a new school management structure, restructuring of the governing body and its meetings, and a revised development planning process have effectively addressed these weaknesses. The school and its governing body now plan well together to achieve their educational priorities. These are clearly focused on raising the achievement of pupils and students through improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- 96 Governors are very committed and undertake their duties conscientiously. They support the headteacher well and keep themselves well informed of the work of the school. The link role with departments is developing well and the governor with responsibility for special educational needs has regular and detailed meetings with the special educational needs staff. However, there are some statutory omissions in the governors' annual report to parents and the school brochure. These need to be addressed.
- 97 Educational developments are supported by very good financial planning, and the school deploys its resources effectively and efficiently to meet its educational objectives. The school is very well administered. There are clear procedures, and teachers and other members of staff receive very good support in their daily work. Effective use is made of new technologies in administration.
- 98 The match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum is good overall. Staff are deployed efficiently and supported well, especially teachers new to the school. The school manages absences and vacancies well and works hard to provide competent teachers in the classroom. Where supply teachers are not subject specialists, the head of department provides good support. This has been particularly effective in mathematics where the school currently has two temporary

teachers. However, ongoing staff absence in some subjects such as girls' physical education and design and technology over the last year has to some extent affected standards adversely in these subjects. The school's arrangements for the performance management (appraisal) of teachers are very effective and meet statutory requirements. Planning for teachers' professional development is very well linked to the educational priorities identified within departments and within the school as a whole, and training provision is of excellent quality.

- 99 The school has sufficient resources to meet the demands of the curriculum. Resources for pupils with special educational needs, history and information and communication technology have significantly improved since the last inspection. In addition, the school has recently bought a wide range of new orchestral instruments. However, the increasing popularity of media studies means that the current technical facilities, such as those for editing film, will be stretched in the future. The resources centre, although small for the size of the school, is well organised and equipped. It is a valuable resource for supporting pupils' learning, but is not used as well as it could be. While pupils in Years 7 and 8 make regular use of this facility, pupils in Years 10 and 11 hardly use it at all.
- 100 The school's accommodation is used well, although ongoing building has reduced the amount of open space in which pupils can relax at lunchtime. The dining area is small and pupils just manage to get served in the comparatively short lunch hour. Sports' facilities are good as they include a swimming pool and an all weather floodlit pitch. The use of the school building and its facilities out of school hours are extremely well managed by the premises manager. This brings in a considerable income which the governors use to the benefit of pupils in the school.
- 101 The governing body monitors expenditure effectively, supported by very good quality reports from the school's bursar. Governors also receive long-range forecasts of projected pupil numbers and income. These help them to plan for the future and prioritise choices. The school's finances are very well administered on a day-to-day basis and there is a clear understanding of the distinction between financial management and financial administration. Specific grant funding, such as the Excellence in Cities funding and standards fund are very well targeted to meet the needs of pupils and improvements in the work of the school. For example, the mentoring project, work-related courses, liaison with other schools in the Catholic Partnership and improving attendance. Money for pupils with special educational needs is appropriately targeted.
- 102 The principles of best value are very well applied in all areas of expenditure, from departmental capitation, to capital works and maintenance of the premises, to the provision of services such as cleaning and telecommunications, where the school has effected considerable savings. They are also applied to the cost of courses. Pupils' views and expectations are taken into account when planning new courses, although parents are not yet formally surveyed.
- 103 The school shows very good overall improvement in many aspects of its work since the previous inspection, and pupils and students achieve well. It still has to consistently reach national averages in Key Stage 3 tests and achieve results in the sciences equivalent to those in other subjects. It offers good value for money.

## **Sixth form**

- 104 The school has a high commitment to provide sixth form education within a Catholic framework. It aims to put the needs of the students first and to encourage all to fulfil their potential. It is largely successful in achieving these aims.

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

- 105 Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The work of the sixth form builds well on that of the main school and in turn students make a significant contribution to work with younger pupils. They provide support in classes for pupils with learning difficulties and hold a drop in centre for counselling. The relationship between the sixth form and main school is very clear and beneficial to both. Students speak warmly of their time in the sixth form and of the support all staff give them. They clearly enjoy sixth form life and work and most complete their sixth form course. The governing body takes an active interest in the sixth form and the standards that are achieved.
- 106 The priorities for improvement in the sixth form development plan are clear and well chosen to guide actions and decisions. The management team in the sixth form has recently undergone changes to strengthen the pastoral support and academic guidance of students. The results of these changes are already beginning to show in the extra support and guidance given to individual students. Very good use is made of data to help students to assess their own progress. The students, with their teachers, set targets for improvement to help them do as well as they can. At the same time this data is used with staff to monitor teaching and how well subjects help students to achieve. Other monitoring such as retention rates on courses is also taken into account. As a result, strengths and weaknesses in subjects are known and action taken when necessary. This systematic approach is effective and standards have risen over the last three years at a rate above the national trend.

### ***Resources***

- 107 Sixth form development costs are very well planned and financial and staffing resources are effectively used. There is a good match of well qualified specialist teachers for the courses offered and this significantly contributes to the good progress students' make. Staff benefit from very good performance management processes and professional development training. Accommodation, both study and social areas, resources and library provision for sixth form subjects are good. The number of computers has significantly improved since the last inspection. These are well used for research and independent study and make a good contribution to pupils' learning. As in the main school, resources for media studies currently meet the demands of the curriculum, but will become increasingly stretched as more students opt to study this subject. There are insufficient textbooks for Year 12 students who are studying geography and in history due to increasing student numbers.
- 108 Although some course numbers are small, innovative approaches such as collaboration with other schools in the local Catholic Partnership mean the sixth form works well within the monies allocated to its students. A particular strength is the opportunity for students of a range of abilities to continue with their studies. It is cost effective and, because of the benefits students' receive both academically and personally, it provides good value for money.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

- 109 The school should continue to improve the good quality of its work by:

- (1) improving in science National Curriculum test results for 14 year olds and A\*-C grades at GCSE by:
  - continuing to develop teaching and learning approaches;
  - providing time for the new head of department to monitor and evaluate classroom practice;
  - matching work more closely to the learning needs of individual pupils;
  - using computers more effectively to improve pupils' learning and presentation of work;
 (*paragraphs 2,5,7,9,10,37,135-142*)
  
- (2) raising standards to be in line with national averages in:
  - (i) design and technology at Key Stage 4 by:
    - improving lesson planning to teach topics more effectively;
    - improving CAM facilities;
  - (ii) French at Key Stage 4 by:
    - continuing to address weaknesses in teaching;
    - improving planning to meet the learning needs of all pupils in the class;
 (*paragraphs 7,9,38,149-157,184-193*)
  
- (3) improving pupils' attendance through:
  - continuing to implement its current good procedures;
  - analysing carefully the reasons for poor attendance and looking for patterns using the computerised system;
  - working with parents to ensure they understand the importance of good attendance;
 (*paragraphs 31,76,87*)
  
- (4) putting in place clear systems to record and monitor the progress and achievement of pupils with special educational needs to ensure specific needs are being fully met by:
  - revising policy and procedures to meet the recommendations of the new Code of Practice to be published in January 2002:
  - ensuring all departments use and contribute to the review of targets in pupils' individual education plans:
  - monitoring the results in national tests of pupils on the special educational needs register:
  - recording more systematically the results of pupils' termly reviews.
 (*paragraphs 57,79,141,161*)

### **Sixth form**

The current very good provision should be further developed by

- (1) providing opportunities for pupils to study design and technology at AS and A-level if they wish to do so by exploring collaborative courses through the Catholic Partnership and with other schools if necessary;  
(*paragraphs 70,237*)
  
- (2) ensuring more students are successful in achieving pass grades and higher A-B grades in the three sciences – biology, chemistry and physics by:
  - giving students more opportunities to predict and hypothesise, analyse information for themselves, and come to their own conclusions;

- increasing the time for practical work;
  - ensuring students' targets express learning outcomes more clearly;  
(paragraphs 17,51,217,218,225-236)
- (3) reviewing and planning for future resource needs in popular subjects such as media studies, geography and history.  
(paragraphs 107, 254, 2623,2678)

Other issues the school needs to address are:

- not meeting statutory requirements concerning the annual report to parents and the school brochure;  
(paragraphs 85,96)
- insufficient monitoring of the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum to ensure all subjects are using it effectively as possible as a tool for learning.  
(paragraphs 42,131,138,171, 200)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	145
	Sixth form	54
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		51

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	7	30	70	32	6	0	0
Percentage	5	21	48	22	4	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	3	16	23	12	0	0	0
Percentage	6	30	43	22	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. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for the sixth form as each lesson represents approximately two percentage points*

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,125	150
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	643	0

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	6	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	281	0

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	19

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	26

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data –2000/01	90
National comparative data 1999/00	91.3

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data – 2000/01	1.94
National comparative data – 199/01	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	121	103	224

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	81	82
	Girls	65	62	55
	Total	136	143	137
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	61 (54)	64 (62)	61 (50)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (18)	34 (36)	18 (15)
	National	32 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	48	80	82
	Girls	56	68	49
	Total	104	148	131
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	47 (46)	66 (64)	58 (51)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	5 (21)	54 (36)	17 (16)
	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	109	77	186

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	47	101	108
	Girls	40	75	77
	Total	87	175	187
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	47 (46)	95 (91)	96 (97)
	National	49 (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	37 (39)
	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	0	n/a
	National		n/a

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	34	44	78

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	14.4	14.6	14.5 (16.0)	0	0	0 (2.0)
National	16.9	17.9	17.4 (18.2)	0	0	0 (2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications (2000 results as 2001 not fully available)		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	20	95
	National		75.2*

\*Indicates 2000 figure as 2001 not available



### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	62
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	0
Indian	6
Pakistani	5
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1,183
Any other minority ethnic group	50

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	73.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.3

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	269.5

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	21

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	16

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	6
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	4
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	2

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	3	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	48	8
Other minority ethnic groups	0	3

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

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2000-01
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	£
Total income	3,504,538
Total expenditure	3,438,806
Expenditure per pupil	2,731
Balance brought forward from previous year	138,562
Balance carried forward to next year	204,294

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate 28.7%

Number of questionnaires sent out

1275

Number of questionnaires returned

368

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	46	48	4	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	46	46	5	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	43	48	4	2	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	36	48	13	2	2
The teaching is good.	45	46	4	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	39	16	2	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	41	5	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	28	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	35	44	13	4	4
The school is well led and managed.	55	34	4	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	50	42	2	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	42	10	4	11

*Figures do not always add up to a 100 per cent due to rounding up to whole numbers.*

## PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

## ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of the educational provision in English is very good.

### Strengths

- The quality of the teaching is good.
- Leadership and management of the department provide a clear educational direction for its work.
- Staff have a shared commitment to improve the quality of teaching and learning through further development of their skills.
- The department extends and enriches the English curriculum for all pupils.

### Areas for development

- Some pupils speaking and listening skills are not as fluent as they should be.
- Not all pupils have yet the ability to assess their own work and progress

110 Attainment in the 2001 tests for 14-year-olds was close to the national average. The proportion of boys and girls achieving the expected level (Level 5) was in line with the national figure, but at the higher levels (Levels 6 and 7) attainment was below that nationally. When compared to similar schools, pupils' performance in English was well above average and this is an improvement on that in 2000. Although the proportion of pupils attaining at Level 5 in that year met the national average, fewer pupils attained at Levels 6 and 7 compared to pupils nationally. Boys results were close to those of girls. This is against the national trend where girls do better than boys. Overall, the trend in results has been upwards and significant progress has been made since the last inspection when National Curriculum test results were well below national averages.

111 In 2001 the proportion of pupils gaining A\* to C grades in GCSE English Language was in line with the national average. Girls did better than boys. All pupils entered gained a GCSE grade in the subject. This was an excellent achievement. It is evidence of the good progress lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make. In 2000 the proportion of GCSE A\* to C grades was also in line with the national average. The attainment of the girls was higher than that of the boys in the school, but a little below that of girls nationally. Boys, however, did better than boys nationally and the highest attaining boys did very well with the proportion obtaining the top grade exceeding the national average. The results in 2001 and 2000 represent an improvement on what was achieved at the time of the last inspection when the proportion of A\* to C grades was below the national average.

112 In English Literature in the 2001 GCSE, A\*-C results for girls were below the national average, but those for the boys were close to the national average. The 2000 results were in line with the national average for boys and girls and very few pupils failed to obtain a grade. The highest attaining boys exceeded the national average in terms of the numbers obtaining an A\* or A grade. Overall, the trend in results in recent years is an improvement on the standards reached at the time of the last inspection when performance was below national expectations.

113 From the work seen during the inspection, pupils are judged to achieve well by the time they reach Year 9. In particular, they make significant progress in developing their reading skills. Achievement of pupils in Year 11 in relation to previous levels of attainment is good. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, as

do boys, who perform well in relation to boys nationally. This is the result of the school putting a high focus on improving boys' reading and writing skills.

- 114 Standards of writing seen across all years meet national expectations, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. Pupils understand and use grammatical forms and they structure their writing well. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils made good progress in understanding and then using comparative and superlative adjectives in their writing such that by the end of the lesson they confidently read their work aloud to the class. Most pupils write with accuracy and the standard of their extended writing is good because of their ability to draft and revise their work. They understand how written forms vary and adapt their writing to a particular audience. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils used paragraphing well to sequence events in a detective story and used language effectively to convey a sense of suspense to the reader. Very good additional support is made available to pupils who need help to improve their basic writing skills. Pupils use computers to improve the standard of their work and present it in a variety of forms.
- 115 Pupils make significant improvements in reading compared to their standards on entry to the school. This is because of the effective schemes that are in place to help those younger pupils who need support. At the time of the last inspection, standards in reading were satisfactory. That is still the case, but now the majority of pupils read well by Year 11. They read from a range of texts of increasing levels of difficulty. These they read with understanding and when asked to read aloud they do so with emphasis and expression. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils read aloud the poem 'Our Love Now' by Martyn Lowery and brought out the contrasts well through the use of pitch and tone.
- 116 Listening was good in almost all lessons seen. In the best lessons, pupils concentrated and reflected on the points made by others. Their learning was improved by their attentiveness when explanations were given and questions asked. Year 10 pupils made good progress in understanding the use of images and presentational devices in a lesson on persuasive writing. This was because they concentrated on the teacher's explanations of the link between the purpose of a text and the nature of the image used. In speaking, standards are variable. Many pupils are increasingly fluent as they mature and so make good progress, but a number remain hesitant and are not able to explain their thinking clearly at length. The department has already identified this as an area for improvement.
- 117 Teaching is good overall and pupils achieve well because of the predominately good or very good teaching in all years. This represents a significant improvement since the time of the last inspection. Then some teaching in Years 10 and 11 was unsatisfactory and teaching overall was judged satisfactory rather than good.
- 118 Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject and good teaching techniques. Planning is very good and is a strength of the teaching. Lesson plans are written to meet the needs of all groups, including those with special educational needs and the high attainers. Learning objectives are defined and communicated clearly to the pupils. Work is challenging and there is pace and rigour in lessons because of the well thought out use of different teaching strategies. Pupils in a Year 11 lesson studying the language and structure of a poem made good progress because of the teacher's skilful use of whole class and group work interspersed with listening to tapes and reading aloud. Another strength of the teaching is the quality of the working relationships staff have with each other and the pupils. Boys and girls, pupils from different ethnic and cultural groups, and those with specific learning needs are all well integrated into the class learning

environment. Teachers have the trust and confidence of the young people and as a result a positive working atmosphere prevails in all lessons and pupils achieve well.

- 119 Effective systems are in place to monitor and assess pupils' work and the pupils are informed on a regular basis of their performance in relation to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. As a result, they understand the progress they are making. Positive steps are taken to improve the working environment through the attractive display of pupils' work. Pupils' learning experiences are also extended through an impressive range of extra-curricular opportunities and enrichment provision. The recent publication of an anthology of pupils' creative writing from Archbishop Ilsley School and some primary schools in the Catholic Partnership is an example of the benefits gained from working with professional writers in school. The pupils have been stimulated to produce work of high quality and it is enjoyable to read. Two small points remain as areas for improvement. Time management in a few lessons was not as effective as it could be when insufficient time was allowed for at the end to consolidate and evaluate the work covered. Secondly, the subject has identified ways in which it can contribute to pupils' numeracy development and they will be incorporated into lesson plans.
- 120 The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department provides clear educational direction with the focus on improving teaching and learning through further opportunities for teachers to improve their teaching skills. His planning and organisation of the curriculum are of a high order and informed by a rigorous analysis of the subject's performance. He is innovative and has the ability to adapt teaching and learning styles to get the best from national initiatives. His supportive and encouraging approach to his colleagues has created a shared commitment to the success of the department. He is well supported by the second-in-charge of the subject. This has resulted in significant improvements in the quality of the educational provision since the time of the last inspection. Increased access to computers gives pupils good opportunities to draft and redraft their work and to improve their spelling and presentation skills. The department is well placed to raise standards further.

## **Drama**

- 121 The quality of educational provision in drama is good.
- 122 Attainment at GCSE over the last three years in terms of the proportion of pupils obtaining a grade in the A\* to C range has met national expectations. These results mean that pupils achieve well given the very limited opportunities for them to experience the subject in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- 123 Attainment at the end of Year 9 is satisfactory. What these pupils can achieve is constrained by the limited time available. The carousel arrangements in Years 7 and 8 raise problems of continuity and progression and the block of time in Year 9 is insufficient for pupils to be well grounded in dramatic techniques and processes. In spite of these difficulties the numbers of pupils opting for the subject in Years 10 and 11 remain buoyant.
- 124 The quality of the teaching in drama is good. The teacher in charge has a good knowledge and understanding of her subject and she plans well to ensure that work meets pupils' needs and is demanding. She uses varied teaching techniques that take account of pupils' capabilities and previous levels of experience. Pupils respond well to this and they enjoy their work.

- 125 The accommodation is satisfactory, although it is in need of refurbishment to create a better working environment. The allocation of resources is good, but could be improved with direct access to the Internet from the drama base.

## MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision is good.

### Strengths

- Pupils' attainment in National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds is improving and is now close to the national average.
- All pupils entered for GCSE in 2001 gained a pass grade.
- Pupils' attitude to their work in mathematics is very good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- The subject is very well led and mathematics teachers are highly committed.

### Areas for improvement

- Information and communication technology is not used sufficiently in mathematics.
- Some lower attaining pupils' mental skills are shaky.
- Some pupils use calculators for calculations that can be completed mentally.
- In a few lessons opportunities are missed to involve pupils in discussion.

- 126 When they arrive at the school pupils' standards in mathematics are only just in line with national averages. Few pupils are at the highest levels and some pupils have very weak number skills. Standards are not as good as results in national tests for 11-year-olds suggest. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school and by the end of Year 11 standards are at the national average. Pupils with special educational needs make particularly good headway, and in 2001 nearly all pupils in Year 11 achieved a pass grade at GCSE; an excellent result. Although boys perform slightly better than girls in national tests, no significant differences in attainment were observed during the inspection.

- 127 Pupils' performance in the 2001 National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds was very close to the national average. Results in the national tests have improved every year since 1996. Pupils' performance is now well above that for similar schools. Pupils currently achieve better results in mathematics than in English or science. At GCSE the percentage of pupils attaining GCSE grades A\* to C is very close to the national average. Twice the percentage of pupils attained these grades in 2001 compared to 1996. Results have improved every year since 1996 with a slight dip in 2000.

- 128 Inspection evidence shows that the overall attainment for pupils currently in Year 9 is average. More able pupils have a secure understanding of place value so that they can multiply and divide decimal numbers by powers of 10 accurately. They collect and record competently statistical data and find cumulative frequencies. They carry through an investigation of the perimeters of regular polygons with increasing numbers of sides to determine the circumference of a circle. All this work is leading to high levels of attainment in the national tests next summer. Middle ability pupils are working at expected levels for their age. They add and subtract three digit numbers using written methods. They calculate the area and circumference of circles and determine the mean, mode, median and range of discrete data. Lower ability pupils complete simple number tasks and can use a protractor to measure

angles. They do not readily recall multiplication tables, which is below the standard expected for their age.

- 129 The attainment of pupils currently in Year 11 is also in line with the national average. Pupils in the top set reach an above average standard while those in other sets are at lower levels. More able pupils understand and use direct and inverse proportion, solve quadratic equations and appreciate the similarity of shapes. They are particularly strong in their analysis of statistical data, determining both the inter-quartile range and standard deviation. Although more able pupils use calculators accurately, they sometimes use them for questions that can be completed mentally. Middle ability pupils understand and use equivalencies between fractions, decimals and percentages. In algebra they are beginning to factorise quadratic expressions. Lower ability pupils understand how to calculate approximate answers to multiplications by rounding up or down the numbers they need to multiply. However, their mental skills are not then good enough to always get the correct answer.
- 130 Pupils use mathematical skills satisfactorily in other subjects. There are some good features. In science, pupils regularly record data, carry out calculations and draw and interpret graphs successfully. In design and technology they measure and mark out materials accurately and create spreadsheets to help with their work in food technology. In geography, younger pupils demonstrate good map-work skills and older pupils satisfactorily handle census data to analyse socio-economic patterns.
- 131 Teaching and learning are good in both key stages. Teachers have a secure knowledge and understanding of how to teach mathematics effectively and are enthusiastic about the subject. This brushes off on the pupils, enabling them not only to make steady progress in their grasp of mathematics, but also to enjoy the subject themselves. Teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is developing satisfactorily. Pupils are encouraged to read questions aloud and starter activities often include an element of mental work to sharpen pupils' skills. Teachers routinely incorporate methods from the National Numeracy Strategy in both key stages to enhance pupils' learning. The frequent use of whole class sessions at the end of lessons is beginning to bear fruit because pupils gain immediate feedback on what they have learnt in the lesson. For example, in a Year 9 lesson good questioning of pupils at the end of the lesson helped to reinforce for this lower ability group how to find the angles required to construct a pie chart accurately. Teachers only make limited use of information and communication technology and so pupils have too little opportunity to appreciate its potential for helping their mathematical studies. However, the use of a commercial program, 'Success Maker', helps lower attaining pupils to improve their number skills.
- 132 Teachers plan lessons thoroughly and have high expectations of what pupils know, understand and can do. In the best lessons, teachers involve pupils effectively through questions and discussion, but in a few other cases opportunities are missed. Most lessons move at a satisfactory pace, but a few dip towards the end as pupils lose their concentration. Teachers use resources satisfactorily and sometimes take trouble to bring items in from home, thus adding a personal touch to the lesson. Teachers give appropriate support to pupils with special educational needs and in certain lessons there is a support teacher or assistant to provide more individual help. This effectively helps these pupils to concentrate and make progress. In an innovative Year 8 booster lesson, led by a visiting specialist and supported by the teacher and a sixth former, pupils used shakers and drums to very good effect to improve their recall of multiplication tables. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well, set and mark homework regularly and make effective use of the information from assessment to help pupils make progress.

- 133 All this results in pupils having very positive attitudes to their work and behaving well in nearly all lessons. They show commendable respect for their teachers, attempt class-work tasks conscientiously and are fully involved in class discussions. In a few cases, pupils lack confidence in their own ability, have a short concentration span or work too slowly on tasks towards the end of the one-hour lessons.
- 134 The department is managed very effectively and staff share a commitment to high achievement for all pupils. There has been very good progress since the previous inspection. Pupils' attainment in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE has improved considerably since 1996 despite continuing difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified mathematics staff. The quality of teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3, is very much better than indicated in the previous inspection report. As a result, pupils make much better progress. Suitable schemes of work are now available for teachers to plan their work effectively and there are very good assessment arrangements. The department is involved in beneficial curriculum development such as the CAME thinking mathematics project (Kings' College, London). Mathematics teachers are generous with their time. They run a lunch-time mathematics club, after-school homework sessions and a summer school for gifted and talented pupils.

## Science

Overall, the provision in science is satisfactory.

### Strengths

- Key Stage 3 lessons are carefully planned with accurate assessments of pupils' progress.
- Working relationship between teachers and pupils are good.
- Teaching is good.

### Areas for improvement

- The head of department does not have enough time to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching in the classroom.
- The use of computers to enhance pupils' learning and presentation of work is not fully developed.
- Teachers do not always provide different levels of work within classes to meet all pupils needs.
- Results in national tests for 14-year-olds and at GCSE are below national averages.

- 135 In the last two years, performance in national tests for 14-year-olds has been below the national average. In 2001, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level was below average and the percentage reaching the higher Level 6 or above was well below. Even though pupils do much better than pupils in similar schools results are not as good as those in English or mathematics. Results have been improving slowly over the past three years, but are still only slightly improved from the previous report. However, observations in lessons and scrutiny of work show that a noticeable change is taking place. Recent appointments to the management team in science have brought a vitality and sense of direction to the teaching in all areas. Consequently, standards are improving rapidly with pupils making good progress. The current group of pupils in Year 9 is expected to reach the national average by the summer of 2002.



- 136 At Key Stage 3 lessons are carefully prepared, pupils have a positive attitude to learning in science and teacher assessments are accurate. High attaining pupils understand the structure and functions of human organs and can explain the difference between elements, compounds and mixtures. In physics they can draw ray diagrams and explain how light is reflected and refracted. All pupils have good experimental skills, though the full scientific approach is left to the longer investigations. Pupils do not use the scientific method of prediction, planning, investigation, analysis, conclusion and evaluation in all lessons. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well for their abilities. For example, they can use simple kinetic theory to explain the behaviour of solids, liquids and gases. Boys and girls, including pupils from different ethnic groups, achieve equally well.
- 137 GCSE results for 2001 are below the national average and only slightly better than in the previous report. They are not as good as those in English or mathematics. Results have fluctuated in recent years, but the 2001 results show a substantial increase in standards over those obtained in 2000. Observations in lessons and scrutiny of work confirm this rising trend and current standards are judged to be close to the national average. The changes in staff as outlined in the previous paragraph are having a similar beneficial effect in this key stage.
- 138 Structured lessons, good subject knowledge, an emphasis on learning through investigative work and enthusiastic teachers conveying their enthusiasm combine to ensure that pupils in the current Year 11 are achieving well. Investigative skills are good, though predictions need to more deeply related to previous understanding and research. High attainers have a good understanding of collision theory and can use this to explain rates of reaction. They can also explain in biology pyramids of numbers and biomass, and in physics they are able to carry out calculations associated with sound waves. Low attainers and pupils with special educational needs can investigate Ohm's Law in lessons on electricity and make appropriate conclusions. Some use is made of computers for the presentation of work, data-logging and recording data on to spreadsheets. However, the use of computers is not yet sufficiently well developed to support learning in science. Boys and girls produce work of equivalent standards. Literacy skills are developed in both key stages through an emphasis on correct scientific vocabulary and the frequent use of extended writing and discussions. Pupils use charts, graphs and calculations confidently to illustrate and interpret their results.
- 139 Teaching is good overall. This has improved from the previous inspection when it was satisfactory. Teaching was good in two thirds of lessons seen with equally small proportions very good or unsatisfactory. Teaching in the department has many strong features. Good pupil teacher relationships give pupils the confidence to join in discussions. Teachers expect high standards of all pupils, use probing questions to deepen pupils' understanding and always check during and at the end of lessons that pupils have understood. The very good lessons have an initial stimulus that immediately gets pupils involved in learning. This is usually either a visual aid or an enthusiastic sharing with pupils what is to be learnt in the lesson that makes pupils want to achieve. The lesson then proceeds at a lively pace with changes of activity, frequent checks of progress and understanding and ends up with a final check that learning has taken place. For example, Year 11 pupils were immediately excited by a dramatic demonstration on obtaining energy from sugar. This was then followed by an appropriate practical activity on organic chemical reactions and a discussion to consolidate understanding. This was very high level work. The lesson was completed by an excellent example of learning and assessment. Pupils produced a possible examination question based on their lesson and then discussed it with the rest of the class. In the unsatisfactory lessons, the introduction is usually too long

causing practical work to be rushed and the final check of understanding to be brief or non-existent.

- 140 Pupils are keen learners in science and listen carefully to each other. They take pride in displaying and discussing their work. Pupils have mature attitudes to their learning and many are contemplating continuing their science studies into the sixth form. This represents a major change when compared to the current small numbers of sixth form science students.
- 141 Within the past year, there have been several new appointments to the department. The new head of science along with a new second in department, an able team of teachers and the full support of the school's senior management team are already seeing improvements in standards and attitudes towards science. There is a collective will to succeed.
- 142 Schemes of Work have been produced for Key Stage 3 and have a clear focus on learning and assessment. Pupils' progress in Key Stage 3 is closely monitored using software to record assessment data. Key Stage 4 pupils do not have the benefit of such a system. Marking is mainly of the tick and praise variety, with few examples of subject specific help being given. Pupils need more information on their strengths and weaknesses so that they can become more responsible for their own learning. The department is moving towards giving each class one teacher for science instead of three. This is having the effect of giving pupils a more coherent view of science and ensuring that pupils' progress is more closely tracked. The departmental documentation contains policies on all the essential areas, but needs guidelines for new staff on how to implement them. There is a reliance on setting to provide pupils with appropriately demanding work, but not enough care is taken to ensure that those with special educational needs receive the help they require. The new head of department has made a good start to monitoring the work of his department, but would benefit from the time to be able to observe lessons. This would help him in his aim to ensure consistency of teaching quality and the spread of good practice across the department.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

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

### **Strengths**

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well at both key stages.
- Relationships are very good and there is a good interaction between staff and pupils.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are very well supported and achieve well.

- GCSE results are well above the national average and have significantly improved since the last inspection.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good with the needs of the individual given a high priority.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The use and sharing with pupils at Key Stage 3 of how their work is assessed.
- The accurate use of National Curriculum levels at the end of Key Stage 3 to assess pupils' attainment.

- 143 Standards have improved considerably since the last inspection. By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils, both boys and girls, achieve in line with the standard expected nationally. By the end of Year 11, attainment and GCSE grades are well above the national average and higher than for most other subjects in the school.
- 144 Pupils make good progress at Key Stage 3. They achieve well as they enter the school with a low skills and knowledge base in many aspects of the art and design curriculum, especially drawing and the use of colour. The emphasis given to a skills based course in Year 7 and the comprehensive scheme of work, taking into account previous learning, contribute to the present higher achievement and improved standards. During their Key Stage 3 course, pupils' knowledge, understanding and use of specialist language increase, as does their use of a wide range of media, including graded pencils and various types of paints and pastels. Pupils work with increasing confidence, skill and imagination. They demonstrate a good balance between imaginative responses and technical skills. Observational drawing is much improved. For example, Year 7 pupils' drawings of a bottle show accurate construction of the shape using ellipses. In Year 8, when drawing action figures, pupils show good use of angle and line to emphasise changes in direction. Pupils have knowledge of a wide range of artists and designers from different cultures and times including Rosenquist, Lichtenstein and Warhol. Pupils use these effectively as starting points in many of their projects, for example the work of Warhol in the production of mono prints in a project based on 'pop art'. The discussion and study of artists add a strong cultural dimension to pupils' work. In Year 9, pupils bring together skills and ideas, they work with increasing competence in visual decision making and they produce good quality results.
- 145 In Years 10 and 11, pupils build effectively upon the wide variety of experiences gained in their Key Stage 3 course. They make very good progress and achieve well. They develop ideas and sustain themes in their responses and they work in two and three dimensions. Pupils make effective use of information and communication technology; for example, they transfer digital camera images to a computer in a portrait painting project on positive and negative images. Pupils discuss their work with confidence and give reasons for visual decisions they make. They transfer skills such as the use of line and shape into working in clay when producing test pieces for the production of a ceramic vessel with incise decoration. Pupils build up folios of ideas sheets in preparation for final projects.
- 146 The consistently good teaching has a very positive impact on pupils' learning, attitudes and achievement. Teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. It is a strength of the department and conducted with a sensitivity to the needs of the individual. Lessons are carefully planned and they engage and involve fully pupils of all abilities, especially those with learning difficulties. There is a strong emphasis on quality and high expectations, and a good balance between whole group and individual help. Learning is supported by discussion, directed questioning

and the use of well prepared visual materials as, for example, in a discussion relating to line and texture in the works of German Expressionists in a Year 10 project on portraiture. These features and the high level of teaching expertise in a friendly supportive atmosphere encourage positive attitudes to learning. Pupils show a willingness to experiment and explore ideas within a structured framework of projects designed to meet syllabus requirements.

- 147 The leadership and management of the art department are now very effective. The recently appointed head of department has a clear view of the subject's direction and its contribution to other areas of the curriculum. Leadership is enthusiastic and supportive and is having a very considerable impact on the subject's improvement. The number of pupils taking GCSE art and design has doubled in the last 12 months. Documentation and schemes of work are informative and well presented. The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides very good opportunities for pupils to follow a GCSE course in art and design. The comprehensive course is enriched by visits to galleries, museums and artists in residence. At Key Stage 3 the use of ongoing assessment, the sharing with pupils how their work is assessed, and the accurate use of levels at the end of the key stage are not yet secure. At Key Stage 4, targets are set for pupils and progress is carefully monitored. The use of information and communication technology has improved and the department now has its own computers.
- 148 The development plan is realistic with identified priorities. Staff are well qualified and have the relevant expertise to deliver the curriculum and take the subject forward. They are hardworking in their efforts to raise standards. The accommodation provides a stimulating environment that supports artistic experimentation. The quality displays around the school value pupils' achievements.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- The department is well managed.
- Procedures for monitoring pupils' performance are good.
- Information and communication technology is well used to support pupils' learning.
- Teachers' have good specialist subject knowledge.

### Areas for improvement

- Standards at GCSE and in National tests for 14-year-olds are below national averages.
- Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM) equipment is insufficient.
- The range of teaching approaches is not varied enough.

- 149 Standards at the end of Year 9 are below the national average. When pupils arrive in the school their knowledge and understanding in the subject is very low. During their first three years in the school, pupils make good progress despite their level of attainment remaining below that expected nationally. Girls perform better than boys, although they still achieve below national levels. Pupils with special educational needs make the same good progress as other pupils, as do those from different ethnic groups.
- 150 GCSE results for all pupils are below national levels, except in textiles technology

where pupils, mainly girls, perform well. In graphical products and electronics, results are well below national figures. Pupils taking design and technology in the year 2001 only achieved two thirds of the number of A\*-C grades gained by pupils nationally. Boys did less well than girls.

- 151 The very low level of attainment with which pupils enter the school has a considerable impact on the achievement of pupils by the end of Year 9, which is below average. Very few pupils have had experience of the design and make process. Their practical skills are very limited, as is their ability to present design ideas. A significant number has reading and writing skills below those expected and this lowers the standard of written work. The department has a clear policy for supporting pupils' literacy development and gives helpful guidance for their written work. This is beginning to improve the quality of work.
- 152 Pupils produce practical work that generally exceeds the quality of the design work. Year 7 pupils use strip heaters with some degree of accuracy to mark out and shape acrylic sheet when producing penholders. They are aware of the need to achieve a high standard of finish on machined edges and manage this through competent use of hand tools. Average and lower attainers take less care with the shaping and final finishing. Higher attainers are well aware of the final user and the benefits of persevering with finishing techniques.
- 153 Pupils in Year 9 understand the benefits of using computer control programs to create virtual traffic control systems. They are effective users of the extensive information and communication technology facilities within the department. Most pupils are conscious of and use safe practice. This is reinforced frequently by all staff in the department. Year 9 pupils in food technology worked well in small groups to analyse their food product using star diagrams. In textiles, pupils show commitment and enthusiasm, although boys concentrate less well and demonstrate lower levels of accuracy. Pupils with special educational needs progress well, and develop confidence in all processes. In all aspects of design and technology work, pupils' attitudes are good. However, at times, small numbers of boys exhibit less satisfactory behaviour. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are never less than sound and usually good. Gifted and talented pupils are identified, but systematic provision for enhancing their progress is at an early stage of development.
- 154 Standards observed for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils during the inspection were below average, although overall progress continues to be at least satisfactory. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 display mainly good attitudes towards their chosen subject. Most Year 10 pupils taking the electronics course respond with interest to the teacher. They have good access to computers enabling them to produce good quality circuit diagrams and present work effectively. Some pupils make little effort in lessons because the work set makes insufficient demands of them. Higher attaining pupils develop alarm systems, demonstrate a good understanding of the work and are able to explain the design process from initial stages to final product. In textiles technology, Year 11 girls worked to their own targets set for a lesson. Most achieved their targets producing some high quality examples of decorative wall hangings and cushions. Most had a very clear idea of why they had chosen a particular approach; either using computerised sewing machines or fabric paints. The overall quality of folder work is not as good as practical outcomes. A standard approach to the presentation of folders is not evident across the department. Between the different areas of study within the department the quality and layout of presentation varies.

- 155 The quality of teaching within the department is generally sound and sometimes good or very good. This is helping to improve standards, although overall they remain below average. Pupils appreciate the commitment shown by staff to help them achieve well. In the good and very good lessons, teachers have precise aims and their learning objectives are clearly thought through. Pupils are set demanding tasks and work hard throughout the lesson to achieve them. Most pupils demonstrate an enthusiasm for the subject. All staff have good specialist knowledge. In the few unsatisfactory and less effective lessons seen there was a lack of pace, planning was inadequate and learning objectives were not clearly expressed. This leads to inappropriate, uninspiring tasks that fail to challenge pupils and to produce the most effective learning. Frequently pupils are not given sufficient responsibility for their learning. Medium term plans are adequate, but lesson plans place insufficient emphasis on the best method to teach the topic that results in poor lesson structures.
- 156 The subject area is well managed by a committed head of department who has a clear vision of where the department needs to make improvements. Since her appointment many aspects of the work of the department have improved. The head of department has the benefit of working with a committed team including a very effective technician who provides extremely competent support both in and out of the classroom. However, a lack of technician support for the food and textiles areas places additional pressure on teachers in these areas. Assessment and monitoring procedures have improved considerably since the last inspection. Assessment information is now used to set pupils appropriate targets for improvement. Pupils determine the best way to improve their work through discussion with teachers. Procedures are in place to monitor and develop teaching, although formal observations have not taken place so far. The department has had to cope with staffing difficulties over the last two years and this has clearly impacted on the standards achieved. The changes made to accommodation by the head of department have resulted in an effective multi-purpose suite of rooms. With the exception of CAM facilities, the subject benefits from very good information and communication equipment, together with capable staff to make good use of it. Pupils have a broad curriculum of experiences at Key Stage 3. However, option choices in Key Stage 4 focus on GCSE accreditation, which may not match the requirements of all pupils. Additionally, pupils who perform well at the age of 16 currently have no opportunity to continue to develop their design and technology education within the school.
- 157 At the time of the last inspection, attainment at Key Stage 3 was judged to be satisfactory. However, current pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 make good progress from the now low attainment in design and technology on entry to the school in Year 7. The profile of GCSE performance remains varied, but the overall trend is upwards. Pupils continue to respond well when lessons are suitably demanding and interesting and behaviour remains generally good. Planning and assessment, both heavily criticised in the last inspection, are now very much improved and beginning to lead to improved pupil performance. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

Provision in this subject is very good. Standards are well above the national average by the time pupils reach the age of 16.

### **Strengths**

- Teaching is very good overall.

- Standards achieved at GCSE are well above the national average.
- The leadership of the department is very good. Teachers work together as a very effective team.
- There is very good provision for all pupils. Lower attaining pupils studying for GCSE receive particularly good support.
- Assessment of pupils' work is very good and includes opportunities for pupils to monitor and comment on their own progress.
- A very good programme of fieldwork enriches pupils' experience.

#### **Areas for Improvement**

- Despite improvements in expertise and equipment, there is insufficient use of information and communications technology in lessons.
- There is no formal system for monitoring and evaluating teaching in the department.

- 158 Standards of work are at the expected level by the time pupils reach the age of 14, as they were at the time of the last inspection. In 2001, boys' attainment was slightly higher than that achieved by girls and was higher than that of boys nationally. There has been a slight drop in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher National Curriculum levels recently. However, pupils' attainment in geography on entry to the school has declined since the last inspection and is below average. Pupils, therefore, make good progress and achieve well to reach their current average standards.
- 159 Results in the GCSE examination in 2001 were well above the national average, as they were at the time of the last inspection. Results have fluctuated since that time, but there has been a steady improvement in the pass rate at the higher A\*-C grades during the last three years. In 2001, girls' results were slightly higher than those achieved by boys, but both girls and boys performed better than the national average for each group. A large number of entrants, spanning a wide range of prior attainment, is entered for GCSE geography every year and represents a much higher proportion of the year group than is the case nationally. Results from both girls and boys are higher than in most other subjects in the school. This represents very good achievement.
- 160 At the age of 14, higher attaining pupils can recall their previous learning in detail and show good understanding of issues such as the choice of renewable or non-renewable sources of energy. With the help of clear guidelines on paragraph construction and content, they are able to write accurately and at length on the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear power. In a good lesson in Year 9, the use of imaginative resources enabled lower attaining pupils to sort their knowledge of nuclear power into categories. They then made independent choices on its suitability as a source of energy. Teachers encourage pupils to develop debating skills on controversial topics, for example, by simulating a public enquiry into environmental issues. In this way, pupils learn how to listen to each other and how to refine and present their own viewpoints. Practical skills are well taught.
- 161 Results from departmental tests for pupils at the beginning of Year 7 show that they often have limited geographical experience when they arrive in the school. They rapidly learn essential map reading techniques. Teachers build up their knowledge of the local area through map work by establishing clear, basic rules and then by setting challenging exercises that extend the higher attaining pupils. Those needing extra support are given individual help so that their learning can be reinforced. Through the very occasional use of information and communication technology in

lessons they are able to use spreadsheets, plot climatic data in graph form and use word processing skills to produce extended writing. Good, supportive relationships exist between teachers and pupils who enjoy their lessons and are often keen to answer questions. Although boys tend to show more enthusiasm in class, teachers are careful to include girls and give them equal chances to contribute. In this way, all pupils grow in confidence and learn how to take part in discussions. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because their individual circumstances are well known by teachers and work is adapted to their needs. Although they often find written tasks difficult, they are encouraged to extend their geographical vocabulary and to use it appropriately. Their written work, therefore, shows good achievement, reflecting the teachers' high expectations.

- 162 At the age of 16, most pupils are very well prepared for the GCSE examination. They have a very good grasp of the processes involved in shaping the physical landscape and many can write at length on the interactions between people and their environments. Higher attaining pupils produce accurate, well-structured course work, often showing initiative in the use of information and communication technology to enliven their work. They show competence in handling statistics collected during fieldwork or data from secondary source material, which they extend with their own research. Lower attaining pupils find it difficult to evaluate their work and to draw conclusions from it, but they benefit from careful guidance from their teachers, completing well-presented folders. The high standards achieved in this course work boost pupils' results in their final examination. Pupils respond very well to the pace and challenge set in the best lessons. For example, in a very good lesson in Year 10, they showed very good understanding of river systems and could then use this knowledge to explore the flood pattern of a local river. They were then able to explain their findings and justify their decisions on flood control mechanisms. In another lesson in Year 10, the teacher's excellent structuring of tasks and use of specially adapted resources enabled lower attaining pupils, including several with special educational needs, to understand the same processes. Although they found the specialist vocabulary difficult to remember, pupils could explain how rainfall affected a graph of river discharge and could then appreciate the impact of these physical processes on surrounding communities.
- 163 Teaching is very good overall. It was good in nearly half of the lessons observed, very good in one lesson and excellent in two others. The best teaching was seen in Years 10 and 11. Common features of the good or better teaching are the teachers' expert subject knowledge and the careful planning of lessons to include resources and tasks that suit the learning needs of all pupils. Schemes of work do not yet identify these resources, however, and this makes opportunities for sharing them amongst all teachers more difficult. Where teaching is less successful, but still satisfactory, tasks are not always explained clearly enough so that learning time is lost. Occasionally, pupils are not sufficiently involved in discussion and they tend to lose interest. Procedures for assessing pupils' work are now very good and have become much more informative and diagnostic since the last inspection. The department has a very good series of assessments that test pupils' knowledge and understanding in a wide variety of ways. Their use means that pupils are aware of their own progress and can relate it to national averages. Opportunities for pupils to record and comment on their own marks means that they increasingly take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers mark pupils' work very thoroughly and make good use of all the data from assessments to build up a very detailed picture of achievement. This helps teachers to monitor progress and to set targets for improvement.



164 The recently appointed head of department has a clear and ambitious vision for the future. He is committed to the extension of opportunities for all pupils, for example, in creating specific activities for gifted and talented pupils and in forging links with other departments and other schools. Classrooms are decorated with colourful displays of work and topical information that stimulate pupils' enthusiasm. As yet there is no formal monitoring of the quality of teaching to ensure that the highest standards are achieved across the department. However, traditions of support and sharing of expertise between teachers are strong and do much to help newly appointed staff to become effective members of the team. The department has maintained its position as a strength of the school since the last inspection.

## HISTORY

Provision for history is very good.

### Strengths

- Boys do particularly well in achieving high grades at GCSE.
- Pupils develop a wide array of historical skills in all years.
- Teaching is very good
- Pupils are very well behaved and enjoy their lessons.
- The department is very well managed with a very strong teaching team.
- Assessment and monitoring procedures are excellent.

### Areas for improvement

- Girls should be encouraged to take a more active part in class discussions.
- The use of information and communication technology needs to be developed more fully.

165 In recent GCSE examinations, results in both the A\*-C and A\*-G ranges have fluctuated at or just below national averages. During this time, boys have performed particularly well in achieving the highest grades. The number of pupils studying the subject at GCSE has been impressively high and most pupils have performed well in terms of their prior attainment. The seeds of this achievement are being sown at the outset as pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject rapidly in Year 7, often from a low knowledge and skills base on entry. They are encouraged to develop historical skills and are soon at ease with the critical use of sources. Pupils learn how to write for a variety of purposes and there is a commendable emphasis on literacy through the use of key words and historical dictionaries. The previous inspection report commented that the use of historical enquiry was not developed fully. This is no longer the case and most pupils are very well familiar with the evaluation and interpretation of historical information. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 8 lesson, in which pupils used various historical sources in order to assess the character of Elizabeth 1. As a result of these advances in subject skills, attainment levels in lessons are in line with, and sometimes above, national standards by the end of Year 9, as is borne out by teacher assessments at this stage.

166 These high levels are maintained in Years 10 and 11 so that, by the age of 16, most pupils have developed an impressive array of historical skills and can analyse issues in depth. This was demonstrated very well in a Year 11 lesson in which pupils worked in groups to examine differing explanations of the rise to power of Hitler in Germany. They are also sharpening their literacy skills well at this stage and some impressive examples of extended writing were seen from Year 11 pupils on Roosevelt and the New Deal.

- 167 The quality of teaching is very good overall. It is sometimes excellent and never less than good. All teachers have a very secure grasp of the subject and this is used very effectively to enhance the learning process. The promotion of very good relationships gives pupils confidence to become historians in their own right and to take an active part in lessons. This was demonstrated to excellent effect in a Year 10 lesson during which pupils worked in groups to produce a magazine montage on the role of women during World War 1. This lesson was instrumental in developing presentation skills and a clear understanding of historical bias. Lessons are planned very well and pupils derive considerable benefit from ample opportunities to reflect on their progress at the end of each session.
- 168 Classroom management is strong and this lends an air of purpose to lessons, which in turn encourages all pupils to do their best. A wide range of activities is used in the classroom to engage the interest of pupils and to stimulate their learning. These include video, group work, artefacts, class debate and short written tasks. An excellent example of this variety was provided in a Year 9 lesson where pupils used a board game, examined artefacts and engaged in group work to study life in the trenches during World War 1.
- 169 Higher attaining pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of history well through extension work and other activities such as drama workshops and trips. This has addressed appropriately an issue arising from the previous report. Lower attaining pupils, and those with special educational needs, are supported well in classrooms and the department is developing a wide range of materials to suit their individual needs.
- 170 The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are very good. They enjoy their lessons and show a clear commitment to learning. They participate fully in lessons, although boys tend to dominate class discussions. A very purposeful classroom atmosphere is maintained in all lessons and pupils show a respectful and mature attitude to their teachers and to each other.
- 171 The department has a very strong and dedicated teaching team and is managed very well. Documentation is thorough and the issue raised in the previous report about deficiencies in the schemes of work has been addressed in full. The monitoring of pupils' performance is excellent and there is a commendable emphasis on self-assessment by pupils. There is a strong programme of visits to enhance the taught curriculum and the subject makes a very good contribution to the personal development of all pupils. Resources have improved since the previous inspection and the department is looking forward to its imminent move to better accommodation. Information and communication technology is playing an increasing part in the work of the department, but further development is needed in this area.
- 172 Overall, the history department has built well on the high standards noted in the previous inspection report. The very high uptake of the subject in Years 10 and 11 is testament to the very high quality and commitment of the teaching team. The department has the undoubted potential to build further on its current notable achievements.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Overall, the quality of provision is good. This includes the teaching and learning of information and communication technology as both a discreet subject and as a tool for learning in other subjects of the curriculum.

**Strengths**

- Standards for 11-16 year olds show continued improvement.
- Pupils have a sound grasp of concepts, apply them well in class work and in answering routine questions, and overall achieve well.
- Teaching is good; specific information and communication technology lessons are well structured with a range of activities that effectively help pupils to build up their knowledge and understanding effectively.
- When working in groups, pupils share ideas freely and work well together.
- A very good range of learning resources is being built up.

**Areas for improvement**

- The level of information and communication technology skills achieved is not reported at the end of Key Stage 4 for all pupils.
- The assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is not used effectively to inform teachers' planning.
- The monitoring of the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum is not rigorous enough.

- 173 Summer 2001 National Curriculum assessments for 14-year-olds show that the attainment of pupils was just below the standard expected nationally. Few pupils achieved better. This was an improvement on the 2000 results. Year 11 pupils who took the specialist GCSE course achieved a 100 per cent pass rate with the proportion of pupils achieving the higher A\*-C grades close to the national average.
- 174 Pupils make good progress in their knowledge of and application of a range of skills in information and communication technology. They use computers in other subjects to practice their skills and this helps their progress. In both key stages most pupils make good progress in learning to use desk top publishing packages, spreadsheets, web page design software and word processing. Their progress in other strands, specified in the National Curriculum programmes of study, is satisfactory with sufficient attention paid to the aspects of control systems, computer aided drawing and handling data.
- 175 The attainment of current 14-year-olds is in line with that expected nationally. In lessons, pupils demonstrate sound skills in word processing that help them to improve their spelling and presentation of work. They are familiar with processing text and images, presenting information and handling data. They also competently access the Internet and use this to carry out research and download images. In design and technology lessons, pupils competently use computers to control systems and for computer aided design.
- 176 In Key Stage 4, 16-year-olds are working at the nationally expected level. Pupils are confident enough to work independently and use a range of software, such as a desk top publishing package, a data base and a spreadsheet, to simulate business practice. They also design web pages. Good use is made of computers to promote individual learning. In design and technology lessons they use computers for control and computer aided design (CAD). In GNVQ information and communication technology lessons, pupils have opportunities to apply their skills to solve more complex problems, particularly in handling information and data. The higher attaining pupils understand and use applications to organise, refine and present information for different purposes and produce results of good quality. They are able to discuss their work with confidence, solve problems and come to reasonable conclusions when given a task to complete.

- 177 Computers are used appropriately in other subjects, particularly in modern foreign languages, geography, media studies and physical education. These subjects extend pupils' skills in the use of computers. Pupils with learning difficulties have good opportunities to use computers to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. However, in a number of subjects such as history, mathematics and science there is still room for further development in the use of computers as a tool for learning.
- 178 In specialist lessons the quality of teaching is good. The teaching observed included good explanation, the use of questioning, regular review of progress and a well-structured sequence of activities. This led to pupils gaining a secure understanding of the use of computers for a range of applications. There are also examples of competent teaching of information and communication technology skills in other subjects and this makes a sound contribution to pupils' acquisition of subject knowledge and skills. These lessons are planned to a high standard, have suitable challenge, and make a good contribution to pupils' ability to use computers as effective tools for learning.
- 179 The management of classes is good. Clear targets are set for pupils of similar levels of attainment. This careful matching of work to their ability motivates pupils and maintains their interest. This aspect has improved since the last inspection. Relationships are very good and the skilled support given to pupils in their work quickly builds their confidence. As a result, pupils have good attitudes to the subject and behave very well in lessons. They treat equipment with care and work hard to master new skills. All lessons include much independent work, which pupils enjoy as their confidence grows. Pupils turn up promptly for lessons and are prepared to use their own time to complete work. They are co-operative and responsive, listen carefully to teachers' instructions, read the guidance material thoroughly and try to work accurately. They enjoy discussions about their work, set themselves suitable targets to achieve and try to meet them.
- 180 The department has responded well to the last inspection and improvements made include an increased challenge in the work set for pupils and more opportunities to use computers. Pupils' achievements across the curriculum are assessed and fully recognised. Training has been provided for staff so that they can use applications and access the network. Opportunities for the consistent application and development of information and communication technology are sufficiently planned and co-ordinated across the curriculum to ensure pupils cover all aspects of the information and communication technology curriculum to the required standard. Pupils have opportunities to use computers during the lunch time and at other times and this helps them to develop further their computer skills and to have access to the Internet. Resources and accommodation for the teaching of information and communication technology are good. They contribute directly to the good progress made by pupils. There is a lack of newer resources such as interactive white boards and LCD projectors.
- 181 The leadership and management of the department are good. There is a clear vision and direction and this will lead to further improvements in the department's work. Good delegation ensures the effective contribution of staff with management responsibilities and there is a high level of commitment to improvement. Technical support is very good, but the technician does not have a job description that clearly outlines his present role and responsibilities. The amount and type of work involved have changed significantly. The co-ordinator also manages the school's administration package and this takes time away from the important role of managing

information and communication technology across the curriculum, which is not yet rigorous enough.

- 182 A development plan has been produced and appropriately identifies key areas for improvement. At present, there is not a formal programme of monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching of information and communication technology skills, including the observation of lessons, both in information and communication technology and other subjects across the curriculum. Curriculum time is in line with what might be expected. Pupils not taking specific GCSE courses in information and communication technology do not get any accreditation for the skills achieved by the end of Key Stage 4. There should be accreditation for all at the end of Key Stage 4.
- 183 The department has made good progress with the areas identified for development in the last inspection. Standards have improved. The joint planning covering all aspects of information and communication technology ensures that the work is challenging and provides progression. There are very good systems in place to monitor the progress and attainment of pupils, although the assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is not yet used effectively to inform teachers planning.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The provision for modern foreign languages is satisfactory.

### Strengths

- Teaching in some lessons is very good.
- The school's management and support of the subject has brought improvements in teaching and in standards.
- Very good relationships exist between pupils and between pupils and their teachers.

### Weaknesses

- Too much unsatisfactory teaching remains in French.
- Pupils' standards in French are below average in Years 10 and 11.

- 184 In all three languages (French, German and Spanish) the proportion of pupils achieving a pass grade at GCSE has been above that nationally in the last two years. However, in French, taken by most pupils, too few pupils achieve at the higher A\*-C grades. Results at A\* to C in the 2001 GCSE French examination were well below the national average. This was a drop from the previous year's results. Pupils who take German are generally higher attaining pupils and their results in 2001 were close to the national average for A\* to C results. Thirty pupils were entered for a short course in Spanish and their overall performance was well below the national average as none gained the higher grades. The school has recognised that this is not an appropriate course and it has been dropped. In spite of still being below average, French results have risen steadily since the last inspection when they were poor. Boys' results are lower than those for girls, as they are nationally.
- 185 Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that the standards pupils attain by the end of Year 9 are in line with those expected nationally in all three languages. Standards at the end of Year 11 are below average in French and average in German and Spanish. The improvements in teaching since the last inspection have not been sufficiently strong to overcome the legacy of unsatisfactory teaching in Years 10 and 11, especially in French. Standards in modern foreign languages

remain below average overall as the majority of pupils take French. There are no significant differences in attainment between the different ethnic groups in the school or progress across different ability groups. Pupils with special educational needs, and those identified as gifted and talented, both achieve satisfactorily. Boys achieve less well than girls. Attainment for a minority of pupils is adversely affected by their poor attendance. There are no wide differences in attainment between the listening, speaking or reading elements of the course. Writing is the weakest of the four aspects of the subject because there is no strong emphasis on pupils producing pieces of extended writing.

- 186 Throughout Key Stage 3, pupils make satisfactory progress. Year 9 pupils answer questions, in a basic way, about such topics as their likes and dislikes in food and drinks, descriptions of people, the countries of Europe, buying clothes and means of transport. In general, pupils listen carefully to the teacher, to audiotapes and to other pupils when they are speaking. The vast majority of pupils are confident speakers and try hard with pronunciation. Where teaching is at its best the teacher makes skilful use of question and answer to allow pupils to give longer answers and to vary their language to suit different situations. As a result, pupils have a great deal of confidence in their ability. This was clearly seen in a Year 8 French lesson where pupils carried out good conversations about their sports and pastimes. There were a number of exchanges and pupils demonstrated their ability to adapt their language to meet unexpected questions. Pupils generally develop their reading skills through reading textbooks and worksheets to find the answers to questions. These are supplemented by reading books in classrooms which pupils read for pleasure and in the lunchtime language clubs. Most pupils write short, accurate paragraphs by age 14. There is no strong emphasis on pupils writing longer passages and only a minority of higher attaining pupils writes good, accurate extended pieces of writing.
- 187 By the end of Year 11, pupils extend these topics in preparation for examinations and add others such as finding articles of lost property, arranging holidays and the world of work. Progress overall is satisfactory, although in French it is not as good as it is in the other two languages. In many lessons, especially with older pupils, there is a good concentration on grammar, spelling and punctuation and the subject makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' literacy development. In some lessons, pupils use tables and graphs to present results of surveys and this contributes to the development of their numeracy skills. Pupils make good use of information and communication technology to write, edit and refine their work. Year 9 pupils, for example, produce accounts of their daily routine on school days. Pupils often use a draw program to introduce graphics into their work and Year 7 pupils design and make interesting and colourful Christmas cards. The use of web sites for research is developing well and during the inspection Year 7 pupils were looking up information on La Rochelle.
- 188 The quality of teaching and the learning it promotes are satisfactory overall. During the inspection teaching was nearly always at least satisfactory and was good, very good or excellent in just under half of the lessons seen. Teaching was unsatisfactory in one-tenth of the lessons. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, it occurs exclusively in French. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection where teaching was found to be unsatisfactory in over half of the lessons in Years 10 and 11 alone. The school has put in a substantial effort to improve teaching and has clearly had a good deal of success, although weaknesses remain.
- 189 A strong feature of all the teaching is that teachers control their pupils well. Even where teaching is boring and unchallenging and pupils become restless, there is no serious misbehaviour. This ensures pupils make progress in their learning. Pupils

generally show good attitudes to work and relationships between pupils are very good. Where teaching is excellent the teacher conducts the whole lesson in the language being taught. Because of this pupils are both competent and confident speakers of the language. This was well illustrated in a Year 7 French lesson where neither teacher nor pupils spoke English for the whole of the lesson and when these pupils had been learning the language for just a few weeks. In these lessons the work presents a high level of challenge and the teaching methods motivate pupils to set high standards for themselves and they achieve very well. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods that may include imaginative use of the overhead projector, word reinforcement 'games' and music as well as reading and writing activities. In these lessons there is a high level of co-operation between teacher and pupils and relationships are excellent. As a result, the working atmosphere in the classroom is relaxed and happy, but highly businesslike. The consistent use of French for all aspects of the teaching process and a variety of activities, delivered in a lively manner, was particularly effective in a Year 7 class where a substantial number of pupils were on the special educational needs register. Pupils enjoyed the lesson and through the good repetition of phrases about the family confidently spoke in French. Throughout the department relevant homework is regularly set.

- 190 Where teaching is unsatisfactory, the lessons lack pace and challenge and too much of the time is spent speaking English instead of the language being taught. The lack of pace and challenge was illustrated well in a Year 10 French lesson where pupils at one point were asked to say the alphabet out loud, a task more suited to Year 7 pupils. They also practised aloud how to say some single words. These are not appropriate tasks for older, higher attaining pupils. In this lesson the pupils' attitudes to work were not satisfactory and the teacher was not wholly successful in classroom control. In another unsatisfactory lesson with Year 7 pupils the teacher gave all classroom instructions at great length in English. There was also little evidence in pupils' exercise books of them beginning to write even short phrases or sentences in French that were not copied.
- 191 The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Translations of prayers into German, Spanish or French in pupils' books are said at various times and make a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Expectations of behaviour are clear. Pupils learn to work well together through listening carefully to each other and taking turns in oral sessions and through paired conversations and role play activities. Pupils show respect for one another by not laughing when other pupils make mistakes over pronunciation. The popular and well-attended languages clubs, covering other European languages than those taught, broaden pupils knowledge of the range of languages people speak. Pupils also study the culture of other European countries as well as the languages they speak. This with trips abroad contributes well to their cultural development.
- 192 The senior management team's support and management of the department have been good and it has helped significantly the head of department to improve the department's work. This has led to the steady rise in standards that is now taking place. Nevertheless, work still needs to be done in improving standards in French especially at GCSE. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good and these help the department to set appropriate targets for further improvement. The department handbook and schemes of work are good and enable planning of a consistent and progressive course for pupils. The school's senior management team has regularly monitored teaching and this has led to a steady improvement in teaching and learning in the classroom.
- 193 Taking into account the steady rise in standards, the improvements in teaching and

the good relationships in classes, the subject has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

## MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is good.

### Strengths

- Teaching is well-planned and based on a comprehensive scheme of work.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and expertise.
- The organisation and management of lessons is good.

### Areas for improvement

- More attention needs to be given to teaching and learning of musical knowledge.
- There is insufficient teaching of musical notation.

- 194 At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is below the national average. Pupils achieve better standards in the composing and performing element than in listening and musicianship. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is satisfactory, although the small cohort of pupils makes the comparison of GCSE results with national figures unreliable. In the 2001 GCSE examination, 12 of the 20 pupils achieved a pass at the higher A\*-C range with five pupils attaining the very highest grades of A\* or A. These results represent a considerable improvement on those reported at the last inspection. Then pupils' attainment was below, and sometimes well below the standards expected at Key Stage 3, and their results in the GCSE examination 'significantly' below the national average. The school has worked hard to address and remedy the criticisms of the previous report and to raise standards. Pupils' results in the GCSE examinations have improved and now compare well with those of most other subjects in the school.
- 195 Pupils' achievement over Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, and over Key Stage 4 it is good. Most pupils enter the school lacking a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience, and for most pupils these are well below national expectations. This is confirmed in discussion with pupils in Years 7 and 8, and by the school's 'audit' of pupils' musical experience on entry to the school. During the inspection, pupils made good progress in their acquisition of skills and knowledge in two thirds of the lessons observed and satisfactory progress in the others. Pupils with special educational needs participate fully in lessons and they make similar progress to that of other pupils. For example, in one lesson a pupil with special educational needs was the first to demonstrate good learning by playing correctly a chord sequence on the keyboard.
- 196 At Key Stage 3, some groups of pupils in Year 7 successfully improvised music to represent the movement of different animals. They used different rhythms and contrasts of slow and fast music well. In a wide range of attainment in the class, one group composed a well-shaped melody and appropriate words to illustrate their animal. The activity linked well with previous learning when the pupils had listened to descriptive orchestral music and written down their ideas and responses to questions. These also showed considerable variation in perception and knowledge. Year 9 pupils showed a good understanding of the Blues chord sequence as they played it on keyboards, reading from simple notation and chord symbols. Other pupils successfully improvise on glockenspiels over the chords. They demonstrate a good understanding of the Blues as well as a sense of rhythm and developing



technique in playing. Overall, most pupils make at least satisfactory progress in lessons, although their standards do not yet match national expectations.

- 197 Taped performances of pupils' work in Key Stage 4 show that skills learned in Key Stage 3 are developed well. Higher attaining pupils compose extended pieces, which show individuality and very good musical knowledge and understanding. In their compositions, pupils use a good range of harmonies and know how to extend and develop themes. They exploit the resources of keyboards well and perform their pieces with accuracy and style. Lower attaining pupils create convincing, well-shaped melodies to a taped backing and they sing these in an appropriate blues idiom. In lessons, pupils work well together to develop their performance skills. Reading from simple notation and chord symbols they practise an extended piece in groups, playing keyboards, guitars and percussion instruments. In the lesson they make good progress and by the end they perform the music accurately.
- 198 The absence of one member of the department during the inspection meant that only the work of one teacher could be observed. Teaching was good in two thirds of the lessons observed and satisfactory in the rest. The strengths of these lessons were very good planning with clear learning objectives shared with the pupils, good subject knowledge coupled with a high level of practical expertise, and a strong commitment to enabling pupils to improve their standard of achievement. An important feature of the teaching is the teacher's assessment of individual pupils' work and progress for use in future planning. At the end of each lesson pupils write a review of what they have learned. The balance and pace of the lessons are satisfactory, although insufficient time is devoted to familiarising pupils with different types of notation (ways of writing music). Pupils in Key Stage 3 concentrate insufficiently on developing their knowledge through listening to music.
- 199 The energetic and enthusiastic teaching motivates pupils to try their best. An impressive feature of their learning is their very good collaboration in group work. Teaching is strongly underpinned by a well-devised and comprehensive scheme of work designed to deliver the National Curriculum. A team of teachers from the Birmingham Music Service provides a very good programme of high quality instrumental and vocal tuition for those wishing to develop their own musical skills further. At present, around 90 pupils are involved, but all pupils have the opportunity to be considered. Pupils identified as 'gifted and talented' receive special tuition financed by the 'Excellence in Cities' fund.
- 200 The department is well led and resourced. It is now housed in a refurbished building. Information and communication technology is not yet fully used to support the curriculum, but new computers have been installed and it is planned that they will be increasingly used in the development of pupils' research and composing work. Extra-curricular activities include choirs, a steel band and orchestra. The school choir in particular reaches a high standard of performance and performs regularly in the community. Music makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development, including opportunities to study the music of other ethnic groups.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is satisfactory.

### Strengths

- Standards in GCSE are better than for most other subjects.
- Pupils have positive attitudes and work hard to improve their skills.

- The range of activities, including extra curricular activities, is good.
- Facilities for sport are good.
- The teaching is good with some very good teaching on which to build.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Not all teachers involve pupils sufficiently in an evaluation of their performance to help them improve.
- There is not enough joint planning of the subject by the girls and boys physical education departments. Good practice is not sufficiently shared to encourage more consistent approaches to teaching, assessment and the standards expected for girls and boys.

- 201 Teacher assessments at the age of 14 show the majority of boys and girls achieve the expected standard for their age. Fewer pupils achieve above this than is the case nationally. Inspection evidence supports this assessment of average standards being achieved by the end of Key Stage 3
- 202 In GCSE examinations in 2001, the proportions of pupils gaining a pass or the higher A\*-C grades were in line with national averages. Numbers of girls entered were too small to make valid comparisons with boys' results. Since the last inspection results have risen steadily to above the national average for A\*-C grades in 2000, although in 2001 they dropped slightly. Pupils with a wide range of ability take this course and all achieve well. Compared with many other GCSE subjects in the school, pupils do well in physical education.
- 203 Many pupils enter the school in Year 7 with limited experience of physical education, particularly gymnastics and dance. However, they have positive attitudes to activity, are willing to practice and want to improve. Pupils make good progress and by Year 9, have average levels of skill in games and gymnastics. Standards are good in swimming for both boys and girls and below what might be expected for girls' hockey. Pupils know how to prepare for activity and warm up using a suitable range of stretching exercises. However, these activities are usually led by the teacher rather than the pupils taking the initiative for themselves. High levels of enthusiasm and enjoyment help pupils to make good progress. These good attitudes to learning were observed in a Year 8 rugby lesson on judging when to pass the ball before being tackled. In a few lessons for girls the pace and expectation of learning was modest. The response of these girls was more passive and they did not make such good progress. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special education needs, make good progress. This is because they are helped and encouraged by teachers and supported by the very good organisation and management of pupils in lessons.
- 204 In Years 10 and 11, pupils in general physical education lessons make satisfactory progress including those with special education needs. They reach satisfactory standards of performance in a range of activities. Standards in swimming for both boys and girls continue to be above average. Pupils continue to participate with enthusiasm. This was evident in a Year 11 dance lesson where the girls developed their own ideas from a simple movement pattern given by the teacher. They went on to choreograph this in small groups and then as a whole class. The good attitudes of a group of less able Year 10 boys showed in the high levels of physical effort they made in a lesson on fitness training. In Year 10, girls were keen to learn the skills of football, a new game for them. Pupils taking the specialist GCSE course have a sound understanding of the effects of exercise on the body. Workbooks show a good knowledge of anatomy and physiology. They use technical language accurately. Written work is well presented and organised by pupils of all levels of ability.

- 205 Throughout the school, pupils listen carefully and respond quickly to instructions. They observe demonstrations carefully so that they understand the correct techniques and key learning points. When asked to comment on the work of others they do so in a supportive manner. In gymnastics they work effectively in small groups and have a good awareness of safety when handling and using apparatus. They are less sure about judging their own performance and progress because they are not consistently asked to evaluate what they do and how well they do it. This remains an issue from the last inspection. Positive attitudes to the subject show in the high levels of participation in extra curricular activities, particularly for boys. Participation by girls is satisfactory, but is beginning to be affected by changes and absence of staff in the last 18 months. Physical education makes a good contribution to pupils' social development as they learn to work well together and understand the principles of 'fair play'.
- 206 The quality of teaching is good. Some very good teaching and some that was satisfactory was observed, but the majority was good. A strength of the teaching is the very good organisation of pupils and management of behaviour. This creates a good climate in which all pupils can learn. Teachers introduce lessons through links made with previous learning and then review what has been covered at the end. At the end of the lesson the teacher often comments on how well pupils have done and this reinforces the main teaching points. However, teachers do not consistently involve pupils in this evaluation or ask them to contribute, so pupils are not always aware of what they need to do to improve. Teachers use a range of methods to develop pupils' skills and sustain their interest and enthusiasm. They use questions to check understanding and pupils will respond and contribute when questioned or asked to demonstrate their work. Pupils act as coaches and advisers, particularly in swimming and gymnastics, but are not often asked to do this in games. Effective use was made of a video camera in Year 10 to record and assess progress in football and in Year 11 the data provided by exercise machines was used to assess the effect of exercise on the body. The pace of lessons varies. Pupils respond with energy and concentration to a brisk pace, as did Year 7 boys in football when working on receiving a pass under pressure from a defender. When the pace and challenge is less demanding pupils, particularly girls, are more passive and less energetic. Homework is used well in examination classes to extend and consolidate learning.
- 207 As at the last inspection there are two heads of department, one for girls' physical education and one for boys. The departments do work together on some aspects and there are joint meetings and a common development plan. The introduction of the A-level course has been very successful and is taught by both departments. Day to day organisation and management of the work in physical education is very good. The very good facilities are used well and there are good levels of resources in lessons. Resources in the library for general use are insufficient and do not reflect fully the activities taught or the individual interests of pupils. However, there are inefficiencies in having two departments with different assessment systems and schemes of work even for the same activity. Good ideas for teaching are not systematically shared. As a result, there is not enough focus on standards and assessment, particularly in general physical education lessons.
- 208 Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The issues of the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and equality of opportunity for girls have been remedied. Teaching has improved.

## **Media Studies**

- 209 **Although not required to be reported upon, media studies is a very popular subject at Key Stage 4. Inspectors considered it should be reported given the success of pupils in this area in the sixth form. Overall provision is good.**
- 210 Media studies is a relatively new option for pupils in Key Stage 4. It was not reported in the last inspection. GCSE results over time have been variable. They were well above average in 2000, but, apart from then, they are usually in line with the national average. The numbers opting for the subject in the current Year 10 show a large increase in the uptake of the subject. Standards seen in school reflect the wide range of ability of the pupils. Overall, they are as expected, but most pupils make noticeable progress by the end of Year 11.
- 211 In Year 10, pupils can recognise the main conventions in television productions. Prompted by good questions from the teacher and using a well structured work sheet, most are able to describe what delineates particular genres in films and TV serials. The teacher encourages pupils to think for themselves. For example, when they ask why some programmes have music and others do not the teacher turns the question back on to them to consider. Boys, who are in the minority in the class, are the keenest to answer whereas girls need to be drawn out more by the teacher.
- 212 By Year 11, girls and boys are equally prepared to answer. They are able to apply technical terms with growing confidence when discussing the effects used in a trailer for a TV series. The teacher brings them all in with well chosen questions. This ensures that those with special educational needs participate fully. In a busy lesson of quick-fire questions and answers the class covered a wide range of media conventions. The teacher constantly reinforced pupils' understanding by sending them back to the text. 'Have you got an example for that?' She provided good resources such as a flip chart and overhead transparencies to remind them of the key teaching points in the lesson. The use of video clips was skilfully managed to help them to visualise film-making techniques. Pupils are confident enough to ask sensible questions when they are unsure of what to look for.
- 213 The written work shows a wide range of attainment from potential grade A at GCSE to much lower levels. Higher attaining pupils compose fluent essays explaining the way that women's roles have changed over time in TV series. Lower attaining pupils struggle to express themselves because of a weaker command of literacy skills. Teachers' very supportive marking helps them to develop their ideas as the course progresses. Pupils' practical work, which includes the production of a short video news programme, is satisfactory. Many pupils do better in presenting new ideas for CD covers where they show good skills in information and communication technology. Most pupils make good progress from quite a low base of media studies knowledge. Attendance in lessons by some pupils is erratic and school reports show that a minority is under achieving because of this.
- 214 Teaching is always at least good with some very good elements such as the effective use of resource materials and stimulating displays to engage pupils in discussions and to challenge them to think for themselves. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and this is helpful to pupils especially in their practical work. The subject is well managed by a new co-ordinator with good support from experienced colleagues in the English department.

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

215 In the inspection, nine subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

216 The tables below show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001 the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

**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	29	48	70	7	31		
Chemistry	11	82	86	18	41		
Biology	25	80	83	4	34		
Physics	4	75	85	25	40		
Business Studies	15	47	86	7	27		
Physical Education	8	88	86	13	24		
*Travel and Tourism	3	33	#	0	#		
Art and design	10	100	85	60	41		
Performing Arts	12	33	#	0	#		
Media Studies	14	100	#	86	#		
Geography	28	93	90	14	39		
History	28	79	93	18	42		
Religious Studies	19	89	90	5	40		
Sociology	13	72	#	8	#		
Psychology	13	85	#	0	#		
English	27	100	93	37	36		
General Studies	18	100	81	72	26		

# No national figures for 2001 yet available

**GCE A-level and AVCE courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England**
Mathematics	19	89	90	10	48	3.6	5.99
*Chemistry	5	40	91	0	48	1.6	5.87
Biology	19	47	89	11	38	1.9	5.28
*Physics	6	17	89	0	44	1.0	5.72
*Business Studies	7	100	97	57	32	13.4	10.78
*Physical Education	7	100	92	2	26	6.3	5.0
Leisure and Tourism	13	92	N/a	23	N/a	11.4	10.54

*Art and Design	5	100	96	0	47	4.5	6.42
*Performing Arts	6	83	#	0	#	3.0	#
*Media Studies	3	100	#	67	#	8.0	#
Geography	16	88	93	13	41	4.5	5.73
History	25	96	89	40	39	6.2	5.43
Religious Studies	12	100	93	0	41	3.8	5.57
Sociology	12	92	87.7**	25	36.8**	5.5	5.46
Psychology	11	100	#	9	#	3.8	#
English	13	100	94	38	36	5.2	5.90
German	16	88	93	13	48	4.5	5.88
General Studies	34	97	85	41	29	6.4	4.8

*\*Indicates comparisons with national averages must be treated with caution because of the small number of students entered for the examination. For example, where the entry is 5 students one student counts as 20%: if the entry is 10 students one student counts as 10%. Hence one student's result can make a significant difference to the percentage of A-E grades and A-B grades in subjects with small numbers.*

#Comparative figures not available

\*\* National figures for 2000 as summer 2001 not yet available

### **Intermediate vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and social care							
Business Studies	8	63	#	12.5	#	n/a	#

## **SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS**

### **MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES**

- 217 The focus was on mathematics, chemistry and physics, but biology was also sampled. Results in biology at both AS and A-level are below national averages, although better than in chemistry and physics. Two lessons were sampled during the inspection along with students' work. Both the lessons observed were good. Observations in class and scrutiny of work show that biology students achieve as expected when compared to their GCSE results.
- 218 Overall, students do not do as well in mathematics and the sciences as they do in other subjects. Improving standards at Key Stage 4 and better management of these subject areas are beginning to have a positive impact on the numbers in mathematics and the sciences and the standards achieved. Considerably more boys take these subjects than girls.

## Mathematics

Overall, the quality of provision is good.

### Strengths

- Teaching is enthusiastic and teachers have very good relationships with students.
- Students are very positive about mathematics, especially the individual help provided.
- Strong leadership is improving the popularity of the subject.
- Teachers are generous with their time in staffing after-school sessions.

### Areas for improvement

- Too many students fall by the wayside after completing the Year 12 AS-level course.
- The planning of parts of some lessons is insufficient.
- Information and communication technology is not used enough.

219 When they enter the sixth form, students' standards in mathematics are variable. Some embark on the AS-level mathematics course having previously taken a GCSE Intermediate course. Others have taken the more appropriate GCSE Higher course. GCSE Intermediate students struggle to achieve an AS-level pass grade by the end of Year 12. Consequently, 2001 AS-level results are very low; only half of students gained A-E grades. A high percentage of students then drop mathematics at the end of Year 12 so that one of the Year 13 mathematics classes in 2001-2002 is very small. However, some of these students only intended to take mathematics for one year to support work in other subjects.

220 A-level pass rates are broadly in line with the national average. However, few students achieve the higher A-B grades. Numbers completing the A-level course have fluctuated, but are stabilising at a satisfactory level. There is an opportunity for students to take A-level Further Mathematics as an after-school session. Inspection evidence shows that by the end of Year 13 students are competent in a range of topics in pure mathematics and statistics. They can complete A-level questions on partial fractions, the remainder theorem, trigonometry, probability, and the binomial, Poisson and normal distributions. Students are stronger and more confident in their work on algebra than in co-ordinate geometry. Their relative strength in algebra results from the algebraic emphasis teachers give in a bridging course at the beginning of Year 12.

221 Students' attitude to the subject is very positive. They are highly conscientious, listen intently and take copious notes. In most cases, students make valuable contributions to discussion, although some are less confident. Students organise their work well and have developed effective self-study skills so that they benefit from the tutorial approach that is encouraged by the mathematics department. Students work well together on tasks so that they gain from each other's knowledge and understanding.

222 Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of A-level pure mathematics and statistics and as a result those problems that students encounter are swiftly and competently answered. This is well supported by the enthusiasm teachers have for the subject and their rapport with the students, who indicate that mathematics teaching is 'brilliant'. In the best lessons, teachers involve students fully in whole class discussions to deepen their understanding and improve their learning. For example, in a very good Year 12 lesson the teacher supervised an excellent final session where one student came to the front to explain to the class how he had solved a particularly tricky quadratic

equation. Other students contributed various points and the teacher skilfully drew on these to summarise what had been learnt in the lesson.

- 223 The teaching of key skills is satisfactory, but the importance of numeracy in other subjects is just starting to be developed. In mathematics the use of graphical calculators is satisfactory, but students have too little opportunity to use other aspects of information and communication technology in mathematics. Teachers' planning of lessons ranges from good to just satisfactory. In some cases, mathematical examples are improvised and are not sufficiently well chosen to illustrate key points. This means that students' learning is not as smooth as it might be. The self-assessment system works efficiently and effectively so that students comment very favourably on the rapid feedback and individual guidance they receive from mathematics teachers.
- 224 The good teaching and learning result from the work in the subject being very well led and managed. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Teachers generously give time for individual tutorials and to staff the after-school further mathematics class. Although there is no up-to-date scheme of work available the department, rightly, is waiting to build on their experience of the new courses and examinations before committing themselves. There has been good progress since the previous inspection in raising the number of students taking mathematics in the sixth form. This has yet to be reflected in improved standards.

## Chemistry

Overall, the quality of provision in chemistry is satisfactory.

### Strengths

- Teachers know their students well and relationships are very good.
- Improving recruitment grades are leading to higher expectations of students.
- Emphasis on the investigative approach results in students developing good problem solving skills.

### Areas for Improvement

- Few students gain high grades at A-level.
- The use of information and communication technology to supplement other teaching methods is not sufficiently well developed.
- Opportunities for discussion of students' opinions in class are too limited.

- 225 Compared to their GCSE results in science, students are making progress close to that expected nationally. There is no difference between the achievements of male and female students.
- 226 A-level results for 2001 show a slight improvement over those in 2000, but they are still low when compared with national figures. Five candidates were entered and two gained a pass grade. The small number of candidates entered for A-level chemistry in recent years makes comparisons with national averages difficult. The lack of a minimum entry grade for sixth form courses leads to some students starting the course with comparatively low GCSE grades in science. This has affected adversely results. Recruitment grades have recently shown some improvement and the AS pass rate for the current Year 13 students in 2001 was in line with that nationally. Two students gained the highest A grade.



- 227 Standards seen during the inspection for current Year 12 and 13 students are in line with those expected nationally for the AS and A-level courses. In relation to their GCSE results students make satisfactory progress. In Year 13, students have a good grasp of fundamental chemical concepts as a result of very well planned and careful teaching. In one lesson, students could confidently predict the paths of organic reactions involving oxidising and reducing agents. They subsequently checked these experimentally. In another lesson, students successfully found the order of a chemical reaction from data generated in class. However, in discussion some students lacked confidence in applying their ideas to new situations. Students in Year 12, who have just begun the course, successfully consolidated their knowledge of the mole theory before using it to find the relative atomic mass of lithium experimentally. In both year groups, students' investigative skills are good and the majority use mathematical skills effectively to analyse their results.
- 228 Teaching is satisfactory and this results in sound learning by the students. In both year groups several teachers teach students. This provides a variety of approaches which students find stimulating. In the best lessons tasks are new and well chosen and this leads to successful learning. However, on one occasion the use of an experiment, previously considered, to find the order of reaction, meant an opportunity to extend students' learning had been missed. Lessons are brisk as a result of good planning and clear direction. Students are motivated and experience a feeling of satisfaction at completing tasks successfully, but opportunities to extend their enquiries and to pose harder questions are sometimes missed. Students' files show that a wide range of activities, including short practical tasks, demonstrations and practice questions is used to reinforce learning. Note taking is kept to a minimum. Opportunities to improve oral skills by debate and discussion of ideas presented by students to their peers are limited.
- 229 Students consolidate satisfactorily their ideas through structured questions and these often form part of the programme for private study. They are subsequently checked in class. Some practice questions are marked and detailed analysis made, but teachers do not often give students the opportunity to present their own ideas for in-depth analysis.
- 230 Students are attentive in lessons and work hard to complete tasks set. They respond well to the variety of teaching styles they experience. Year 13 students have a mature approach to their studies and are aware of the progress they are making and ways in which they can improve their standards. Year 12 students are more reticent and find it more difficult to pose questions of their own to clarify their understanding. Students support each other well in practical classes and very good relationships between teachers and students ensure learning is enjoyable.
- 231 The organisation and leadership of the sixth form chemistry courses are effective and contribute to the satisfactory learning of the subject. Teachers are committed to raising standards at A-level and are currently preparing new teaching schemes to improve the role of independent research in the learning process. More effective use of the Internet and information and communication technology generally are to be included. Monitoring and evaluation of students progress is effective and student targets, based on detailed analysis of their work, are to be introduced this term.

## Physics

Overall, the quality of provision in physics is satisfactory.

### **Strengths**

- Teachers' good subject knowledge and questioning support well students' understanding.
- The use of the departmental web-site for guidance and research is developing well.
- Good relationships give students the confidence to express opinions and views.

### **Areas for development**

- GCE A-level results are considerably below average.
- Student targets are not always focused on what they need to know and be able to do.
- Students are not given enough responsibility for their own learning.
- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching by the head of department.
- One hour lessons are inadequate for investigations.

232 The GCE A-level results in 2001 were very poor. Small numbers of entrants make it difficult to give accurate trends. In relation to their GCSE results students underachieved. The standards of current students are in line with those expected for their courses. In Year 13, students achieve in line with predictions based on their GCSE results. Results in the AS examination at the end of Year 12 last September confirm this. Three out of the four students passed, one at the highest grade. In one Year 13 lesson, students demonstrated good mathematical skills and understanding of physics when carrying out calculations related to forces in electric and gravitational fields. In another, students were able to derive the Universal Gas Law Constant in a practical exercise. Lessons are well structured and planned; though not all are equally effective in placing demands on the students. In some lessons much was expected of students whereas, in others, too much guidance was given. Students work with confidence in class, but written work for research can be brief.

233 Year 12 students, though only a short distance into their course, are clearly making satisfactory progress from GCSE levels of work. They show an increased understanding of Wave Theory. Students were observed producing their own explanations and demonstrations of how sound waves combine to form new patterns. They showed good understanding when required to explain their thinking to the rest of the class. Written work shows that there needs to be greater depth to predictions and hypotheses.

234 Teaching is satisfactory overall. The main features of all lessons are the careful planning and the use of practical investigations to deepen understanding of the principles of physics. In the good lessons, there are clear learning objectives to keep students focussed, a brisk pace, regular changes of activities and teaching methods, probing questions by the teacher and a final discussion to check understanding. In these classes the rate of learning was good because much was expected of the students. In one lesson, the good use of information and communication technology gave the teacher the time to assess and guide students individually. Of the four lessons seen, two were not as effective as the other two that were good. In these lessons, students were given too much guidance to carry out identical straightforward experiments and consequently the pace and extent of learning was moderate. One-hour single lessons are inadequate for most investigations, causing them to be rushed or completed later.

235 Scrutiny of previous work indicates that students have had few opportunities for independent learning and research. However, the use of the departmental web-site is being developed as a good source of guidance and support. Day-to-day marking

is good. There is good emphasis on error calculations and their relationship to the reliability of data. There is not much evidence of the use of information and communication technology for presentation and learning in physics, but students were observed in lessons using spreadsheets to record and analyse data.

- 236 Students learn well. They form good relationships with each other and the teacher. These good relationships give them the confidence to enter discussions and offer explanations without fear of ridicule or failure. Not all students are keen to be at the centre of attention, but when called upon they too contribute with confidence.
- 237 Although previous results indicate unsatisfactory standards, the new head of physics has quickly got to grips with the situation. Standards are improving and the current Year 13 students are on track to obtain satisfactory results. A new scheme of work is being developed to set the stage for consistently good teaching across the department. A feature of this is the range of approaches to be adopted to ensure effective teaching and learning. Target setting is in the early stages of use and needs to be developed further to make sure students fully understand their exact learning goals. The head of department has already conveyed his enthusiasm to other staff and early signs from pupils in Key Stage 4 show an increased interest in opting for A-level physics.

### **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

- 238 The school does not offer courses in design and technology, food studies, engineering or manufacturing in the sixth form.

### **BUSINESS**

- 239 There was no specific focus on any course in this curriculum area during the inspection. However, the two year business studies AVCE is a popular course and students achieve good results. Results after one year for the AS course are not as good, because students start the course in Year 12 with minimal experience in this subject. However they make good progress such that after two years they achieve better than expected grades. During the inspection, the teaching seen was effective in both years and Year 13 students demonstrated a good understanding of the business environment.

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

- 240 There was no specific focus on any subjects in this curriculum area as the school does not offer currently any ICT or computing courses at A-level or AS or in vocational A-levels. However, next year, due to the success of the ICT courses in Years 10 and 11 and student requests, the school plans to run AS and A2 courses in ICT. At present there is accreditation for sixth form students in ICT skills through advanced / intermediate GNVQ options in business studies, health and social care and travel and tourism. Results have been satisfactory.
- 241 For students currently in the sixth form their skills in information and communication technology are at the expected standard. They are able to discuss their work with confidence, solve problems and come to reasonable conclusions when given a task to complete. There are opportunities for students to extend and consolidate their computer skills through their course work in many subjects, such as history, but in areas such as physics and mathematics they could be better.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

- 242 There was no specific focus on any course within this curriculum area. However the AVCE and GNVQ courses provided in travel and tourism are attracting an increasing number of students and are well managed. Good results were obtained in 2001. A number of students in the sixth form opt for A and AS physical education. In 2001, the first set of students sat the A-level examination and achieved well. The number of students entered was too few to make comparison with national figures, but all students achieved at least a D grade pass and a significant proportion achieved higher grades (A-B). Summer 2001 results from the AS course are line with national averages and suggest this pattern of good achievement will continue. Students achieve well in relation to their previous GCSE results. Students in the sixth form are keen and interested in their work and teaching is good. In Year 13 they can discuss issues of importance in sport and they use a good range of ideas to illustrate their opinions. In Year 12 they are making good progress in understanding the way in which skills in physical education are learned. Students are encouraged to read widely and the use of information and communication technology in lessons and for research supports the increasing independence of students in their learning.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

- 243 There was no specific focus on any course within this curriculum area. Students in Year 12 take the GNVQ Intermediate Health and Social Care course. One lesson was sampled in the inspection. The teaching was very good and students made very good progress in learning. The course is well managed and the course leader has experience of working in this area. Almost equal numbers of girls and boys take this course, which is unusual. In most schools girls usually predominate on this course. Results in recent years have been in line with those nationally and current students are working at levels expected for the course. This shows good progress as most students enter the course with below average GCSE results.

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

- 244 The focus was on art and design, and media studies, but the course in performing arts was also sampled. AS and A-level results in the performing arts in 2001 were not as good as in previous years. The course includes options in music, dance and drama. Currently, 12 students in Year 12 and nine in Year 13 take the course. The school's open policy on entry to courses means that some students embark upon the course without any GCSE experience in any of the elements. During the inspection three lessons were seen, two in drama and one in music. Teaching was sound and students made satisfactory progress. In music the emphasis is on collaborative group work in performance and composition and this enables those with more experience to assist other members of the group. In the work seen in Year 12, students were making satisfactory progress in producing and performing a piece to which all had contributed. The piece used a variety of instruments and showed a sound grasp of rhythmic, melodic and harmonic requirements. In evaluating it the students decided that a further refinement could be the introduction of vocal parts. The good management of the subject should lead to improved standards in the future.

### **Art and design**

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

### **Strengths**

- Students, including some without GCSE art and design, make good progress and achieve well. Results are slightly above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is good and has a strong emphasis on helping individuals to reach their full potential.
- Results have improved since the last inspection.
- Relationships between students and their working relationships with teachers are very good.

### **Areas for improvement**

- A-level A-B grades are at present below the national average.

245 Standards have improved since the last inspection and examination results show a consistent upward trend. In 2001, there was a 100 per cent pass rate at A-level, although no students gained the highest A-B grades. AS results for Year 12 students were better than those nationally, with over half the students gaining the highest A-B grades. The AS Level course provides very good opportunities for all. Students with lower GCSE grades and students who have not followed a GCSE art course are accepted provided they show aptitude and commitment. They do well. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls.

246 In Year 12, students adapt well to working in a different way and become good independent learners, able to obtain information, transfer skills and try out new ideas. Drawing and painting skills have greater depth and students apply them with increasing imagination and feeling. Sketchbooks and personal studies demonstrate a wealth of research and experimentation that result in final works of high quality. Students use a wide range of media, including oils, pastels and fabric and they understand clearly how the use of colour and line can reflect moods and feelings. Students' studies of chosen artists are followed through in considerable depth and include their own interpretation of work by such artists as Bacon, Hockney and Estez. Students are very articulate. When discussing their paintings they give clear reasons for the decisions they have made on how their work will develop. There is a wealth of experimentation and a good understanding of design and composition principals.

247 Teaching is good and has a very good impact on students' learning. There is a mixture of group and individual teaching with an emphasis on good quality help for each student. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of and the ways in which individual students work. They have the expertise to encourage them to reach their full potential in whatever media is chosen. Students are given the opportunity to work with practising artists and have access to a wealth of visual resource material including the Internet, videos and external visits. Teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of their students and they monitor their progress and achievement on a regular basis. Students know what they need to do to improve.

248 Students respond very well to the high quality sensitive help given. They use their time well, show independence and maturity in their approach and value their time in the department. Students remain motivated throughout their course; they organise themselves well and take a pride in their work and its presentation. They work well together, discussing their work in groups. They benefit from the challenging and interesting activities and projects set. These ensure they achieve the standards required by the course.

249 The very effective management of the department is extended to the sixth form. The varied styles and good quality time spent with individuals, checking progress and suggesting developments and research needs, contribute significantly to the good provision and good results. Student numbers are increasing and a greater number of students now continue through to Year 13. The department hopes to continue to increase numbers in Year 12 taking AS Level.

### Media Studies

The quality of provision for media studies is very good overall.

#### Strengths

- Results in recent GCE AS level and A-level examinations are very high.
- The staff and students show a very high degree of commitment to the subject.
- The consistent high quality teaching enthuses and challenges students.
- The students produce a very good standard of practical work.

#### Area for improvement

- Resources for the current Year 12 are inadequate.

250 Standards at A-level have improved significantly in recent years and examination results are now above national averages. The popularity of this successful course has grown so that numbers in the current Year 12 are high. Results in 2001 at A-level and AS-level were outstanding. At A-level two of the three students gained the highest A -B grades and at AS level nearly all Year 12 students recorded A or B grades also. The results show that students make excellent progress when their attainment is compared with that at GCSE. The proportions of boys and girls change year on year and there is no significant difference between results. Students from ethnic minority groups do very well in media studies.

251 Standards seen in school confirm this picture. The current Year 12 has been split into two large groups. They are very keen and have shown good progress during their induction period. In discussions on the changing conventions in TV quiz and 'chat' shows, students made obvious gains in knowledge in the lessons as they explored the nature of rituals and looked at the role of an audience. Teachers are good at linking the ideas that students raise and this helps the students to form a more coherent view of how the media are constructed.

252 In Year 13, students show a high level of skill in presentation and debate. In a discussion on the moral responsibilities of film makers, students were able to see the dangers inherent in the presentation of violence on the screen. They discussed with clear understanding the varying effects such films have on the audience, and they spoke with clarity about the nature and possibilities of copycat reactions and the desensitisation of the viewer. Students compared the style and intention of 'The Silence of the Lambs' with 'Pulp Fiction' and showed how sharp an eye for detail they have when studying the text. The teacher skilfully brought in opposing views to challenge and redirect the students when they needed a fresh view.

253 The students show very good achievement in presenting their own ideas orally. They use information and communication technology effectively to provide good visual aids for their seminars. Their communication skills are well developed. A group of girls

gave a superb analysis of the composition of a 'lad's magazine' bringing out the full range of subtle verbal and visual techniques used by the producers to attract the required audience. The boys were similarly thorough as they described how female audiences are attracted to different types of magazine. Their emphasis tended to focus on the production techniques employed. Both groups showed a clear understanding of stereotypes and the way that these can be used by the media to create specific representations and constructs. Students' clarity in using the correct media terminology added to the effectiveness of their work. Their practical work, such as the production of radio sequences and a three minute introduction to a horror movie, is very good.

- 254 The quality of teaching is very good. The authoritative and very professional approach to the subject generates a high level of commitment and industry from the students. The collaborative work is good as seen in the film clips they have produced together. In lessons there is a real sense of learning by doing and by exploring issues as a group. Students are encouraged to be independent in their studies and this leads to the very good results seen recently. They talk very positively about the subject and are able to argue convincingly why they have chosen to approach a topic in a particular way. They raise interesting views about practical work. For instance, they believe that a limited choice of equipment might lead to more imaginative methods of production and to greater co-operation.
- 255 The co-ordinator for media studies is a new appointment. There is a clear view of how the subject needs to develop. The long term plans are good, but the more immediate requirements are less detailed. With the rapidly growing popularity of the subject in the sixth form and in Key Stage 4, the adequacy of resources and their maintenance will become an immediate priority. Media studies makes a very valuable contribution to students' personal development particularly to their moral, social and cultural development.

## **HUMANITIES**

- 256 **The focus of the inspection was on geography and history, although students' work and lessons were sampled in sociology and psychology. Provision for sociology is very good. The subject is very well taught with the teachers exhibiting very competent subject knowledge. A-level results have been rising steadily and standards are high, although results in 2001 were not as good as those in 2000. The subject is very well managed and is increasingly popular. Students are thoroughly motivated in lessons and their oral contributions are of a high quality. The provision for psychology is also good. In the last two years all students taking the course have gained an AS or A grade in the subject, although few at the highest levels. Currently, 25 students are studying the subject and this makes it one of the most popular in the sixth form. It is well taught and, in the two lessons observed during the inspection, students were well motivated and made good progress. Theology was inspected by the Diocesan team and it has written a separate report.**

## **Geography**

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

### **Strengths**

- Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent.
- Standards at A-level in 2001 are higher than those of the previous two years.
- Students with a wide range of prior attainment achieve well.
- Very good relationships exist between students and teachers.
- Extensive provision of fieldwork activities makes a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding.
- Assessment procedures and their use for monitoring students' progress are very good.

### **Area for Improvement**

- There are too few text and reference books available to students.

- 257 The GCE A-level examination results have varied from year to year recently. They were well above the national average in 1998, but they declined to a level well below the national average for a small group of students in 2000. Results in 2001 for a much larger group show an improvement with the pass rate in line with the national average. Most students in Year 12 in 2001 gained a pass grade in the new AS modules, although less than one fifth of students was awarded the highest grades of A and B. Almost all students who completed these modules have continued their studies into Year 13.
- 258 Students who are keen to study this subject in the sixth form are welcomed and encouraged to do so. As a consequence, levels of prior attainment vary a great deal. Progress for most students is good, with many achieving grades higher than the level predicted for them by their GCSE results. There is no significant difference in the performance of girls compared with boys.
- 259 The standards of work seen in the current Year 12 are in line with those expected for the course. Although students are in the early stages of sixth form work, they are adjusting well to its demands. They show good recall of their GCSE studies, for example on population change, and are beginning to build on this background. They understand concepts of over and under population, and higher attaining students discuss fluently the problems associated with rapid population growth. Some students find the transition to independent study and advanced level written work difficult. Teachers help them to reach the appropriate standard by showing them how to organise their files, to take succinct notes and to plan extended essays.
- 260 In the current Year 13, standards of work are good. Based on standards seen so far, examination results in 2002 are likely to show an improvement over those achieved last summer. Students, both girls and boys, are articulate and enjoy debate and use their knowledge of their own urban area to provide insights into wider patterns. In an excellent lesson on the geographical patterns of crime, students used detailed resources from the Internet to test their perceptions of the incidence of crime. They consolidated their understanding and reached high levels of learning. With guidance from the teacher they were then able to consider the geographical and spatial perspectives of their findings. In a very good lesson on migration, skilful management of the discussion by the teacher helped students to reach complex conclusions about changes to immigrant communities. Work seen during the inspection showed that students make good progress in independent work throughout the course, particularly in their personal studies.
- 261 Teaching is very good overall. Half the lessons observed were very good and one



was excellent. The best features of the teaching include the ways in which teachers establish excellent relationships with students and the high quality of lesson planning. Teachers develop many varied resources and methods of learning and incorporate challenge and high expectations at all times. Students are keen to learn and respond very well to the stimulus that is offered. Residential and local fieldwork excursions do much to increase students' enjoyment and understanding of the subject, and to establish very good working relationships between them.

- 262 The assessment of students' work is very good. Procedures are excellent. They provide continuous individual monitoring of progress and detailed marking of work. In Year 12, teachers scrutinise students' files, as well as their written homework, to make sure that they develop good study skills. All students are well aware of the standard of their work, how it relates to national averages and to the targets they have been given. Some very good practice in assessment has been developed. For example, mark schemes are provided for students to evaluate their own performance, and students complete 'essay response' forms on which they add their own comments to the teacher's detailed analysis. In this way they take responsibility for their own learning.
- 263 Although teachers provide a wide range of information for students, there is a need for more textbooks for use in lessons and to support students' personal research. Systems for obtaining information from the Internet are well established and provide useful, up-to-date statistics for aspects of the subject which are continually changing.
- 264 The leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are very good. There is a strong commitment to improving students' attainment whilst still providing opportunities for weaker students to study geography. The head of department has produced detailed schemes of work in response to the new specifications for the subject and he monitors students' progress rigorously. There is a great deal of experience and expertise amongst the sixth form teachers and this is used sensitively and effectively. In the previous report there was very little information about geography in the sixth form. It is now a well established and flourishing subject and standards are improving.

## History

The provision for history in the sixth form is very good. It is a popular subject and has 30 students studying AS-level in Year 12 and 20 students studying A2-level in Year 13.

### Strengths

- A-level results in recent years have been above national averages.
- Higher order historical skills are very well developed, particularly in Year 13
- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Student attitudes are very positive and mature.
- The provision for history in the sixth form is very well managed.
- Student progress is monitored very thoroughly.

### Areas for improvement

- More resources are needed to help students to develop higher order skills in Year 12.

- 265 Student performance in A-level examinations has shown a rising trend with overall performance consistently above the national average in the past two years. In the year 2000, all students passed the examination and one-third gained grade A. The proportion of male students gaining this grade was particularly high. In the most recent examination there was a similar picture with over one-third of students gaining

A or B grades. In the most recent AS level examination, the pass rate was a little below the national average and with only one-fifth of students achieving the higher grades.

- 266 The standards reached by students as seen in the current inspection confirm that attainment levels are above average and that achievement is very good. Students show a sound knowledge and understanding of historical methods in the Year 12 AS course and student folders are well organised even at this early stage. Students analyse sources critically and are at ease with the use of a wide range of evidence. This was seen to good effect in a Year 12 lesson in which they used photographic, video and written evidence to evaluate source material from the Vietnam war. These historical skills are developed further in Year 13 where students also display a good command of higher order skills through their note-taking and extended essay writing. In this context, some detailed evaluative work was seen on the importance of F.D. Roosevelt's contribution to American politics after World War 1.
- 267 The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers use their subject knowledge and their enthusiasm very well to promote successful learning. Lessons are planned well with clear aims and objectives which are shared with the students. Expectations are high and, as a result, students make considerable gains in their knowledge and understanding of the various topics, as well as acquiring detailed historical skills. This was demonstrated very well in a Year 13 lesson, during which students examined and graded each other's essays in order to understand how to achieve higher grades in the forthcoming examination. A variety of techniques are used to stimulate students' interest in the subject. These include brainstorming, the use of video clips, short written tasks and class discussion. A notable feature of the teaching and learning is the strong rapport in history classrooms. This gives students confidence to ask questions and to voice their opinions. They are very mature in their oral responses and eager to participate fully in class discussions. In this context, some very impressive analytical presentations were seen from Year 13 students, including a detailed and confident computer 'Power Point' presentation. Above all, there is a sense of enjoyment and purpose to sixth form history lessons and, as a result, students make very good progress in both year groups.
- 268 Very good management underpins the high quality of teaching and of learning. Documentation is of a high quality and the performance of students is monitored very carefully. There is a good range of materials to support students in the classroom, but more resources are needed to help them develop their independent learning skills in Year 12. The possibilities of information and communication technology and the Internet are making a considerable impact on the study of history in the sixth form and students are given good advice on how to use the wealth of information now available to them. There is a commendable sense of teamwork in the department and this shared sense of purpose enhances the learning environment in all lessons.
- 269 Overall, this is a very successful area of post-16 provision in the school and rising numbers in both years are clear evidence of the subject's increasing popularity. Good standards at the time of the last inspection have been built on well. The subject is taught with enthusiasm and expertise and, as a result, standards are high and students make very good progress.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

The focus was on English and German, but French was also sampled. In the Year 13 French lesson observed, teaching was satisfactory, although standards were below those expected for the course. In the last few years no students have taken French at A-level.

## English

### Strengths

- The quality of the teaching is very good.
- The quality of leadership and management and the commitment of the staff have led to significant improvements in teaching and learning styles.
- The pace and challenge in the work set for students are good.

### Areas for development

- There is the potential to increase the number of students gaining the highest A-level grades.

- 270 All students who took the A-level English Literature examinations in 2001 passed, with the proportion of students gaining the highest grades in line with the national figure. The spread of the results was equivalent for males and females. Achievement was good with half of the students progressing well in relation to their previous results at GCSE. In 2000, all students who were entered passed the A-level English Literature examinations and nearly half of them attained one of the two highest grades. This meant that their results placed them in the top 40 per cent of schools nationally, an achievement which was good given their levels of prior attainment at GCSE. There has been a steady improvement in A-level standards since the time of the last inspection. The AS results for those students who were in Year 12 in the 2000/01 academic year met the department's expectations and all students continued their studies into Year 13. As at A-level, there was a 100 per cent pass rate with the proportion achieving the highest A-B grades equivalent to that nationally.
- 271 The evidence from work seen during the inspection confirms that standards are rising and that students achieve well. They display analytical skill in their writing and present well argued literary criticisms with supporting textual references. Year 13 students showed good analytical and communication skills in a lesson on the First World War poets. They contrasted the differing attitudes to the war of Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke through the poets' use of language and imagery and the contrasting form and rhythm of the poems. Their prior reading of diaries and letters had given them a good understanding of the social context which shaped the writers' values. It enabled them to appreciate how attitudes began to change as the war progressed. The standard of this work met national expectations.
- 272 Year 12 students are adapting well to the demands of the AS course. The preparatory work they had undertaken for presentations to the class on Tom Stoppard's 'Arcadia' showed a good understanding of the literary context of the play. They spoke well, clearly articulated the main points of their analyses and supported their conclusions with textual references. They offered positive criticisms of each other's presentations and judged the standard of the work using the course's evaluation criteria. Year 12 students have made good progress in these initial weeks of the sixth form and the standard of their work meets national expectations.
- 273 The sixth form teaching is good and some is very good. The strengths lie in the teachers' knowledge and understanding of English literature and the teaching approaches needed to stimulate students to give of their best. The quality of planning is also very good in that lessons are now structured to encourage students to take increasing responsibility for their own learning and to evaluate their own progress. Teachers have high expectations of their students and encourage them to

think analytically. Students in a Year 12 lesson were challenged to think critically about the moral and spiritual issues explored in Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale'. As a result of the teacher's clear explanations and questioning, most were able to make good progress in relating these issues to the teaching of Jesus Christ.

274 Students display a mature attitude to their work and respond well to the challenge of greater independence. They are developing their own research skills and use computer technology to seek information and present it in varied forms. They annotate their own work and have note-taking skills. In the lessons seen a small number of students were less inclined to contribute to discussion. The aim must be to ensure that all are included in the interchange of ideas and learn from it.

275 The leadership and management of the sixth form teaching are strong. Curriculum planning is very good and there have been significant developments in teaching and learning styles that have resulted in students making good progress. Teachers know their students well, having taught most of them in main school, and so they are able to plan the work to meet individual need. There is pace and rigour in lessons and the work is challenging. Teachers are committed to further improvements in provision and the raising of standards, particularly those of the highest attainers.

## Modern foreign languages

### German

Overall, the quality of provision in German is satisfactory.

276 There are no students studying German in Year 13 and five in Year 12. Because of the low numbers, the school has joined the local Catholic Consortium to offer German. Half the lessons are planned jointly by the German staff in the different schools and delivered in the students' own school. The other lessons take place at a language centre in the City of Birmingham and students from all schools in the Consortium attend together. This has proved a successful move and is popular with students because they can stay at their own school and study A-level subjects that might otherwise be uneconomic.

#### Strengths.

- The consortium arrangement means that students are able to study German in their own school even though numbers are small.
- Most students achieve well in relation to their levels of GCSE passes.

#### Areas for Improvement

- The numbers of pupils who opt for languages in the sixth form is small.
- The quality of students' written work is not good enough, particularly in the basics of grammar and spelling.

277 In 2001, five students were entered for A-level and two gained passes at lower levels. Much of this is a legacy of the unsatisfactory teaching found in the main school at the last inspection.

278 The evidence seen in lessons and in students' files suggests that standards in the present Year 12 are at the level expected for the course. Allowing for the standards attained at GCSE, students generally achieve well. Male and female students do equally well. Most of the students in Year 12 speak German well and discuss

matters such as the education system in Germany with some confidence. A minority is over reticent in discussions. Higher attaining speakers discuss their views and opinions on the systems in Germany and in England confidently and effectively. Students handle authentic texts with some confidence and they read and respond to German newspaper articles by selecting the main points and details from them. The quality of students' written work is not so high. They write, for example, about the advantages and disadvantages of new technology, but are not secure in the basics of grammar and spelling at this level.

- 279 The sixth form teaching is satisfactory. The teacher who usually teaches German was not in school at the time of the inspection. A temporary teacher taught students and was 'holding the fort' very well with a group of students he had not worked with before. From these lessons and from analysis of students' work and discussions with them, there are some features of teaching that it is possible to identify. Teachers have good subject knowledge particularly of preparation for examinations and students are given plenty of helpful prompts to aid their preparation. Teachers support students well in making the jump from GCSE to AS level and students speak warmly of the help and support they receive. Teachers plan a range of activities and these systematically cover the whole range of the curriculum needed at this level. Good use is made of information and communication technology to prepare extra resources and for research.
- 280 Students of German are attentive and show interest in the subject. Most are keen to take part in discussions and sustain and develop their views well. They are developing good individual work and research skills. Students work hard and show mature and sensible attitudes to the subject. Help and advice is readily available when students need it, and they act on the advice given. This is a significant factor in the progress they make.
- 281 There are clear policies and schemes of work set out in the department handbook and these provide clear and cohesive courses for students. The involvement of the school in the Catholic consortium is a significant strength and has been of great benefit to students by providing a range of experiences that they would not otherwise have had and by allowing them to study their other subjects at their own school.