

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST LEONARD'S RC VA COMPREHENSIVE
SCHOOL**

Durham

LEA area: Durham

Unique reference number: 114326

Headteacher: Mr S O'Keeffe

Reporting inspector: Mr K Davitte
15029

Dates of inspection: 14 – 18 January 2002

Inspection number: 191882

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: North End

Durham

Postcode: DH1 4NG

Telephone number: 0191 3848575

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr G P Oak

Date of previous inspection: 13 January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
15029	Mr K Davitte	Registered inspector		The school's results and students' achievements Students' attitudes, values and personal development Teaching and learning Curricular and other opportunities for students School's care for its students Effectiveness of leadership and management in the sixth form
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30941	Mr K Brammer	Team inspector	English	
13619	Mr B Meech	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Leonard's School is an 11-18 Roman Catholic comprehensive school in the local educational authority of Durham. There are 1357 pupils on roll with 654 boys and 703 girls. There are 196 students in the sixth form (106 boys and 90 girls). The school is a popular school and is oversubscribed. The great majority of pupils in the school are white. Only 14 pupils speak English as an additional language which is low and none are at an early stage of learning English. The school has a below average percentage of pupils with special educational needs (12.7%) and also a below average percentage with statements of special educational needs (1.4%). The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average (4.3%). The socio-economic circumstances of pupils are favourable overall but the catchment area varies from depressed former mining villages to areas of high class housing. Attainment on entry for the majority in Year 7 is above average. A wide range of students by ability is accepted into the sixth form. St. Leonard's was awarded Technology College status in 1999.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Leonard's is a very good school and very effective in achieving well above average results for the majority of pupils and students at nearly all stages in their education. The well above average results at AS level in 2001 indicate a significant upturn in standards in the sixth form. The high expectations of the headteacher, who provides very good leadership, and his drive in raising standards permeates the whole school. High academic achievement works hand in hand with pupils' very good personal development. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are consistently well above average.
- Results in GCSE examinations are consistently well above average.
- AS level results at the end of Year 12 in 2001 were well above average in most subjects.
- The quality of teaching is good overall, much is very good and some is excellent.
- The distinctive nature of the ethos of the school contributes enormously to pupils' personal development and prepares them well for their future life and learning with a strong set of values.

What could be improved

- The percentage of students attaining A-B grades in their A level examinations at the end of Year 13.
- The management of whole-school assessment data so that it is easily accessible and used uniformly by departments in setting individual pupil and student targets.

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 January 1997. Weaknesses observed at the last inspection have been mostly successfully addressed. There are now far greater opportunities for students to be actively involved in their own learning. Greatly improved resources including information and communication technology (ICT) and a refurbishment of the library have contributed to this and to a wider range of teaching and learning styles. Specialist accommodation elsewhere has also improved markedly. The school has benefited considerably from Technology College status. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and its co-ordination have been strengthened considerably. Departmental policies and practices now dovetail more effectively with whole-school policies but not sufficiently in the use of assessment data. Whilst vocational provision continues to be offered in the sixth form such provision is still rather thin in Years 10 and 11. External test and examination results have improved in relation to national standards in most areas. Standards of teaching have improved further. Overall progress since the last inspection has been good.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A levels/AS levels	C	D	C	

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

The majority of pupils who start in Year 7 have attained above average standards at their primary schools. Pupils make good progress to consistently achieve well above average results in national tests at the end of Year 9. Compared with similar schools, results were also well above average overall in both 2001 and 2000. Standards based on 2001 results have improved since the time of the last inspection.

Pupils continue to make good progress and consistently achieve well above average results in GCSE examinations. Results are better in relation to national averages than those at the time of the last inspection based on the percentage attaining five or more grades A*-C. Compared with similar schools, GCSE results were well above average in the last two years. The school just exceeded its targets for GCSE results in 2001 and has suitably ambitious targets for 2002 and beyond. In 2001, results were well above average in English, mathematics and science and most other subjects. Results were just below average in geography, German and business studies and below average in information studies.

In the last school year students in Year 12 made very good progress to achieve well above average results in most subjects in their AS level examinations. Results at A level have fluctuated and in 2001 although results at grades A-E were above the national average overall they were below average at grades A-B in most subjects. Although students of a wide ability range achieved much as expected at A level overall in 2001 in relation to their previous results, there is scope to improve performance at A-B grades. Results in GNVQ examinations in business compare favourably with national averages. Future targets for AS/A level like others in the school are ambitious and attainable.

Standards seen at the inspection were well above average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11, average at AS level and above average overall at A level. Students who attained well above average results in AS levels in Year 12 are continuing their good progress into Year 13.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: nearly all like their school, want to learn and co-operate readily with teachers and other pupils.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good: much behaviour is exemplary in an orderly school where pupils and teachers are nearly always enabled to get on with their work without interruption. Only a few pupils let themselves and their school down badly.
Personal development and relationships	Very good: the Christian principles of the school are a strong driving force in generating high quality relationships and respect for others.
Attendance	Well above average and an improvement since the last inspection. Unauthorised absence is well below average.

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 overall and much is very good. Of 110 lessons observed teaching was at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of lessons, good or better in 80 per cent, very good or better in 44 per cent and excellent in six per cent. Teaching is consistently good in the main school in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In the sixth form most teaching is good and is very good in English, mathematics, psychology and textiles. The quality of the teaching of PSHE which was criticised at the last inspection is now much better and in line with other teaching. Throughout the school, teachers have high expectations which are helping to drive up standards. Dedicated and able teachers prepare meticulously, give of their best in lessons and serve the needs of all pupils and students well. Sufficient opportunities are now provided for independent work. The skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught with a very good response to national initiatives. Homework is set well to extend work in the classroom. Marking is regular, helpful and often points out what should be done to improve further. The management of pupils is very good, helped considerably by their readiness to learn and do well. Pupils work well independently where required and discuss their work in groups constructively. During the week of the inspection, although pupils and students responded well to very good questions from teachers they asked less questions of teachers than is usually the case.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the only deficiencies are the low allocation of time for physical education in Year 9 and the thin provision for vocational education but careful plans are being laid to address the latter. Extra-curricular activities are good and those for rowing excellent but reliance on bus transport is a restriction on after-school events. Good links with outside sporting clubs.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good: pupils are well integrated, have equal opportunities and through the quality of teaching and supportive arrangements are enabled to make similar progress to other pupils. The school has appointed a support assistant to assist with social inclusion.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Exceptional arrangements are not required as all are very proficient in English. The school has sufficient expertise and contacts to meet any need that should arise.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good: moral and social responsibility is cultivated effectively. Religious education and spiritual development influence all aspects of school life. Lunchtime societies, other events and visits offer good opportunities for taking responsibility, mixing socially and benefiting culturally.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good: pupils and students feel secure and well supported by teachers, a strong team of heads of year and very efficient and unflappable administrative staff. Ongoing assessment is very good but the school lacks centralised and easily usable assessment data to set

	better targets.
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Close links are fostered with parents reflecting the school's strong belief that it cannot accomplish all it wants to achieve without that kind of partnership. Parents respond well to the school's expectations.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good: very good leadership by the headteacher who places his stamp indelibly on the school. He is very well supported by his loyal and efficient deputies and senior managers. Senior staff tend to take on too many major roles and some should be delegated. There are some strong departmental managers who monitor teaching and learning well but that is not consistent across all departments.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good: governors realise the enormity of their responsibilities and carry out their functions with care, efficiency and with an acute awareness of the strengths of the school and areas for improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good: the school's priorities are well chosen and action plans are much improved.
The strategic use of resources	Very good: an average budget is used well but teachers' class contact is above average. Best value is assured by scrupulous monitoring of spending and comparison of costs. Staff development is very well documented and costed.

Staffing is good with an improved mix of experienced and recently qualified teachers. Accommodation has improved considerably. The library and many classrooms are most welcoming but there are some rather shabby and uncared for areas in the school. Displays in main corridors could be improved. Some staff facilities need updating. Learning resources are good and ICT facilities are very good.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are happy in the school • Behaviour in school is good • Teaching is good and pupils are making good progress • The expectations for pupils to work hard and achieve their best • They feel comfortable in approaching the school with a question or problem • The school is well led and managed • The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible • The school provides an interesting range of activities outside the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some would like more information on how their children are getting on • Some feel that homework is excessive on some nights

Inspectors agree with what pleases parents most about the school. Inspectors judge the use of

homework to be a good feature of the school but agree that it is something to be continually monitored so that any peaks and troughs are ironed out as much as possible. Information to parents is good and reports are above average in quality with pupils' strengths and areas for improvement spelled out clearly. A centralised system which records test and examination results and predicted grades could be used to improve reporting on progress to parents.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this large Roman Catholic voluntary aided comprehensive school has 196 students (106 boys and 90 girls). Of these, very few students are from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of students staying on from Year 11 varies but is usually about 50 per cent. There is a good range of subjects available at both AS and A level (A2) but limited vocational provision. Very few students join the sixth form from other schools. There is a flexible open-entry policy and therefore the sixth form recruits a wide range of students by ability.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provision is good and cost effective and there are some very good features. The well above average results of 2001 in AS level examinations represents good progress from GCSE. This has given the school a boost in its intent to improve A level results. Academically and personally the school is currently catering well for students of a wide range of abilities as a result of the quality of teaching, the support received and the determination of good leadership that students should do their best.

Strengths

- Results in AS level examinations in 2001 were well above the national average.
- Current standards in Year 13 are above average in most subjects.
- The quality of teaching is good overall, much is very good and some is excellent.
- Students' attitudes and the relationships which they establish with others in the school in participating in activities and taking responsibility.

What could be improved

- A level results which have been below average at the higher grades A-B.
- The more precise setting of targets and greater consistency by staff in monitoring progress against these targets.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good: results in 2001 were well above average at both AS and A level representing very good progress. Teaching and learning are very good with excellent use of ICT. High expectations have led to an improvement in standards.
Biology	Satisfactory: AS level results were well above average in 2001 representing good progress. A level results have usually been above average at A-E grades but below average at A-B grades. Teaching is satisfactory overall but should aim at greater student involvement.

Chemistry	Good: AS level results were well above average in 2001. A level results improved to above average including at the higher grades A-B. Teaching is good enabling students' achievement also to be good.
Fashion and fabrics/textiles	Very good: AS and A level results are well above average. One A level student was placed in the top five nationally. Teaching is very good and students are challenged and extended to make good progress.
Business studies	Good: students made good progress to achieve well above average results at AS level in 2001 and above average results at A level. All candidates have achieved an A-E grade in the last four years which is a very good record. Teaching is mostly good and assessment of students is very good. Business links are underdeveloped.
Information and communication technology (ICT)	Good: standards observed at the inspection are above average and better than the below average AS level results of 2001. Good teaching and high expectations are currently helping to improve standards, and achievement and progress are now good.
Psychology	Very good: students made good progress to achieve well above average results in 2001 at AS level. A level results have mostly been above average at grades A-E and average at A-B with good progress made. Teaching in this increasingly popular subject is very good.
English	Very good; A level results are usually above average at grades A-E and over time very few candidates do not manage to attain a pass grade. AS level results were above average in 2001 at grades A-E but below average at A-B. Students show a genuine enjoyment of the subject in response to very good teaching and achieve well in relation to their previous results.
French	Good: results were above average at AS level in 2001 and well above at A level. Results at A level have usually been above average. Teaching and learning are good. There is positive interaction between teachers and students which assists in the good progress made.

In most other subjects work was sampled. Teaching was mostly good, much was very good and in one lesson in German teaching was excellent. Standards achieved by pupils were mostly above average.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good in terms of establishing a work ethic for students to achieve their best. Induction arrangements are very good. Ongoing assessment is very good but students need to have a clearer idea of where they are in relation to their end of course target. Advice on higher education is good and on careers satisfactory.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good with some very good decisions made in the timing of AS modular examinations so that students are enabled to do their best. There is a keen and influential encouragement to students to make a contribution to the full life of the school. The monitoring of academic progress could be improved by more uniform and consistent systems. Equality of opportunity is a strong feature. Some students feel that their views do not have sufficient influence and response is slow. Some parents wrote to the inspection team in support of this. This is something for the head of

	sixth, senior managers and governors to address.
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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"> • They enjoy being in the sixth form and are proud of their school and what it stands for • The help given to settle into the sixth form • They are taught well, challenged to do their best and helped and encouraged to study • Their work is thoroughly assessed • Teachers are accessible if difficulties arise • They can rely on strong support from the school if personal problems arise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way the school listens and responds to their views • The range of worthwhile activities offered • The advice offered on future careers • Information on progress

Inspectors agree strongly with what students like about the sixth form. Inspectors judge that the school is sometimes too slow in responding to students' views and reasonable requests, for example to improve their common-room facilities. The demands at AS level have reduced time for some other activities on offer but the school does as much as most schools to provide a varied diet and more than most to involve students in the life of the whole school. As stated elsewhere advice on progress needs to be more sharply related to end of course grades. Advice on careers is satisfactory and similar to that provided by most schools. There is a comprehensive library of information on universities but some students do not feel they have a full picture of those institutions as places to live and study. Informed discussion with students could pinpoint where further improvements are possible.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are consistently well above average

1. National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above average compared with all schools and have been well above average overall in each year since the last inspection. In individual subjects, results have been consistently well above average in English and science compared with all schools. In mathematics, results have been mostly well above average compared with all schools with the exception of 2000 when they were above average. Results in national tests in 2001 were well above average not only at the levels expected for 14-year-olds (Level 5 or better) but also well above average at Level 6 or above and Level 7 or above. Results in mathematics and science were similar for boys and girls but in English girls attained better results than boys at Levels 6 and 7 in 2001. Compared with similar schools results were also well above average overall in both 2001 and 2000. Standards based on 2001 results have improved since the time of the last inspection.

Results in GCSE examinations are consistently well above average

2. In each year since the last inspection, results based on the average points score per pupil have been well above average compared with all schools. In 2001 the average points score was 46.5 compared with the national average of 39. In 2001 and 2000 results were also well above average compared with similar schools based on the average points score.
3. Results have also been mostly well above average in the percentage of pupils attaining five or more grades A*-C with the exception of 1999 when results were above average. In 2001 the percentage attaining five or more grades A*-C was 63 per cent compared with the national average of 48 per cent. It exceeded its target of 61 per cent. Sixty-one per cent of boys and 66 per cent of girls managed this with the gap between boys and girls much smaller than the gap between boys and girls nationally.
4. In individual subjects GCSE results in 2001 and in the last three years have mostly been well above average compared with all schools. In 2001 results were well above average at A*-C grades in English literature, mathematics, science, art and design, combined science, French, history and physical education. With small numbers in music all five candidates were successful at A*-C grades. Pupils in French did particularly well compared with the performance of the same pupils in their other subjects and other subjects which did well in that respect were, English literature, mathematics and art and design.
5. St Leonard's is not a complacent school and realises that it is capable of doing even better than the very good results already achieved. It will be joining other selected schools in dialogue with the local education authority to discuss how feasible it is to break the 70 per cent barrier for the number of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C in future.

AS level results at the end of Year 12 in 2001 were well above average in most subjects.

6. The modularisation of the sixth form curriculum has brought increased opportunities to a school which is organised, has a strong ongoing work ethic and where most students are prepared to work hard to achieve good results. A combination of these factors allied to mainly good teaching and much that is very good culminated in very good AS level results in 2001 which were well above average in most subjects not only at grades A-E but also at grades A-B. Amongst the many very good results some were exceptional. In mathematics 12 of the 21 candidates achieved the top A grade; in business studies 10 of 22 candidates and in psychology 13 of 34 candidates were successful at that level.

The quality of teaching is good overall, much is very good and some is excellent

7. The quality of teaching is good overall and a substantial proportion is very good. Good teaching is a consistent feature of the school at all stages. Of the 110 lessons observed 108 (98 per cent) were satisfactory or better, 88 (80 per cent) were good or better, 49 (45 per cent) were very good or better and in seven lessons (6 per cent) teaching was excellent. Teaching was slightly better in the sixth form than in the rest of the school and accounted for five of the seven excellent lessons but overall any differences were not significant.
8. There are certain characteristics which are typical of the best features of teaching regardless of the year groups being taught including in the sixth form.
9. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and prepare well which helps in ensuring coverage of the lesson objectives. A Year 11 group studying Indian music responded positively to the teacher's knowledge and interest in the subject. Subject competence also helps in assisting students to make a smooth transition from Year 11 to Year 12 and in preparing them for challenging examinations and higher education. Equality of opportunity is a strong feature of the school and teachers always plan to serve the needs of all in the class. The success of this approach was seen in most lessons observed at the inspection. It was also seen clearly at rowing practices where the coach takes pride not only in the achievements of high flyers but also those who are unlikely to reach such heights but whose personal development and confidence are being carefully nurtured.
10. In many lessons expectations are high. In an excellent lesson in German in Year 8, where all pupils were prepared to have a go and experiment with language, there was clear evidence that they have acquired an amazing grasp of German after only learning the language for a comparatively short period of time. In this lesson there was a strong and successful insistence on pupils learning to ask questions which gave it an extra edge. Some lessons in most subjects lack that ingredient. In the sixth form high expectations are helping to raise standards.
11. Many lessons are interesting with teachers able to capture and retain attention and extend pupils with challenging questions. Year 10 pupils in food technology learned new facts about gels as a result of the teacher's clear explanation and interest generated with references to 'smart foods'. Questions which involved the whole class in a Year 8 mathematics lesson were supplemented by frequent and well chosen interjections of the teacher to sustain interest and enthusiasm when dealing with substitution into formulae. Pupils' basketball skills in Year 10 progressed as a result of knowledgeable teaching and instruction on basic movement and tactical skills. Open-ended questions are used to particularly good effect in Years 12 and 13.

12. Teachers provide good opportunities for independent learning, group work and research in all years including in the sixth form. Excellent and humorously illustrated teaching in a Year 9 science lesson resulted in pupils making great strides in discovering for themselves that current increases with more cells and reduces when resistance is increased. In this lesson pupils were given numerous opportunities to do the thinking. In a PSHE lesson in Year 10 pupils learned much about the qualities needed to take full advantage of work experience through their keen involvement in discussion. Year 9 pupils in English were very involved in an interesting lesson in English where they developed simple ideas into an extended story and where the enthusiasm built up was infectious. An English lesson in Year 10 inspired pupils to consider unexplained mysteries in the world and to refine their thoughts and ideas through discussion and through listening to the opinions of others. Independent work coupled with clear enjoyment were features of a very good lesson in art and design in Year 9 in studying cubism. In an ICT lesson in Year 10 pupils worked well and independently in exploring the world wide web. There was good engagement of pupils in a business studies lesson in Year 10 and some good original writing emerging in looking at how and why businesses merge. Year 7 pupils learned by 'doing' in an ambitious lesson in exploring the physical geography of the British Isles with rapid question and answer sessions.
13. The management of pupils is very good and there are only isolated examples where pupils do not abide by the school rules and where behaviour is unsatisfactory. In the sixth form students are always ready and willing to be taught. In many lessons the quality of relationships between teacher and taught aids enormously in learning. Year 8 pupils, for example, felt very comfortable and confident with the teacher and therefore in responding to group tasks when learning about trench warfare tactics in the First World War.
14. The use of time and resources is usually very good. Only a minority of lessons flag in the latter stages. There was exceptionally good use of time in a Year 7 science lesson in practical work dealing with indigestion tablets and also with very good attention to safety. Resources were very well used in a general fitness class in physical education for Year 10 pupils with again very good attention to health and safety issues in the use of equipment. Video, ICT and whiteboard technology are imaginatively used in German. Very good use of whiteboard technology also helped a Year 10 technology lesson to move along smoothly and in a Year 10 art and design lesson such technology was used to set the scene for the whole lesson in investigating different visualisations of images. A Year 7 lesson in mathematics showed too that small whiteboards can be used just as effectively in explaining geometry. In the sixth form resources are well used including ICT in English and mathematics. Displays in rooms are stimulating and should be extended into main school corridors. A humorous display of action rugby photographs illustrating a mix of emotions attracts pupils' attention in the physical education teaching area. The department of physical education has forged some good links with local clubs to tap into any external resources, and links with the city club are being strengthened to boost the development of rugby in the school.
15. Numeracy and literacy are well taught helped by the whole-school focus given and an awareness by all teachers that they have a part to play. Teachers give attention to an understanding of key words in their subject area but do far more than that as illustrated in particular by the quality of their very good marking. In addition weaker pupils are given appropriate attention in lessons, helped by a very good awareness by teachers of any special needs. Where extra tuition is arranged in small specialist classes, pupils appreciate the individual attention they are given and in a Year 8 class were able to

recognise the progress they were making when matching key words to pictorial evidence. In response to very good teaching and enthusiastic explanation a small group of Year 9 pupils made very good progress in understanding how information could be better organised.

16. There were many other examples seen during the week of the inspection which illustrated that the school has a teaching force which is capable of taking the school on to even better things.

The distinctive nature of the ethos of the school contributes enormously to pupils' personal development and prepares them well for their future life and learning with a strong set of values.

17. The great majority of parents agree that the school is helping their child to become mature and responsible. At the pre-inspection meeting, parents complimented the school on what it does to promote pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour. Some amazement was expressed at the progress made in a comparatively short period of time in Year 7 in ensuring that pupils were organised in their approach to learning. A strong work ethic in the school rubs off on nearly all pupils and students and is a significant factor in the test and examination results achieved. During the inspection there were hardly any instances where pupils were prevented from getting on with their work and doing their best. In the vast majority of instances teachers too are allowed to teach without distraction from the class. This is the norm and inevitably pupils' values are influenced by what they see around them day after day.
18. In encouraging a set of values for pupils' and students' time at school and in their future lives the distinctive Roman Catholic denominational nature of the school is a driving force. Religious education and spiritual development permeate all aspects of the school and the school life. Those accepted into the school who are not Roman Catholic and of other faiths are valued as enhancing the life of the school and this too acts as a good preparation for pupils and students to live in a culturally diverse society. The influence of the denominational nature of the school was all apparent during the week of the inspection right from the first assembly observed and where pupils were encouraged to think and pray for others as well as themselves. A Mass attended by some inspectors was equally powerful in reinforcing such principles.
19. Consideration and respect for others is a feature of nearly all lessons. The more able help the less able and in group work pupils do their best to harness the contributions of all. Teachers are very good role models in this respect and in the way they treat all pupils and bring them into the lesson. The readiness of pupils, students and staff to help each other is a feature of the school. Many sixth form students volunteer readily to help younger pupils for example with their reading. There is a feeling of a team spirit in so much of what the school does and teachers and administrative staff, as well as pupils and students, know that there is always a positive and helping hand when problems arise.
20. One of the priorities of the school's mission statement is to instil within pupils a moral and social responsibility for the world around them. It succeeds in doing so in the content of lessons where appropriate and through parts of the PSHE programme. Pupils and students have an acute awareness of what they see as abuse of employees by major manufacturers throughout the world and action has been taken to remove certain products from sale in the school and to replace them with products of manufacturers who have a better record. Debate surrounding this has been a prominent feature of recent meetings of the School Council. Evidence of this was seen

at the inspection when year representatives of the School Council spoke articulately and with conviction on these and other matters. Such representations at the School Council supplement the work of the active fair trade student group. Again a generous spirit is cultivated in raising money for the less fortunate in the world including through charity collections, CAFOD donations and the Christmas Shoe Box Appeal. The St Leonard's December newsletter reports 'nearly 300 shoeboxes filled with a magnificent range of quality goods are on their way to war-torn areas of the world'.

21. The school is also preparing well for the more comprehensive study of citizenship nationally with the use of an audit to identify the good features and opportunities already in the school and how that should be expanded. Through elections to various bodies including year councils much is already done to promote democratic principles. Within the school everyone is made well aware of the rules which they are expected to abide by to make life comfortable for all in a large school. Where there is a gross breach of rules action taken is swift. The record of exclusions shows that pupils are rarely repeat offenders and that pupils accept the restrictions as well as the freedoms of studying at St Leonard's as in any other walk of life.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The percentage of students attaining A-B grades in their A level examinations at the end of Year 13.

22. A level results compare favourably with the national average at grades A-E but, at the higher grades A-B, results are below average in most subjects. They were below average in 2001 at grades A-B in art and design, biology, English literature, geography, history, textiles, physics and sociology. Only small numbers were entered in German and music. In German, although the two candidates were successful at grades A-E there were no passes at grades A-B. In music both students were successful at grades A-E.
23. There were some exceptions to the rule and in 2001 results were above average at grades A-B at A level in business studies, chemistry, design and technology, fashion and fabrics, French, mathematics and psychology.
24. Results at A level should be seen in the context of St Leonard's accepting a wide range of students into the sixth form by ability. They should also be seen in the context that, overall, students achieve much as expected in relation to their GCSE results and also that the qualifications achieved allow nearly all to progress to appropriate courses in higher education. Having said that, results at A level have not been as good as those achieved elsewhere in the school where pupils at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 do better than expected in relation to their starting point at the school. In 2001, students also did better than expected in achieving well above average results at AS level. The school faces the challenge this year in converting such results into similar attainment at A level (A2) with the same cohort of students and so far indications are good.

The management of whole-school assessment data so that it is easily accessible and used uniformly by departments in setting individual pupil and student targets.

25. The school does not have a sufficiently good centralised system for collecting and using assessment data and in accessing external data on national performance in tests and examinations. The school has not been standing still in building up more meaningful assessment data but that process needs to be accelerated and organised more effectively. Better use could be made of data if it were more readily available. Currently teachers in English, mathematics and science log the results attained by pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 when in primary schools. These are used alongside other information acquired on entry including some testing to set targets for national tests at the end of Year 9. In other subjects there is insufficient use of prior achievement to set targets. The special educational needs department makes good use of data from primary schools.
26. The school makes reference to its own records and test data in setting targets for GCSE as well as being guided by local education authority data but acknowledges that the process could be more sophisticated for individual pupils. In Years 12 and 13 there is even greater potential for improvement. There are good examples of target setting by departments but there is not enough consistency across subjects. The school has recognised that the current use of performance data to set standards is not sharp enough and has decided to invest in a well-tried national programme which will give a more accurate prediction of students' potential. This should give a better match between predicted grades and current attainment and effort.
27. There is too much of a time lag in accessing test and examination data which is posted on the Internet before official publication in hard copy and the school should be accessing that information earlier whilst the results of the previous year are fresh in people's minds.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to improve standards the governors and senior management should:

- improve the management of whole-school assessment data to make it easily accessible and usable and to use more uniformity in setting individual pupil targets by:
 - having pupils' and students' test and examination results and targets recorded centrally from the time they enter school right through to the end of their school studies;
 - identifying a person to manage and develop the system effectively with sufficient time to do so;
 - providing the necessary staff development and training to maximise use of the system.

(paragraphs: 25, 26, 27)

(The whole-school key issue on improving A-B grades at A level is dealt with below as a part of the sixth form issues)

Sixth form

- improve the percentage of students attaining A-B grades in their A level (A2) examinations by:
 - effectively building on the very good achievements at AS level in 2001 and ensuring that those students in Year 13 continue to have the right kind of tuition and mentoring to achieve well at A-B grades as well as at A-E grades at A level (A2);
 - always setting targets which are geared to A-E and A-B grades rather than A-E and A-C grades and therefore raising expectations by measuring success at the higher grades in terms of A-B grades.
- introduce more precise target setting and greater consistency by staff in monitoring students' progress against these targets by: integrating as part of a whole-school system in the collection and use of data;
 - introducing a better and more reliable system for assessing students' potential in Years 12 and 13 and measuring progress against targets set;
 - keeping students better informed of their progress compared with where they are expected to be by the end of their course;
 - providing suitable staff training;
 - ensuring that information is accessible and meaningful to staff.

(paragraphs: 53, 65, 66, 74, 75, 79)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	56
	Sixth form	54
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		30

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7-11							
Number	2	20	20	12	2	0	0
Percentage	3.6	35.7	35.7	21.4	3.6	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	5	22	19	8	0	0	0
Percentage	9.3	40.7	35.2	14.8	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 Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1161	196
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	59	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	172	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	14

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	3

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.4
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	99	123	222

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	82	84	82
	Girls	113	109	106
	Total	195	193	188
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (80)	87 (73)	85 (75)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	62 (50)	57 (48)	58 (45)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	81	86	73
	Girls	108	105	103
	Total	189	191	176
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (87)	86 (74)	79 (76)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	49 (50)	62 (52)	45 (43)
	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	129	108	237

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	79	126	127
	Girls	71	103	105
	Total	150	229	232
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	63 (60)	97 (99)	98 (100)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score Per pupil	School	46.5
	National	39.0

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	46	44	90
	Average point score per candidate	16.1	15.1	15.6
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	44	43	87	2	1	3
	Average point score per candidate	16	15.3	15.7	18	6	14
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	5
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1341
Any other minority ethnic group	7

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	30	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	77.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.4

Education support staff Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	433

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.6
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.3
Key Stage 4	22.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	3,443,790
Total expenditure	3,325,224
Expenditure per pupil	2,464
Balance brought forward from previous year	158,943
Balance carried forward to next year	277,509

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16.1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	19.0

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1353
Number of questionnaires returned	345

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	50	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	47	49	3	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	57	3	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	57	14	2	0
The teaching is good.	38	56	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	53	17	1	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	43	4	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	32	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	51	13	1	7
The school is well led and managed.	53	37	3	1	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	48	5	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	42	3	1	3

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

28. On average about 50 per cent of pupils in Year 11 stay on into the sixth form. Retention rates are very good with very few dropping out once they have started their sixth form courses.
29. Results at A level have fluctuated between average and below average since the last inspection. A level results compare favourably with the national average at grades A-E in most subjects. In business studies there is a very good record of students passing at A-E grades with all students being successful in the last four years. English too has a good record. Some of these results have been achieved with large numbers in particular subjects and with a wide range of students. In psychology there were 33 candidates in 2001 and 35 in 2000.
30. A level results at the higher grades A-B in 2001 were below average in most subjects. They were below average at grades A-B in art and design, biology, English literature, geography, history, physics and sociology. Only small numbers were entered in German and music. In German, although the two candidates were successful at grades A-E there were no passes at grades A-B. In music, both students were successful at grades A-E. There were some exceptions to the rule and some subjects in 2001 performed better than the national average at A-B grades. Results were above average at grades A-B at A level in business studies, chemistry, design and technology, fashion and fabrics, French, mathematics and psychology.
31. Data produced by the local education authority shows that taking into account the performance of all students in all subjects they make satisfactory progress to achieve much as expected at A level in relation to earlier GCSE. However it is not as good as the good progress which pupils make earlier in the school from Year 7 to Year 9 and from Year 9 to Year 11. Data at A level for each subject shows some variation with students achieving best in relation to their earlier GCSE results in mathematics, chemistry, French and least well in history, politics, German and biology. The weakest subjects are affected in particular by the lack of sufficient grades A-B being attained.
32. The 2001 results at AS level have given the sixth form a boost as results were well above average in most subjects at grades A-E and A-B with students achieving very well and making very good progress. There were some particularly noteworthy results. In mathematics, 12 of the 21 candidates achieved the top A grade; in business studies 10 of 22 candidates and in psychology 13 of 34 candidates were successful at that level. Results in ICT and art were below average and in art, results were pulled down by three candidates being ungraded.
33. Another good feature of the AS results in 2001 was the extensive range of subjects offered. Candidates sat examinations in 25 different subjects. The same students who took AS levels when in Year 12 are now in Year 13 following the next stage of their advanced studies. The school has confidently predicted that such students will carry through their performance at AS level into Year 13 examinations (A2). Inspectors judge that the upturn in standards as indicated by AS level results in 2001 is being carried through into Year 13. Currently standards in Year 13 are above average.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

34. Students enjoy their studies in the sixth form and appreciate the opportunities offered in preparing them for the next stage of their education and training. Whilst there are some who have to be 'persuaded' more than others to work hard and apply themselves fully there is a strong work ethic overall. Behaviour is excellent and attendance is similar to the rest of the school where it is very good. They enjoy the annual school dinner dance also attended by large numbers of former students which is an indication of how positively past students still view the school.
35. The majority involve themselves readily in the life of the school. At the inspection some impressive extra-curricular activities were observed where there was much support from the sixth form both to further their own interests and to support younger pupils. A Fairworld Group in the school entirely run by students in Years 12 and 13 with its own mission statement does much to bring 'injustices' of the world to the attention of all pupils and students in the school. It has campaigned successfully to change suppliers of food products in the school where it has judged that the manufacturer of such products does not measure up to 'fairtrade' criteria. As seen during one lunchtime the Fairworld Group is very organised and pro-active. Other impressive contributions of sixth formers include their voluntary contribution to paired reading for younger pupils through a 'Reading Friends' scheme. In sixth form assemblies students are respectful and attentive and several took a leading role in front of a large audience of their peers, staff and inspectors at the inspection. In a vibrant senior choir rehearsal students were humorously exhorted to 'sing through their eyes' to improve their performance and they responded accordingly. Most volunteer to be school prefects and are willing helpers with open evenings and special events. There is also a very good response in helping in one capacity or other in school productions.
36. Students interviewed during the inspection were mature, reflective and measured in their judgements about the school. They had much to say that was very complimentary about their school and some suggested where things could be improved and where they thought the school could move more quickly.
37. Sixth formers work together very effectively in groups and, although prepared to challenge each other's viewpoints, they show respect and are very supportive of each other. During the inspection many examples were seen of the way in which positive attitudes of students helped good learning to take place. In chemistry, students are diligent and in biology the good humour and interest in a task shown by Year 12 students helped them progress. In physics, Year 13 students cheerfully tackled some complex concepts and calculations contributing to an atmosphere which encouraged learning. They do not give up easily and in sociology were not daunted by a demanding task set on Marxist sociology. In psychology, students in Year 12 adjust well to the demands of a new subject. In physical education, students work hard and are well motivated particularly in their practical work and coursework. In both geography and history, students work extremely well in pairs and in groups. Similarly in English and textiles, group work is very good as students are eager and good listeners and ready to share their thoughts and feelings. In business studies, students enter into and enjoy sharing problem-solving activities. ICT students are particularly well motivated in practical work. In art, students take advantage of the relaxed but purposeful atmosphere in developing their skills and knowledge.
38. Whilst students usually respond very positively to questions from teachers and opportunities to work independently they do not back this up enough by questioning

their teachers. In nearly all respects students are developing attitudes and approaches which will equip them well in their further studies.

39. Those who choose to persevere with rowing activities in the sixth form show the necessary dedication and commitment and take full advantage of the wonderful facilities and coaching on offer. Training includes regular attendance at pre-school sessions. There are no elitist attitudes in these groups despite some eminent national rowers in the school. Students clearly support each other and there are examples of individuals of all abilities growing enormously in confidence.
40. Students feel they are well prepared for living in any society which is more multicultural than the one they experience in Durham. This is helped by continuing with the study of religious education in the sixth form and consideration of a wide variety of themes and above all by the fact that at the school they learn to respect all others regardless of race or creed.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

41. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good overall, much is very good and some is excellent. In the 54 lessons observed in Years 12 and 13 all were satisfactory or better. Teaching was good or better in 46 lessons (85%), very good or better in 27 lessons (50%) and excellent in 5 lessons (9%) seen. Scrutiny of the completed work of students over time confirmed these standards. The pre-inspection survey of students showed an overwhelming percentage of students agreeing that they are taught well, challenged to do their best and that their work is thoroughly assessed.
42. In the nine sixth form subjects inspected in depth teaching was very good in English, mathematics, psychology and textiles, good in business, chemistry, French and ICT and satisfactory in biology. Other subjects were sampled.
43. Good teaching overall is matched by good quality learning and learning is very good in many lessons. The 2001 results at A level show that students made a very good transition from their GCSE courses into more advanced studies. Students readily accept opportunities to become involved in projects and individual research. The current Year 12 are adapting more slowly than last year's group as suggested by the 2001 results but most are working to their potential. Their learning is helped by teachers' awareness of their individual needs although target setting is as yet not sharp enough in some subjects. Year 13 students have moved on smoothly from their successes in AS level examinations and on to the extra challenges of A2 courses. Most students are able to sustain concentration and immerse themselves in their project and assignment work. Evidence from the inspection showed that students are rather happier in responding to questions set by teachers rather than asking questions of the teacher themselves but that varies between subjects.
44. Examples of excellent teaching were seen in individual lessons in German, ICT, mathematics, psychology and textiles and several other lessons came within a whisker of being awarded that accolade.
45. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject are very good. In mathematics for example it gives rise to confident and effective teaching. The subject expertise of biology teachers and the extra knowledge they acquire through research enables students to advance their learning beyond the information in their textbooks. Similarly in chemistry, teachers' subject knowledge is used well to build up students' conceptual understanding. Discussion in textiles is lifted to an extra level as a result of the

teacher's input which draws well on both knowledge and experience. In physical education students' level of motivation is influenced positively by their teachers' secure subject expertise. In the excellent lesson observed in German the teacher's use of the language to explain meaning and constructions was outstanding and aided considerably in moving students on in their learning. The knowledge of the new teacher in business studies is reassuring for students. Extra-curricular activities profit from skilled coaching which inculcates high standards as illustrated in a sixth form netball practice.

46. Teachers' planning is good overall and very good in many cases. It is invariably well structured and as a result lessons are usually pitched at the right level to challenge all students. This was seen in most classes, and in ICT lessons the sharing of clear objectives with students helps to secure their involvement and similarly so in the teaching of business. All teachers of French prepare well and the benefits are seen in the use of a full range of resources.
47. High expectations characterise much of the teaching. In an excellent textiles lesson in Year 13 very good questioning technique reflected the teacher's high expectations and ensured that students were challenged and encouraged to reflect effectively on their practical coursework and evaluate their progress. In mathematics, high expectations are also driving up standards. In art, teaching was able to draw on very good knowledge which, together with the use of good questioning skills, inspired and challenged students of all abilities to raise their standards.
48. Teaching methods are good and often very good. There is sufficient variety overall and within most subject areas. In psychology, students experience a range of learning opportunities that include very good formal teaching as well as opportunities to be involved in purposeful class discussions, paired and other small group work, independent projects and use of case study materials. English teaching is characterised by the use of a wide variety of imaginative strategies which captures interest and arouses curiosity. In biology, whilst learning objectives are crystal clear, teaching methods are not inventive enough.
49. Teachers' questioning of students in most subjects is usually very good with open-ended questions used to particularly good effect. Such techniques were used in some lessons during the inspection in focusing on past examination questions which also served to ensure that students had their eyes on some of the final hurdles in their course. This was seen to good effect for example in a Year 13 geography lesson. Teachers in nearly all cases meet the needs of all students in any particular class and they have a good knowledge of individual students. In psychology for example teachers provide extension work for the most able to ensure they are stretched as much as others in what are quite large classes. In a French lesson the teacher addressed the needs of all students with attention to weaker and the more able with extended questioning for the latter. In the very small number of instances where a student has a special educational need teachers are well informed and modify their teaching style to ensure equality of opportunity.
50. Students are successfully encouraged to work independently in many lessons and in well-directed essays and assignment work. Very good examples of independent learning were observed in media studies, and in art good studio procedures encourage this. In psychology, students listen carefully to the teacher and each other and contribute willingly. There are examples of teaching stimulating and encouraging students to ask questions themselves rather than just responding to questions asked by the teacher but there are also examples where this is not so. In ICT, students'

attention was captured by an exercise using the Internet to investigate elements of good questionnaire design which stimulated them to pose some demanding questions to their teacher. In a lesson observed in government and politics skilful teaching, which led but did not dominate, enticed students to pose some questions themselves when considering the arguments for and against the use of a referendum. Lively discussion and an excellent exchange of ideas was a feature of a very well taught Year 12 PSHE lesson where students tackled a case study which involved a reduction in the workforce of a company. Although some good responses to teachers' questions were seen in history and geography students did not pose questions themselves and their reticence was too easily accepted. Again in business studies, students rarely questioned or challenged their teachers despite taking responsibility for their learning in other ways.

51. There are lessons where teaching methods do not sufficiently involve students and during the inspection examples were noted in biology, mathematics, chemistry and physical education. Year 13 students in biology show good awareness and understanding of the benefits and hazards of genetic engineering but are less confident in justifying their own opinions in debate.
52. The use of time and resources is very good overall with particularly good use made of one hour lessons. Occasionally lessons could be moved on more quickly in Year 12 and pace drops in the latter stages of some lessons. Resources are well used. ICT is very well used in English by teachers in presentations and by students to increase their knowledge base, and there is excellent use of ICT in mathematics. There are some good examples of use of external resources including outside speakers. Although in business studies, students enjoy and benefit from drawing on real life experiences, links with the business community are underdeveloped.
53. The quality and use of ongoing assessment and marking are very good. Written work is marked regularly and constructively with many examples of informative written comments. Consistently high levels of assessment feedback in business gives praise where merited but also points out what needs to be done to improve. Students in English know what they have to do to achieve higher grades as assessment criteria is shared with them. In practical lessons there is invaluable ongoing feedback with students keen to know teachers' perceptions. In one brief visit to an art lesson a student was seen to be given much food for thought on the teacher's feedback on the painting of buildings in New York in order to improve perspective and visual impact. Homework is also well assessed and is well used to extend students' learning further. The main weakness in assessment is not the quality of marking and oral feedback, but relating that assessment and feedback to students' end of course targets so that students are more aware of their progress towards those ends. Some departments are very good at this but there is a lack of consistency.
54. The management of students is very good, helped considerably by students' attitudes to work. Students nearly always want to learn and this is a strong feature of the school.
55. The formal teaching of key skills in the sixth form is mainly confined to ICT and is very good. Teachers give adequate attention to the development of students' abilities in communication skills and numeracy skills through their subject teaching and thorough marking.
56. In line with the quality of teaching throughout the whole school, teaching in the sixth form has many strengths but there are examples of where teaching could benefit from replicating some of the best features seen elsewhere. The quality of teaching and tasks

set are preparing students well for the next stages of their education and training.

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

57. The range of courses in the sixth form gives sufficient opportunities for students to build on what they have already achieved at GCSE and additional subjects such as psychology, sociology, textiles, media studies and government and politics provide some attractive additional options.
58. Vocational provision is rather thin but there is the opportunity to follow vocational courses in business studies and ICT and to combine these with AS/A2 courses or with re-sits in GCSE in Year 12 but only small numbers opt for this. The school is aware that there are neighbouring institutions who offer a much wider range of vocational options for those who wish to pursue their post-16 studies elsewhere and students too are well aware of that. The school is also acutely aware of the cost implications of running such courses. There is scope however for the range of vocational options to be increased subject to demand and for closer links with other institutions to make that possible. Discussions are imminent to pursue such avenues.
59. Overall the courses on offer reflect the needs and interests of those students who choose to stay on in the sixth form and enables them to achieve appropriate qualifications for the next stage of their education and training. The record of student destinations kept by the school supports that judgement. The school meets statutory curricular requirements for religious education and collective worship.
60. AS level courses in Year 12 are extensive and well organised and the combination of subjects requested by students is mostly met within the inevitable constraints of timetabling and costings. There are some students who would like to see greater flexibility in options available and some smaller classes in more popular subjects. Fitting in re-sits for modular examinations is an additional challenge which teachers and students have to face in adjusting to greater modularisation of the curriculum in the sixth form and at the same time moving on in covering the curriculum. Although the school like others is on a learning curve AS level courses are being well managed and as a result students are mostly but not always adjusting well.
61. The formal teaching of key skills is confined to ICT for one hour a week in Year 12 for those who do not receive the necessary opportunities in their other studies. This works well. The school relies on subject teachers to provide the support which students need to develop further their key skills of numeracy and communications. Teachers take such responsibilities seriously as shown in the marking of work and classroom approaches and arrangements are adequate but should be kept under review to monitor effectiveness.
62. Private study time particularly for those following four AS level courses has been reduced. Students are given sufficient pre-course and in-course guidance on how to use such time and facilities are adequate. In addition to a designated room near to the sixth form common room the refurbished library offers a welcoming atmosphere and one conducive to study.
63. In addition to the key skills course in ICT all students follow a one hour programme of religious education as well as one hour a week of PSHE. There are good opportunities for students to continue their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and all year groups can benefit from a spiritual retreat. Owing to increased pressure on

students' time in the sixth form with the advent of modular courses the enrichment programme has been curtailed but the sum total of provision is still good. Some students would prefer more private study time at the expense of the enrichment programme. The school has to strike a difficult balance of being aware of the importance of additional studies and at the same time being aware of the pressures on students. Enrichment at this school is more than the formal programme. There are many opportunities for students to take responsibility in the wider life of the school all of which make a significant contribution to students' personal development. The Sixth Form Council and School Council offer considerable opportunities for taking major responsibilities. Students have opportunities to volunteer to be prefects, to run various societies themselves and to help younger pupils in their studies.

64. Work-related education is not a strong feature of the sixth form and links with business are underdeveloped. There are close contacts with the local careers service including an invaluable event attended by representatives of institutes of higher education, and all Year 12 students are interviewed by the careers service. There are limited formal curriculum links with other schools and colleges but an informal network is strong with an acute awareness of what each other offers. At whole-school level the Durham and Darlington Catholic Partnership has recently been set up. The school is exploring the possibility of closer links for the expansion of vocational provision. There is a good sharing of facilities with outside organisations in rowing and where all parties benefit from mutual support.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

65. Nearly all students feel that their work is thoroughly assessed and inspection evidence shows that marking and ongoing assessment is of a very good quality. About a quarter of students whilst happy with ongoing assessment do not feel that they have a clear picture of the progress they are making and how it relates to where they should be by the end of the course. Teachers are not helped in this process by a lack of a common whole-school system which generates more precise targets. Although assessment systems have improved currently the information fed back from tutors and mentors varies too much and there is not enough consistency across subjects.
66. The school has recognised that the current use of performance data to set standards is not sharp enough and has decided to invest in a well-tried national programme which will give a more accurate prediction of students' potential. This should give a better match between predicted grades and current attainment and effort.
67. Reports to parents and students are already very good with high quality comments on what students do well and what they need to do to improve. The introduction of more precise end-of-course targets would add an additional and important dimension.

Advice, support and guidance

68. Before they join the sixth form potential students are given sufficient help and support to make the right decisions from the courses on offer. They are made sufficiently aware of opportunities available at other institutions and students are very happy with the way the school helped them to settle into the sixth form. There is a very good and clear guidance booklet on choices in the sixth form including details on learning styles required, course content, examination and assessment procedures and potential career paths. In the booklet students are assured by the headteacher that 'steady

application, concentrated attention and resolution to master all will bring success'. The induction day held on external premises in September for all Year 12 students and their tutors is very good practice. When they join the sixth form students are strongly 'encouraged' to adopt the work ethic which the school seeks to cultivate. Difficulties encountered in the early stages of settling into the sixth form are picked up and dealt with well. Retention rates on courses are very good.

69. The fact that nearly all students in the sixth form have spent their previous secondary education at the school helps to ensure that students' needs are effectively diagnosed and met whether higher or lower attainers or those needing additional support. This is very important and necessary in a school which has a flexible policy on entry into the sixth form and accepts students who would not be accepted into some institutions. Where a student has a special need, it is assessed accurately and dealt with in a supportive and sensitive manner. The contribution of the sixth form chaplain which mirrors what also happens lower in the school is valued.
70. Advice on the next stage of students' education is good and comprehensive. There is a very good selection of university and college prospectuses and good vetting by the head of sixth to ensure that institutions are well chosen and 'challenging'. Some students would like to be better informed on the universities to which they are applying. Inspectors judge arrangements for careers advice to be satisfactory but significant numbers of students would like to see certain aspects of that advice improved. Some students would like more information on non-academic careers. The best way to pinpoint any improvements which are possible in advice given is through dialogue with sixth formers. St Leonard's reputation as a leading rowing school has the additional benefit of helping some students, both male and female, to win places at prestigious institutions.
71. The support given to students when they collect their A level results is very good and in particular for those who are disappointed with any of their grades. They are reassured before they arrive that everything will be done to help and that the school has a very good record of finding suitable places in higher education where first choices do not work out. The letter which they receive prior to that is wonderfully well put.
72. There are appropriate arrangements in the sixth form to ensure students' health and safety.

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

73. Students are overall very positive in their views about their experiences in the sixth form and inspectors' judgements support those views. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and are proud of their school and what it stands for. They recognise and appreciate the help they were given to settle into the sixth form and were impressed with the induction programme. Nearly all feel they are being taught well, challenged to do their best and encouraged to study but a few express concerns about the teaching they receive and the response to the representations they have made. Evidence from interviews during the week showed that students do not even mind their private study being supervised as it allows them to get on with their work uninterrupted. Students feel that their work is thoroughly marked and that teachers are accessible and helpful when difficulties arise. In addition most, but not all, are reassured by the strong support on offer from the school to deal with any personal problem. In all these key areas the school works closely and nearly always successfully with students.

74. Students would at times like the school to pay greater attention to their views and to move more quickly in implementing some promises, particularly to improve their common room facilities. There are also occasions when some feel they are not treated as responsible adults and they have insufficient freedom to prepare them for university life. Whilst they are happy with the quality of ongoing assessment, students would like a better and more accurate picture of where they are in relation to what they need to achieve by the end of their course. There is a realisation by students that additional demands at AS and A level have reduced the amount of time available for other activities but some regret that. A significant number would like to see an improvement in the advice offered on future careers and some would like additional information on the universities to which they are applying.
75. Inspectors judge that there is a need for the school to react more quickly and where possible more positively to students' suggestions and for there to be some softening at the edges in how they are treated. That would go a considerable way to improving their perceptions of how they are treated as responsible adults. This is something for the head of sixth and her team to address. Careers advice is as good as that offered in most schools and information on higher education is comprehensive. Where students feel that is not so the solution should be found in a mature two-way discussion between students and management. These students are worthy of engaging in dialogue wherever possible as they have much to offer as seen in their contribution in many parts of the school. Information on progress in relation to end of course targets could be better with the implementation of more precise and accurate standardised systems. Even with reduced time for enrichment activities the programme is still good overall. The less positive comments made by students should be seen in the light of the high level of satisfaction which they express about their experiences in the sixth form.
76. Comments from parents show that they are satisfied with the sixth form, as they are with the rest of the school. Some wrote to the inspection team to support those students who feel that there should be a quicker response to their suggestions. As throughout the school parents make a very good contribution to the school by helping at various events and in fundraising activities.
77. The school is constantly looking at the timing of parents' evenings and formal reports so that parents' evenings are used for the best purpose. This has been necessary for example in Year 12 alongside revamped reports. These parents' evenings are an invaluable opportunity for dialogue and very well supported with about 95 per cent of parents attending. The practice of having students in attendance as part of the discussions adds to the occasion, making the exchange of information more meaningful and mature. The high quality of information in reports reflecting the great commitment of teachers provides a very good starting point for discussions.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

78. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of the sixth form works closely and effectively with the headteacher and the rest of the senior management team to ensure that the sixth form has a separate identity but at the same time is an integral part of the whole school and its distinctive philosophy. There is strong commitment to the needs of all students and a determination that they should be encouraged and enabled to do their best. Good quality teaching and learning in the sixth form and much that is very good is making this possible. There are some areas of teaching where further improvements could be made but this is greatly outweighed by

considerable strengths. Academically and personally the school is currently catering well for students of a wide range of abilities. There is a keen encouragement for students to make a contribution to the full life of the school. Having accepted a wide range of students into the sixth form, leadership is acutely aware of the extra support which some students need. Equality of opportunity is a strong feature of the sixth form and all pupils regardless of ability are looked after well.

79. Because of the rather ad hoc arrangements in the school for co-ordinating assessment it is difficult for the head of sixth and other senior managers to have a strong enough grasp of how well students are progressing overall. Plans are in hand to address this and to set more precise and meaningful targets accompanied by appropriate staff training. As with other senior managers the head of the sixth form needs to be presented with that information by a manager of the system rather than attempt to do that herself. There is already a great deal of investment in time by the head of sixth form in meeting informally with individual members of the sixth form and that is invaluable. There are increasing demands, however, to complete administrative tasks in connection with university applications which are in danger of deflecting from this and some designated administrative time should be allocated so that such functions can be delegated. There has been a recent change in the deputy leadership of the sixth form and the new appointment is settling in to the role with support from the head of sixth form.
80. The governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities well in relation to the sixth form and are aware of its strengths and where improvements can be made as well as formulating plans to bring about change. The school is determined to improve success rates at A level at higher grades and has made a good start in this respect with the very good AS level results of 2001. The school also realises that it needs to move quickly to improve assessment systems and the recording of information in the sixth form.
81. The school has put additional investment into the sixth form to ensure that students are well prepared for their examinations and receive the necessary amount of tuition. Some brave and good decisions have been made in the timing of entries for modular examinations to prevent students from being rushed into external assessment too early. This has allowed them to do their best and at the same time the sixth form has remained cost effective. Principles of best value are well applied including when considering the range of courses and possible uptake. Management is justified in persevering with vocational provision in the sixth form even with small classes particularly as it has plans to discuss better provision in conjunction with other institutions.
82. Much of the planning for the sixth form takes place within the context of the whole-school plan and departmental plans. Some additional and more detailed planning in relation to the sixth form would not go amiss. A development plan which focuses on short- and longer-term projections, for example in relation to examination targets, curriculum developments, recruitment targets and marketing, support for students, external links, resources and projected costings could help to give even better direction. This is not a major weakness but could help to focus minds and assist governors.

Resources

83. Arrangements for staffing and provision of learning resources are very good. The subject expertise of staff is an important element in the success of teaching in the sixth form and the school has not had difficulties experienced by some schools nationally in filling posts. The much improved library accommodation has brought about benefits for

the sixth form. Teaching accommodation is good although a few classrooms are rather cramped. The sixth form common room is beginning to feel the pressures of increased numbers but is adequate. Physical arrangements for private study near to the common room are good. There are considerable advantages in the office of the head of the sixth form being in close proximity. Benefits arising from the school's Technology College status are seen in the sixth form as elsewhere in the school and there are lessons where the use of very good ICT facilities and whiteboard technology aids learning considerably.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

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	20	95	72	80	33	4.15	2.34
Further mathematics	4	75	n/a	50	n/a	3.00	n/a
Chemistry	27	100	87	67	43	3.93	2.94
Biology	17	100	85	59	36	3.41	2.69
Physics	19	90	87	58	42	3.47	2.89
Design and technology	4	100	85	50	26	2.75	2.41
Design and technology: food	4	100	89	25	34	2.50	2.73
Design and technology: textiles	6	100	n/a	50	n/a	3.83	n/a
Business studies	22	100	88	64	29	3.86	2.59
Information and communication studies	9	78	81	11	22	2.00	2.21
Physical education	11	100	88	36	26	3.45	2.48
Art and design	18	83	87	22	43	2.50	3.10
Music	3	100	94	100	44	5.00	3.18
Media studies	7	100	n/a	43	n/a	3.14	n/a
Geography	12	100	91	75	40	3.92	2.95
History	25	92	94	52	43	3.28	3.11
Religious education	9	100	92	56	42	3.78	3.00
Government and politics	7	100	n/a	71	n/a	4.00	n/a
Sociology	10	100	n/a	60	n/a	3.50	n/a
Psychology	34	100	n/a	50	n/a	3.53	n/a
English literature	25	96	94	28	37	2.72	2.98
French	18	94	90	50	45	3.44	3.09
German	6	100	91	83	42	4.17	3.01

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
Art and design	17	94	96	29	46	5.06	6.57
Biology	6	100	88	17	34	5.00	5.25
Business studies	26	100	92	35	32	6.15	5.50
Chemistry	12	92	90	50	43	6.17	5.90
English literature	29	100	95	28	37	5.45	5.91
French	12	100	89	50	38	6.67	5.59
Full Design and technology	7	100	91	43	30	7.14	5.38
Geography	14	93	92	0	38	4.43	5.74
German	2	100	91	0	40	3.00	5.81
History	13	85	88	8	35	3.85	5.45
Home economics	13	77	83	23	28	4.92	4.73
Mathematics	18	100	87	67	43	7.00	5.80
Further mathematics	1	100	n/a	100	n/a	8.00	n/a
Music	2	100	93	50	35	7.00	5.74
Psychology	32	100	n/a	28	n/a	5.81	n/a
Government and politics	14	93	n/a	29	n/a	5.57	n/a
Physics	16	75	88	31	40	4.88	5.67
Religious studies	2	100	92	0	38	6.00	5.84

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business Post 16 GNVQ	9	100	n/a	11	n/a	10.45	n/a

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, biology and chemistry but physics was also sampled. In physics, A level results were below average in 2001 and although better than 2000 they were not as good as 1999 and 1998. In contrast AS results in 2001 were well above average including at the higher grades A-B. Current Year 13 students following the A level course are nearly all achieving well in comparison with the well above average AS results they achieved in Year 12. Two lessons were observed one with good and the other with very good teaching. In exploring radioactivity, Year 13 students cheerfully tackled the complexities of intensity and nature of gamma rays. Through exceptionally clear and well-structured guidance, they

successfully mastered complicated calculations about gamma radiation and learnt much more about its absorption by thick lead. All this was dealt with in a happy atmosphere which encouraged learning.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Standards have improved and examination results at AS and A level were well above average in 2001 at both A-E grades and the higher levels A-B.
- Confident and effective teachers with secure subject knowledge have high expectations of their students which is helping in driving up standards.
- Excellent use is made of information and communication technology in teaching and learning.
- The positive attitudes of students and the very good relationships between students and teachers have a very positive influence on learning.

Areas for improvement

- Extend the range of teaching methods to secure greater student involvement in lessons.
- Continue to build on and extend the use of information and communication technology in the classroom.

84. Standards at A level have improved from well below average in 1999 to well above average in 2001. Results have also improved at the higher level grades A-B and were well above average in 2001 with 67 per cent of students attaining these higher grades. The performance of students in the AS level examinations in 2001 was also well above average at both A-E and A-B grades with 12 of the 21 candidates achieving a grade A. Students who took examinations at A and AS level in 2001 made very good progress in relation to their previous results.
85. Current standards are also well above average overall. Evidence from work seen in lessons and from students' files in Year 12 reflects a considerable range of ability on entry. Progress in Year 12 and in Year 13 is, however, consistent with their well above average achievement in examinations in 2001. In Year 12 there is good work in algebra with students coping well with complex algebraic expressions and in work with equations. Work in some students' files, however, shows limited confidence with some quite basic algebra and in the arithmetic associated with roots and powers. Students are confident with differentiation and integration and with sketching graphs of functions. In mechanics they are happy working with the vector notation when investigating conservation of momentum and have a good command of the basic theory. When asked individually about their work students respond well and show a good understanding of the topic but in lessons they are often reticent in responding to general questions from the teacher.
86. By Year 13 algebraic skills and analysis are well established with just the odd lapse of concentration in some very good work on equations and inequalities and in differentiation and integration. In their work with vector products students display a confident understanding of matrix and determinant notation with one student happy to propose his own alternative notation. Work solving trigonometric equations confirms a sound knowledge of underlying concepts with students able to quote the appropriate formulae without reference to formula booklets. In applied mathematics there is demanding theoretical work and students show a good understanding of Newton's laws and working confidently with vector algebra. Although students' responses to questions

is now much better, they remain less confident and less involved in their lessons than might be expected given their considerable ability.

87. Students' files from both Year 12 and Year 13 contain work of a very high standard and show good recording of essential information to aid understanding and revision.
88. All the teaching seen was good or better and overall teaching is very good and matched by very good quality learning. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and teach with confidence. They have high expectations of students and ensure understanding with appropriate questioning throughout the lesson. Relationships between students and teachers are good and students respond well to the combination of support and challenge. A Year 12 pure mathematics lesson started with a good review of a series of questions students had attempted for homework that had tested and extended their knowledge of previous work. The style of this review reinforced students' attitudes to the subject, built confidence and enabled students to assess their own progress. One mathematics classroom has recently been equipped with an interactive whiteboard and all the teachers are developing materials to exploit this extra resource. Lessons are well prepared with clear objectives that are shared with students which create involvement and help to accelerate learning.
89. In a Year 13 applied mathematics lesson, investigating work done by a force and power, the teacher made good use of the interactive whiteboard to provide a range of diagrams in explaining problems. The teacher was able to sustain the pace and challenge of the lesson and have time at the end to consider the same topic with motion in a curve and with non-constant acceleration.
90. Some teaching is to small groups of students and teachers adapt the style of their lesson well to maintain student involvement using handouts and one-to-one tutoring. In a Year 13 lesson on solving trigonometric equations the teacher used a clear handout to summarise previous work on this topic before developing the theory and techniques for solution. In working through examples the individual support from teachers was very effective in meeting the different needs of these students. Working in such small groups can, however, limit the opportunities for interaction between the teacher and the students in the theoretical development of a topic.
91. The head of department provides good direction for the work in the sixth form. There is a clear focus on raising achievement through high expectations and the continued development of teaching strategies linked to curriculum development. The department has exploited the introduction of the AS level course well to develop A level programmes, and courses are well planned and effectively managed. Students' progress is regularly assessed and monitored against their expected level of performance. Resources for mathematics are good, but resources to exploit the interactive whiteboard need further development.

Biology

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

Strengths

- AS level results in 2001 were well above average including at the higher grades A-B.
- There is a strong commitment to raising standards.
- Relationships are very good and students have a strikingly positive motivation towards learning.
- Crystal clear learning objectives are shared with students.

- Teachers' subject expertise is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Improving standards particularly at A-B level.
- The setting of sharply focused targets for students which are carefully monitored.
- Greater opportunities through teaching styles for students to widen their capacity to raise questions, justify their opinions and challenge assumptions.
- Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice.
- Improving subject management through action planning linked to departmental budget planning.

92. Although in 2001 all six candidates passed at grades A-E only one was successful at the higher grades A-B attaining a grade A. Over recent years whilst results at A-E grades have usually been above average results at grades A-B have been below average. AS level results in 2001 with 17 candidates were well above average at both A-E and A-B grades with students making good progress from GCSE.
93. Current standards in Year 13 on the A level course are slightly above average. This suggests that A level results in 2002 will be better than those of 2001. The attainment of A level students fluctuates however as shown by performance in recent tests and some are not achieving in line with their full potential. Students feel that conflicting demands on their time caused by modular examination re-sits is a factor. There is an onus on the management to assess how this could be better managed but there is also an onus on students to manage their time better.
94. Analysis of students' work in Year 13 shows clearly organised files illustrating a high degree of commitment from students, which helps them in their reflection and contributes towards raising standards. There are strong features in relation to work on concepts, for example respiration and homeostasis and in genetics and variation. Analysis shows however a lack of intellectual rigour in the application of ideas, and explanations can be too superficial. In one lesson, whilst Year 13 students showed good awareness and understanding of the benefits and hazards of genetic engineering they were less confident in expressing and justifying their own opinions in debate, for instance about the use of genetic engineering in agriculture.
95. The popularity of the subject in the sixth form is increasing with particular growth at AS level with 23 Year 12 students opting for the course. At AS level current attainment is just above average with students achieving much as expected in relation to their earlier GCSE grades. Such standards were achieved in one lesson where a lively group consolidated what they already knew about the mammalian heart from their GCSE work, through competent dissection and conversations with their teacher. Progress was enlivened by students' good humour and interest in the task. Although learning was accelerated by the introduction of new work on the effects of cholesterol levels on cardiac functions generally there is much scope for moving students on to advanced work more quickly.
96. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory with some notably good features, which are reflected in the quality of students' learning. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge well in drawing out facts from students in consolidating their ideas and building sequentially upon them. A teacher's specialist research substantially added interest and took genetic engineering 'beyond the textbook' for Year 13 students who learnt much more about genes and DNA. Students are helped in their learning because the intentions of lessons are made crystal clear to them, good resources are available

and they get on well with their teachers. On the other hand, certain aspects impoverish learning. Although planning is methodical and follows the syllabus it is rarely inventive. Pace tends to slow down as lessons proceed, cutting down on challenge, and constructive plenaries are missing. Students do not discuss, question and debate ideas enough; lessons are not planned imaginatively so it is not surprising that they are not involved enough.

97. Marking is always consistently done, usually encouraging and helpful. Occasionally, the generosity of comments does not clearly match the mark given, so messages to students are clouded. Students pass back comments about their understanding or misconceptions but this is not a consistent practice.
98. There is a strong commitment to improving standards in biology, which is having a positive effect on attainment and progress but there is not a strong enough focus yet on improving the percentage of A-B grades at A level to match what has already been achieved at AS level. There is more active evaluation of the subject's performance, although this is not yet used to identify specific learning targets for individual students. Currently the subject does not have an action plan that is linked to the departmental budget plan and teaching and learning are not monitored rigorously enough through classroom observations.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Improving standards as shown by above average results at A level in 2001 and well above average results at AS level.
- Teachers' mastery of their subject knowledge is used well to enable students to build on their knowledge and conceptual understanding.
- The diligence of students in their approach to learning.
- Constructive marking and a perceptive awareness of students' misconceptions help students progress.
- The subject is well co-ordinated and highly organised with efficient records of results used well to raise standards.

Areas for improvement

- Extend the range of teaching styles so that students participate more imaginatively in lessons.
- More rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice.
- Set targets for students that are sharply focused on learning specific aspects of chemistry.

99. A level results were above average in 2001. They were average at grades A-E and above average at the higher grades A-B. They were the best results of the last four years and better than those achieved in biology and physics in 2001. A level results in 2001 improved considerably on the below average results of 2000. In 2001, students achieved well in relation to their previous results and one student made excellent progress from a grade D at GCSE to a grade B at A level which shows what is possible. At AS level, results were well above average in 2001 with all students successful at A-E grades, and results at A-B grades well above average with 11 of the 27 candidates achieving a grade A.

100. The standards of work of current Year 13 students are also above average. Recent school test results show they are improving upon the A level results of 2001 and are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. A-B grades in the 2002 examinations are on target to be above average and all are likely to pass the examination at A-E grades. How well students increase their knowledge and understanding is linked directly to the quality of teaching. In one class they did well in moving forward in their learning about spectral techniques because of the opportunities to explain their own analysis and interpretation of particular spectra when identifying unknown compounds. As a result they deepened their understanding of structural features in molecules. Anomalies and misunderstandings were expertly and quickly spotted and support given for confusions about, for instance, probable structures. In another class, sharp mathematical skills soon smoothed out complex calculations about pH and hydrogen ion concentration. Although listening politely students were not, however, involved in using and talking about the ideas.
101. Chemistry continues to be a popular choice among students who have achieved highly at GCSE. Overall, Year 12 students are progressing well. Current attainment is above average. Students show good knowledge and understanding of basic ideas of organic chemistry studied so far and are increasing practical skills and experiences well. For example, by exploring the reaction of ethanol with sodium to form a sodium alkoxide and hydrogen, they learn more about the chemistry of alcohols. They are expertly supported in representing the reaction's chemical formula and extend their learning by being included in the teacher's 'board work' in working out and explaining the equation. There is scope for increased sophistication in student explanations and in presentations to their class.
102. Analysis of work showed improving standards where students displayed a good response towards correcting work. For example, the understanding of energetics was helped through numerous opportunities to practise calculating the extent to which energy is dispersed in chemical reactions and comments made by teachers in their very good marking noticeably provided good support in explaining misconceptions. Analysis also showed succinct, organised notes reflective of consistent diligence by students and a good prop in raising standards. There was less evidence of problem solving, evaluating and debating theories. Certain answers lacked depth in that they did not sufficiently justify statements.
103. Teaching is good overall so students learn and achieve well. They have a strikingly good knowledge of the information students need to learn. Objectives of lessons are made clear which help in the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Effective teaching helps students to 'see the big picture' more clearly, for instance understanding about chemical pathways became clearer for Year 12 students as they fitted 'pieces' of an idea together themselves making up a whole conceptual picture. Very positively they applied facts well, eclectically drawing threads together about respiration, fermentation and industrial production of methylated spirit. Students successfully build upon GCSE work and incorporate new and more advanced ideas. High quality individual support contributes to students working with increasing confidence. On the other hand, where students are not given enough opportunity to enquire more deeply into a topic during lectures, learning is less secure. There is scope for lesson planning to be more inventive in providing much more challenging experiences and stimulating debate for students.
104. Independent activity is encouraged by teachers and approached diligently by students; more opportunities are being created for them to extend this activity. Although library resourcing is limited for independent research, computer software has been extended

and analysis of work illustrates competent use of the Internet for extracting information.

105. The subject is well organised; teachers work hard using their skills and talents to good effect in supporting students. There is clear commitment to high standards and an increasing evaluation of performance although there is insufficient focus on the achievement of A-B grades. Regular classroom observations are not yet taking place and as a result good practice is not being shared sufficiently. Records are efficiently computerised and students' attainment carefully tracked.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Fashion and fabrics/textiles

Overall, the quality of provision in fashion and fabrics/textiles is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards achieved at AS and A level are well above the national average.
- Teaching is very good and lessons are well structured to reach objectives.
- Teachers show good subject knowledge and have high expectations which is demonstrated in challenging students of all abilities to improve.
- Students are confident, attentive and work productively.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Increase class sizes by publicising more actively the merits and achievements of the course.

106. The GCE A level examination results in fashion and fabrics were well above average in 2001. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade A-E and the proportion gaining the highest grades A-B was well above average. One of the students was placed in the top five nationally by the examining board. AS level results in 2001 in textiles were well above national standards with all students achieving an A-E grade and more than half achieving the higher A-B grades in 2001. All current students on AS and A level courses are following a course leading to a qualification in textiles rather than fashion and fabrics.
107. Students who sat the AS level examinations in textiles in 2001 and who have progressed to the A level course are maintaining high standards in Year 13 with a significant minority achieving better than expected. They are not only making good progress in mastering basic skills and techniques but are also demonstrating flair and imagination in their work. In one lesson, for example, the imaginative use of modern materials like fur fabric, silk and polythene to make a quilted kimono and neoprene to produce a disco top was complemented well by the use of traditional skills such as smocking.
108. Current standards at AS level in Year 12 are also well above average. All students are reaching the standards required for AS level grades A-E and almost half are working within the higher levels A-B. They are achieving as well as expected in relation to their previous GCSE results. Students can describe the processes of design well, talk about their current work with confidence and employ the right manufacturing techniques to produce garments in a variety of fabrics. Good use has been made of historical research into style and fabrics to influence the making of an Edwardian dress in velvet.

Research into hat designers like Philip Treacy has inspired a student to produce a unique hat design. An investigation of the influence of the Design Movement on soft furnishing patterns from a variety of cultures and periods, including Oriental and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, has led to the production of fabric prints in a variety of methods including screen and block printing.

109. All students are making good progress in textiles in response to teaching which is at least good, sometimes outstanding and very good overall. The principal merits of teaching are clear objectives, very good classroom management and high expectations which challenge and extend students. Teachers show good subject knowledge in discussions, questioning and explanations of tasks. The scheme of work is supported through sound assessment procedures and effective feedback to the students on what they need to do to improve their work. Target setting, based on careful analysis of students' performance in both written and practical work, is well established.
110. The students learn well. The lesson structure and effective teaching, together with good discussion and questioning, focuses students' learning. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching. They are confident in using books and ICT to undertake research and to complete coursework. In one theory lesson the students accessed a variety of websites successfully to gain invaluable information on current trends and unusual uses of knitted fabrics. Students support and help each other effectively and maturely as they talk and listen to each other about their work. When they engage in technical discussions with teachers about their often innovative designs, they show respect for the teachers' knowledge, and feel secure when experimenting with techniques. Students take responsibility for their own learning in their practical and theoretical coursework and related homework assignments.
111. The very good teaching and learning are influenced positively by the subject being well led and managed. There is a clear commitment to improving standards and building on what has already been achieved in the previous examination course in fashion and fabrics and in the new scheme of work and examination in textiles. Opportunities to study textiles in the sixth form are not common and the merits and achievements of these very good courses should be publicised more actively in the locality and further afield in order to increase the numbers of students enrolling.

BUSINESS

Business studies

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

Strengths

- A level results in 2001 which were above average and AS level results which were well above average.
- The quality of lesson planning and preparation.
- Feedback to students which is of a consistently high standard.
- Dedicated and co-operative students.

Areas for improvement

- More attention is needed in lesson planning to strategies which challenge individual students and small groups.
- Small groups needing particular attention.

- Business links and extra-curricular activities are currently underdeveloped.

112. A level results were above average in 2001 and an improvement on the previous year when they were average. Results at grades A-E have been consistently above average with all candidates in the last four years attaining a pass grade which is a very good record. In 2001, results at grades A-B were above average and with the exception of 2000 have been above average in the last four years. At AS level, results were well above average in 2001 at both A-E and A-B grades and ten of the 22 candidates achieved the top A grade which represented very good progress. The department ensures that those who did not study business studies at GCSE are not disadvantaged if they opt for an advanced course and therefore such students do equally as well as others in examinations.
113. Standards seen at the inspection were at least above average in Year 13 and in two lessons observed well above average. In lessons students' thematic inquiry work involves extensive research by individual students and good summaries of relevant information collated on a variety of aspects including how companies such as Marks and Spencer are facing up to the need for change. Newspapers, the Internet and company sources were well used for this purpose. Students were also seen demonstrating high level comprehension skills in analysing information from company case studies and putting forward ideas for a business strategy to solve a company's financial problems. This involved debating the strengths and weaknesses of strategies such as diversification and sale of assets. Students were able to communicate their findings well in using overhead transparencies to flag up their key points. AVCE students were able to design and explain very effective job descriptions and person specifications for a company having learned their purpose and format from real examples provided by the teacher and from their work experience and part-time jobs.
114. The standard of work in Year 12 is mostly above average. AS level students introduced to a new topic were able to deduce trends in the balance of payments successfully from graphs they were asked to plot and relate examples of boom and recession to such trends. GNVQ intermediate students showed a good recall of knowledge of business terms and understanding of sole traders and could illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of business ownership using examples of local people they had met including from a local taxi firm.
115. Teaching is good and is characterised by detailed schemes of work and clear lesson plans for two or three weeks ahead. Whilst teaching methods lead to a variety of activities which are generally well suited to the needs of students some opportunities are missed to target particular individuals and small groups in lesson planning. Teachers' good subject knowledge and very good relationships with students help in securing positive responses. Opportunities are provided for students to work effectively in small groups. Although students readily contribute their ideas and respond well to questions asked of them they are not encouraged sufficiently to ask questions themselves. Feedback on assessment is of a consistently high standard. Teachers ably summarise what students have achieved, give praise where due and point out clearly what needs to be done to meet requirements.
116. Students learn well in response to good teaching. There are mature and considerate in exchanges with their peers. They enjoy shared problem-solving activities and pointing out each other's successes, for example in 'making money' when participating in the Financial Times Proshare investment game. Students use ICT in a capable manner in assignment and display work and in searching the Internet for information.

117. There are some good existing links used by students in their work but they are underdeveloped. AVCE students value their one week's work experience and how it contributes to extending their business knowledge and understanding. Planned assignment work as part of GNVQ/AVCE courses includes local surveys and business contacts and some input from a visiting speaker. There is no specific extra-curricular provision in business studies.
118. Good and successful leadership had led to a smooth transition to Curriculum 2000 and very recent change of leadership has been helped by good teamwork. Whilst lesson observation is carried out as part of the school's performance management programme it is not frequent enough or sufficient to ensure the sharing of good practice.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The above average standards in project work.
- Teachers' up-to-date knowledge and skills.
- The high expectations of teachers which are helping to improve standards.
- The quality of students' practical and assignment work.
- The quality of ICT resources.
- Good leadership and management with a clear focus on curriculum development and raising standards.

Areas for improvement

- Raise achievement at AS level particularly at the highest grades.
- Continue to review and monitor the development of information and communication technology across the whole school curriculum and the contribution which individual subjects make.

119. AS level results in 2001 were below average at grades A-E and A-B. The first students to sit A level ICT, currently in Year 13, will take their examinations in the summer of 2002. The school introduced a new curriculum for AS and A level in 2001 leading to the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE).
120. Current standards at AS level are above average and represent an improvement on the results of previous years. The evidence from work seen in lessons and from students' files in Year 12 reflects the broad range of ability on entry to the AS course. Students are making good progress in relation to their previous GCSE results. All students are confident and competent users of the school's network and can move between applications and transfer information almost casually. In a Year 12 key skills lesson students could search the Internet for careers information and transfer the information competently into forms they had copied from the school's network without any help from the teacher. In practical work there is a growing understanding of presentation and the need to match the content of a document to the expectation of the reader. Project work shows the development of good research skills and the ability to document evidence. Students do not however display these skills in the organisation of their work files which have little indexing or structure to support revision.

121. The work seen in Year 13 reflects the high expectations of staff for students to produce work of a high professional standard. Current standards are above average. Overall the work seen in classes and in students' files reflects good progress by students from Year 12 to Year 13. Students move between applications on the school network with ease and use a variety of software with ease and casual confidence. They can choose appropriate software for a particular task such as making a presentation or constructing a data file and work independently and well on practical work. Some of the work in web-page design shows flair as well as technical competence. Project work, as at AS level, is a strength of the work of the department. It is very well managed and is now underpinned by very good standards for both design and implementation. Documentation shows a good understanding of the assessment criteria and the project work seen was at least good with some work well above the required standard. Some students' files, however, remain poorly organised for supporting future work, and some note making, when not directed by the teacher, lacks structure for reference.
122. Teaching was good or better in all the classes seen and is good overall. The teachers' up-to-date subject knowledge ensures confident teaching at a good pace in theory lessons with explanations of theory well linked to practical examples. Teachers make good use of technology in the classroom, with one room equipped with an interactive whiteboard, and also use student handouts effectively. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are shared with students so that students are more involved in their learning. In a Year 13 lesson on normalisation of database records students worked with a good case study handout. As the teacher explained the process students' understanding was checked by frequent questioning from the teacher which helped in ensuring that learning progressed smoothly. Teachers have high expectations of students and encourage independent learning.
123. The quality of learning is good. Students enjoy their learning and are particularly well motivated by the practical work. In a Year 12 lesson students were designing a leaflet to obtain a theatre audience's preferences for future programmes. The teacher made good use of the internet for students to investigate the elements of good questionnaire design and expected students to record their findings in a wordprocessed document. Students were well motivated by the exercise and the sustained pace of the lesson, resulting in some demanding questions for the teacher. Relationships between students and teachers are very good in both theory and practical classes. Teachers have excellent knowledge of the computer applications available to students on the school's network and provide very good support for practical work. In some cases this support is almost too good, with students relying on the teacher rather than working things out or consulting their notes. In a Year 13 class where students were working on their coursework projects, individual support from the teacher covered technical support from desktop publishing to web-page design. Some of this work was of exceptional quality.
124. The relatively new head of department is providing clear direction for the department. Some recent appointments have resulted in a small and effective team to promote ICT throughout the school. There has been a useful audit of the cross-curricular delivery of ICT and the curriculum has been revised to provide good continuity and progression right from Year 7, where a new taught course has been introduced, and throughout the school into the sixth form. There has been good rationalisation of the curriculum for AS and A level and the AVCE in the sixth form. Courses are well planned and effectively managed. There are detailed schemes of work with clear objectives and clear assessment requirements which are well used. For example, students' progress is regularly assessed and monitored against expectations and agreed deadlines. In discussions with students it is clear that they are well aware of how well they are doing

in the various parts of their course. Resources for ICT are very good and with continued development of the whole-school curriculum in ICT and a more uniform contribution by all departments the work in the sixth form should continue to develop rapidly and well.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

125. Physical education was sampled at the inspection with two lessons observed. Results at AS level in 2001 were well above average at grades A-E with all students passing and results at grades A-B were also well above average. AS level students made good progress in relation to their previous GCSE results. In the Year 12 lesson observed attainment was average overall with a wide variation in standards between the most able and weaker students. Students learned very well in this lesson in response to very good teaching as the group explored the protocol and reliability of testing. A Year 13 lesson about sport in Asia was satisfactory but students' learning was too teacher dependent and they were insufficiently involved in discussion. Standards reached in this lesson were average. Students are hard working, very well motivated and dedicated, particularly in their practical and coursework. They benefit strongly from their teachers' secure subject expertise and knowledge. Facilities and opportunities in some sports are very good and the standard of rowing is excellent.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

126. Art and media studies were sampled during the inspection with one lesson being observed in each subject.
127. Results in art at A level in 2001 were average at grades A-E and below average at grades A-B. They were not as good as the previous year when results were above average at grades A-E and average at grades A-B. In AS levels in 2001, results were below average at A-E and A-B grades with overall performance being pulled down by three students who were ungraded. In the one lesson observed, standards were much higher than indicated by previous examination results with students learning very well in response to very good teaching. There were good studio procedures where students profited from taking responsibility for their own work. The teacher used his very good knowledge well and good questioning skills inspired and challenged students of all abilities to raise their standards.
128. Results in media studies at AS level in 2001 were above average with students making good progress from their GCSE studies. The quality of teaching and learning was good in the lesson seen at the inspection. Students are successfully encouraged to work independently, have a good knowledge of the major concepts and theories and are developing a range of critical and practical skills well.

HUMANITIES

129. The main focus of the inspection was on psychology but sociology, history, geography and government and politics were also sampled.
130. The sociology results at AS level in 2001 were well above average at both A-E grades and the higher grades A-B. Two lessons in sociology were observed and good teaching

in both led to good learning and above average attainment. In one lesson a Year 13 group were asked to use their knowledge of the Marxist sociological perspective in order to prepare a statement in mitigation for a 16-year-old defendant who had caused death through dangerous driving. Students were not daunted by this demanding task and rose to the challenge in vigorous and well-focused discussion.

131. History results were well below average at A level in 2001 as in the previous year. Results were better at AS level in 2001 and average at A-E grades compared with all schools nationally and well above average at A-B grades. Those improved standards are being carried through into the A level course in Year 13. Two lessons were sampled in history. Teaching was good in one lesson and very good in the other. In Year 13 students attained above average standards in their knowledge of Bismarck and the unification of Germany and in learning the effect of Germany's imperial constitution on the people including the problems faced by 'excluded groups'. Although students did not ask any questions of the teacher they responded well to questions asked of them. The quality of small group discussion was good as students responded to challenging tasks set by the teacher. In a Year 12 group, discussion was again good with the composition well devised to encourage all to participate. Teaching gave sufficient direction but allowed students to take much responsibility for their learning and as a result the stances of the Tories and Whigs were much better understood by the end of the lesson. Standards reached were average overall with a few students well above average.
132. Geography results at A level were average at A-E grades in 2001 and below average at grades A-B and not as good as the above average results of the previous year. AS level results in 2001 were well above average at both grades A-E and A-B. One lesson was sampled in geography at A level. Year 13 students are attaining above average standards and in the lesson observed showed good knowledge and understanding of the influences of climate on human activity and applied their knowledge well in tackling a past examination question. Students also worked extremely well when paired together. Some very good hints were given on examination approaches and techniques. Teaching was well informed and good for much of the lesson but tailed off considerably in the latter stages. Homework was set well to extend students' learning further.
133. Results in government and politics were average at A level in 2001 and well above average at AS level. One lesson was sampled in government and politics. In that lesson students attained above average standards in discussing the potential uses and abuses of a referendum. Very good teaching skilfully led but did not dominate. Very good use and timing of questions resulted in all students being challenged. Simple but effective display material was used well to move the lesson on at a good pace and help students to tease out and understand different concepts of democracy. Students responded to questions well and asked a few very pertinent questions themselves.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- AS results in 2001 which were well above average.
- Extremely good specialist subject knowledge of the highly qualified staff
- Very carefully planned and well-resourced teaching.
- Extremely good relationships between staff and students resulting in a high level of student motivation and progress.

- Highly effective tutorial support, resulting in good learning by students across the whole ability range.

Areas for improvement

- More systematic sharing of information between departmental staff about the effectiveness of different teaching and learning styles.
- Increasing the proportion of A-B grades in examinations by encouraging students to develop more effective written evaluations and by providing students with more detailed individual progress targets.

134. Psychology was introduced into the sixth form three years ago and the subject has rapidly grown in popularity with 33 candidates at A level in 2001 and 35 in 2000. Results at A level have been mostly above average at A-E and average at A-B including in 2001. In 2001, AS level results were well above average with all students being successful at grades A-E and half successful at the higher grades A-B with 13 of the 34 candidates achieving a grade A. These results represent good progress for A level students in 2001 and very good progress for AS level students in relation to their earlier GCSE results.
135. Much of the work seen at both AS and A level included high quality responses to carefully selected case studies. In one Year 13 lesson, a selection of short video extracts allowed students to identify key features of autism. In follow-up group discussion, the students demonstrated their ability well to predict accurately how aspects of this condition might affect the family and those working with autistic children. Whilst some A level students have developed an effective writing style, the work from those predicted to achieve grades C-E lacked evidence of broad enough reading. This resulted in a tendency to oversimplify some of the more complex psychological viewpoints.
136. At AS level psychology is a completely new subject for all students in Year 12 and they make very rapid progress. They are very enthusiastic about the subject, which they find challenging and stimulating. Students work well, both in small groups and independently. In class discussions they listen carefully to the teacher and to each other and contribute willingly. The work seen from these students shows that they have already firmly grasped key psychological and empirical concepts. In the two Year 12 lessons observed, students were working on their individual studies, planning small-scale practical research projects. They understood the need to prepare a testable hypothesis and could discuss in detail the principles and practicalities of controlling and measuring research variables. Higher attaining students were able to draw on earlier reading. They could relate their pilot studies accurately to a range of published research in cognitive and child development psychology. They clearly understood the ethical considerations associated with experimental research. Lower attaining students in Year 12 have yet to develop the ability to write about the similarities and contradictions between the main approaches to psychology.
137. Relationships between the teachers and students are excellent. Boys and girls are equally enthusiastic and successful in their studies. The increasing popularity of the subject has resulted in relatively large teaching groups that are currently limiting the extent to which gifted and talented students are being further challenged. Teachers are aware of this and are correctly providing extension work.
138. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. The subject benefits from being taught by highly qualified and energetic teachers. A strong commitment to students' learning and achievement are features of the teaching. In the best examples

seen, careful lesson planning resulted in lessons that were equally challenging for students across the ability range. Lessons have clear, appropriate objectives. They are well structured, with a range of activities that address the course objectives particularly effectively. Students experience a range of learning opportunities that include very good formal teaching as well as opportunities to be involved in purposeful class discussions, paired and other small group work, independent projects and use of case study materials. Particular attention is paid to the consolidation of learning, using proven techniques to aid memory and understanding, such as 'mind maps' and 'spidergrams'. Strategies such as 'writing frames' are used well to improve students' analytical writing skills. ICT is used effectively for preparing course work but is not yet being systematically used for researching major topics.

139. Students value the opportunities, provided mostly in Year 12, to undertake practical work and visits. Individual tutorial support is very good and the ready availability of staff is much appreciated by students. Written work is marked rigorously and constructively using the relevant examination criteria, and includes particularly informative written comments. Students report that they receive additional individual advice directing them to further reading from specialist journals. Whilst the feedback from marking is thorough students would benefit from more detailed longer-term targets. These could be used to measure progress and give students a more accurate feedback of where they are at any given time in relation to where their teachers want them to be by the end of their course.
140. Planning is a strong feature of the teaching, both for individual lessons and across sequences of lessons. Independent study periods and homework are used thoughtfully and effectively to support and extend work done in lessons. Medium-term planning is very clear and well structured, reflecting considerable thought and a secure grasp of continuity and progression in learning. This includes good awareness of opportunities for personal, social, moral and cultural development and of the need to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
141. The very recently appointed subject co-ordinator has not yet had time to develop her role in monitoring and developing teaching styles and as yet there is insufficient sharing of information amongst departmental staff about the effectiveness of different teaching and learning styles. However, planning in the subject is very thorough and well developed, making good use of detailed performance data. Money for resources has been spent wisely and with considerable thought about how to use it effectively to support the teaching. An excellent range of supplementary material has been developed.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Current standards are above average.
- Teaching is mainly very good and teachers have high expectations, use a variety of teaching methods and set challenging and stimulating tasks.
- Students enjoy the subject, have positive attitudes to learning and readily encourage and support each other including in very effective discussion and development of ideas.
- Assessment data is used well to set targets and involve students in that process.

- Leadership of the subject is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Increasing the percentage of A-B grades in both AS and A level examinations.
- The skills of lower ability students in analysis of character, language and imagery in their writing about set texts.

142. Results at both A level and AS level in 2001 were above average at A-E grades but below average at grades A-B. In 2001 all 29 candidates were successful at grades A-E at A level and nearly all at AS level. In recent years results at A-E grades have usually been above average at A level but other than in 2000 they have been below average at grades A-B. Students made good progress in relation to their earlier GCSE results.
143. Standards of work seen at the inspection were above average particularly in Year 13. The most able students write fluently and concisely, showing very good knowledge and understanding of their texts, and make informed, independent judgements on writers' style, structure, language, purpose and form as well as explain and illustrate the impact of the writing. A Year 12 class studying *The Tempest* made very effective use of the AS level examiners' report to evaluate their own writing on the language of the play. They also learned the vital importance of identifying and addressing key words in examination questions such as 'compare' and 'how far'. The least able usually engage closely with plot and character and have some understanding of the historical context of the writing being studied. They do not, however, make sufficient reference to the author's voice or tone, or investigate how characters are created and why we react to them as we do: they also tend to paraphrase or explain quotations, rather than analyse them. All are able to use talk to explore new concepts and refine their opinions, but lower attaining students sometimes have difficulty in transferring their ideas effectively to their writing. Group work is very good, and an impressive feature of many lessons, because students are eager and good listeners and readily share their thoughts and feelings. This was seen to particularly good effect in one lesson when students were considering the ethical and moral dilemmas in the opening soliloquy of Dr Faustus. They usually support and help each other and give positive and useful feedback.
144. Students' progress is also helped greatly by their mature attitudes to study, their enthusiasm and genuine enjoyment of the subject, excellent relationships with each other and their teachers, and their personal organisation and willingness to do independent research and to take increasing responsibility for their own learning. A good example of this was observed when a Year 12 group presented their findings on morality plays to the rest of the class following good quality research and where presentation was helped by well devised information sheets.
145. In both Years 12 and 13, teaching is all at least good and is mainly very good. Teachers' planning for continuity and progression is very good, as is their subject knowledge, and they make learning both challenging and rewarding, using a wide variety of interesting and imaginative teaching strategies. They share the assessment criteria with students, so that they know what they have to do to achieve higher grades, make frequent and appropriate use of praise to encourage all to contribute and are well aware of the needs of individuals. As a result students learn very well. All teachers provide opportunities for students to review the effectiveness of their learning and to negotiate their own improvement targets, and marking is positive and helpful. In lessons, they make very effective use of open questioning to check students' understanding and to encourage them to consider other interpretations and approaches. Additionally, they have high expectations of all and plan opportunities for students to do independent research, using a range of ICT such as Power Point for

presentations, and the world wide web to discover and evaluate other opinions or information about writers, their texts and their times, and to report their findings to the class. In the very good lessons, students are given choices: they are encouraged to be creative, to make their own decisions, to test and challenge the opinions of others, including acknowledged literary critics such as A C Bradley and Dr Johnson, and to produce counter arguments supported by clear textual evidence.

146. The leadership and management of the dedicated, enthusiastic and hard-working team of sixth form teachers is very good. Communication between staff is excellent and, because the department has its own base, there are daily interchanges and consideration of ideas, strategies and best practice. There is a shared philosophy of English and a commitment to helping each student achieve the highest possible grade; and careful monitoring of lessons, together with peer observation, ensures high quality teaching and learning. The department is well resourced, all staff are fully aware of current educational initiatives, appropriate improvement priorities are identified in its action planning and responsibilities, such as the analysis and use of examination performance data and the mentoring of sixth form students, suitably delegated. Additionally, the department supports a large number of curriculum enrichment activities such as theatre visits, the sixth form debating club, the sixth form revision reading group, the school magazine and drama productions and extra tutorials for examination preparation.
147. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Standards achieved by all students are improving because of the effective implementation of strategies arising from the department's self-evaluation and appropriate action planning. Nearly all teaching is now very good and there are frequent opportunities for students to develop their independent learning through ICT, library research, presentations and group work. Their speaking and listening skills have become a strength of the sixth form because a wider range of opportunities, both in and outside the classroom, has been introduced.

MODERN LANGUAGES

148. The focus was on French, but German was also sampled. In German, the number of students entered for 'A' level in recent years has been low. Only two candidates were entered in 2001. Both were successful at A-E grades although neither obtained the higher A-B grades. Their results however showed distinct improvement compared with their GCSE grades. Results at A level were also below average in 1998 and 2000 but were average in 1999. In 2001, AS level results were well above average and bode well for A level examinations later this year.
149. In German, two lessons were observed. In one excellent lesson, the teacher's use of German to explain meanings and constructions was outstanding. Total immersion in the language was achieved and pupils responded enthusiastically to combine new and previous learning very effectively. They produced mature oral responses to stimuli drawn from authentic sources on the theme of crime and punishment. The other lesson was satisfactory. Skills were reinforced throughout, although questioning techniques require refinement. New elements of language were not introduced with the flair evident in the excellent lesson.
150. Scrutiny of written work indicates that all pupils in Year 13 have a very good understanding of word order, cases and tenses. The best pupils use quite sophisticated language and are not afraid to tackle complex issues, as for example in essays about the German school system.

French

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

Strengths

- A level results in 2001 were well above average at grades A-E and A-B.
- Teaching is always at least good and some is very good.
- All teachers use French effectively to express ideas and explain concepts and there is an insistence on the accurate, active use of language in all lessons.
- In all lessons there is positive interaction between students and the teacher.
- The recent development of analytic assessment procedures and the setting of more accurate student targets are providing a clear focus for improvement.

Areas for improvement

- Continuing the thrust towards high level questioning skills by students.
- The monitoring of teaching which currently is not rigorous enough.

151. A level results were well above average in 2001 at grades A-E and A-B. This high level of attainment has been achieved every year since the last inspection apart from 1999, when attainment was average. Girls generally achieve higher grades than boys. In relation to performance at GCSE, pupils' achievements are good. AS level results in 2001 were above average.
152. The standards of work of current students in Year 12 are average. They are benefiting from detailed coverage of basic vocabulary and grammar, with verb formation being an appropriate priority. Pupils often make notes independently. The quality of language in both speaking and written work is variable. Weaker pupils still have problems with agreement of subject and verb and of adjectives with nouns. Higher attainers are willing to express themselves in ambitious ways. In a well-constructed essay on her 'ideal man', a girl used the subjunctive effectively and there was a strong development of imagery in statements such as "Je veux trouver un homme qui peut faire chanter la lune". Well over half of the pupils put grammar rules into practice in their extended writing, as they discuss the extent to which they now live and work independently. In their work on the family, lower attainers rely heavily on standard learned phrases, and still experience difficulty with grammatical issues such as object pronoun order. Their teachers are aware of this, and target these pupils' weaknesses by giving them substantial practice on specific points. Reading aloud from text is sometimes anglicised, but the best pupils have good intonation and accents. There is no clear variation in the standards of boys and girls in this year group.
153. In Year 13, girls predominate numerically, and their attainment is overall higher than that of the boys. Students form a unified group. They work extremely co-operatively and support one another's learning very effectively. They are determined to achieve the best possible outcomes and work assiduously to achieve their demanding targets. Most have sufficiently strong language skills to express opinions clearly and to develop a sustained argument. They exhibit a high vocabulary retention rate from previous topics. Listening skills are of a high order, and key points from demanding texts are picked out systematically. These pupils continually search for 'le bon mot'. There are numerous examples of fluent, persuasive writing. For example, they develop an argument within an accurate grammatical framework when considering the effects of tobacco or pollution. Higher level work shows a refined level of individual interpretation as when one pupil discusses themes in the film 'Tirez sur le pianiste'. Occasionally, pupils use idiomatic language such as 'j'ai la gueule du bois' when describing the after effects of a

night out on the town. In classroom discussions, French is often used very productively and higher attainers have the confidence to express their thoughts with originality and to introduce humour spontaneously.

154. The quality of teaching and learning is good and some is very good. All teachers of French are well prepared, use a full range of resources and are committed to high standards. Expectations are high and all lessons incorporate a range of skills. Questions are probing and the use of French throughout the lesson is impressive. In a very good lesson about transport there was an insistence on accuracy and key words were clearly established. This lesson structure ensured that language was introduced systematically. In a lesson about alcohol consumption the teacher acted as an informed facilitator, skilfully teasing out of pupils their own viewpoints. All teachers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils. In a lesson about advertising, the teacher addressed the needs of all pupils, with appropriate consolidation for weaker pupils and extended questioning for the more able. Work is always demanding as exemplified in a well-paced lesson about smoking, where all attainment targets were covered. Sometimes teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to take the initiative in classroom discussions. Homework is challenging and is marked thoroughly.
155. The acting head of department has exciting ideas for the future, but as yet has no mandate to effect decisive change. The department is working towards a team approach, although the sharing of good practice is not yet a regular feature. The introduction of an analytical approach to assessment is a major breakthrough. Target setting is now much more refined, and value-added measures are beginning to inform future planning. The monitoring of teaching is not yet undertaken regularly. The acting head of department recognises the need for short-term target setting for all teachers. The school will soon lose the services of some talented and very experienced teachers through retirement. This will provide a major challenge to the department as they strive to maintain, and indeed improve on, the high standards currently being set. Since the last inspection, progress has been good.