

INSPECTION REPORT

HAGLEY ROMAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Hagley, Stourbridge

LEA area: Worcestershire

Unique reference number: 116994

Headteacher: Mr. T. Hammond

Reporting inspector: Mr. D. Pittman
16976

Dates of inspection: 4th – 8th February 2002

Inspection number: 194312

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:	LEA Special Agreement
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Brake Lane Hagley
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Telephone number:	01562 883193
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs. E. Yates
Date of previous inspection:	20 th – 24 th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
16976	Denis Pittman	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and achievements.</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
11229	Mike Freeman	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
22723	Bob Hartman	Team inspector	Sixth form Co-ordinator Mathematics	<p>How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?</p> <p>Sixth form aspects</p>
4922	Mike Driver	Team inspector	Chemistry Physics	
20716	Reg Grogan	Team inspector	History	
23550	Marie Blewitt	Team inspector	French German	
2276	Terry Payne	Team inspector	Music	
3958	Maureen Cawdron	Team inspector	English	
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12336	Malcolm Overend	Team inspector	Geography	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Hagley High is a mixed comprehensive Catholic school that has voluntary aided status. There are 1010 pupils and students on roll, with fairly equal numbers of boys and girls; there are 169 students in the sixth form. The school is oversubscribed, and because it draws from a wide area, over 90 per cent of pupils are 'bussed in'. The socio-economic circumstances of pupils and students are varied but are generally above average; the number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. While the proportion of pupils from ethnic minority families is below average, the proportion for whom English is an additional language is a little higher than nationally, although almost all pupils are fluent English speakers. The number of pupils who have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) is below average; similarly the number of pupils with statements of SEN is low. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment overall is above the expected standard.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school continues to be highly successful. Standards of attainment are well above the national average for all year groups. Pupils and students achieve well as a result of good quality teaching. Their personal development is significantly enhanced by an ethos which is caring, supportive, yet challenging; it is further underpinned by an active commitment to Christian values. Leadership and management are good. Relationships are very positive and are reflected in high standards of behaviour. The school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards of attainment in examinations and tests are well above national averages.
- Pupils and students are taught well.
- Pupils' and students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are very good.
- There is an extensive range of opportunities to broaden and enrich the personal development of pupils and students.
- The quality of care for pupils' and students' welfare is very good.
- The sixth form provision for students is a significant strength.

What could be improved

- Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 9-11.
- The provision for multicultural education.
- The balance of responsibilities and roles within senior management and the self-evaluation procedures for the school.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since the previous inspection in 1997. Standards of attainment in tests and examinations have continued to be improved and are well above average; the trend in improvement in GCSE examinations was better than the national picture. The quality of teaching has improved and is a major factor in promoting the high levels of achievement of pupils and students. There has been good improvement in the key issues identified in the last report. Assessment procedures are now more coherent, providing useful information for target setting. The physical resources for computers have improved through the provision of a whole-school network, but there are issues of accessibility related to an appropriate ICT curriculum for pupils. The library is now an effective information centre, but is not used sufficiently as a resource in lesson time. The involvement of governors is more effective through the work of established committees. However, the governors' role in monitoring is an area for further development.

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	A	C	A	

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

In the 2001 national tests for 14-year-olds, results were well above the national average. In English attainment was above average and above the performance of similar schools. Attainment in mathematics and science was well above average nationally and also in comparison with similar schools. The overall trend in test performances is in line with the national picture. The standards achieved were well above the average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds.

In GCSE examinations, results were well above the national average and well above the performance of similar schools. GCSE results have been consistently well above average in recent years. There are no significant differences in the attainment of boys and girls. The trend in GCSE standards is better than the national picture. Examination performance in most subjects was significantly above national figures, with particularly high standards being achieved in design and technology, child development, English language and literature, drama and music. Standards achieved in French were not as high as they should be. The school exceeded its overall target for GCSE examination performance by 2 per cent and has set a challenging one (70 per cent) for 2002.

Attainment at A level in 2001 was well above the national average; the overall performance of boys placed their results in the top 5 per cent of all schools and colleges. The achievement in the sixth form is good. Standards were well above average in biology, chemistry, English, French, history, mathematics, music, physics, but below average in geography and religious studies and well below average in art and design. All other subjects were average or above. Standards in the key skills of communication, application of number and information and communication technology are high.

Throughout the school there is no difference in the rate of progress made by boys or girls, pupils and students from different backgrounds or those who have special educational needs.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils and students show enthusiasm for school life; their positive attitudes help them to learn successfully.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils and students have high standards of behaviour; they work well together and show respect for the opinions and views of others. In most lessons teachers did not have to mention behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils and students show increasing confidence and maturity as they progress through the school. Relationships are a significant strength.

Attendance	Good. Above average, particularly low unauthorised absence.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The overall quality of teaching is good. There were examples of high quality teaching in many subjects; very good teaching was seen in drama, design and technology, history, music and physical education. Teaching meets the needs of pupils and students well.

The teaching in English and science is very good in Years 7 to 11; it is good in mathematics. The skills of literacy and numeracy are taught well. In all other subjects teaching is at least good, apart from business studies, French and geography where it is satisfactory. Across the school, the main strengths in the teaching are the teachers' knowledge of their subjects, the detailed and effective planning and comprehensive assessment procedures. The rapport and positive relationship between staff and pupils are significant features of most lessons. Pupils gain new knowledge very well and their understanding of issues shows good levels of maturity. Pupils work hard and concentrate well on their studies. They work effectively on their own initiative and organise themselves efficiently; generally a considerable amount of effort goes into written work and homework.

The overall quality of teaching in Years 12 and 13 is good; students learn well. The very good relationships between teachers and students promote a positive climate for learning and discussion. Teaching is very good in mathematics, German, music and psychology; it is satisfactory in business studies and geography.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The provision in the sixth form is very good. The absence of a discrete ICT course for Years 10 and 11 does not meet statutory requirements. The general program for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is very good. The extra-curricular activities provide very good learning opportunities for pupils and students.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. The relatively small number of pupils with special educational needs are supported well. Administrative systems are not concise and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are not consistently updated.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Most pupils who have English as an additional language are fluent in English and make the same good progress as other pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Spiritual and moral development are very good. Provision is strongly rooted in Christian values and contributes significantly to the prevailing positive ethos in the school. Pupils are friendly and courteous; they have a well-developed sense of right and wrong.
How well the school cares	Very good. Staff know pupils and students very well and are vigilant in

for its pupils	carrying out the school's arrangements for pupil welfare.
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HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher and senior staff provide effective leadership and support; targets for improvement are being met. Roles and responsibilities of the senior management team need to be restructured. The quality of department management is developing well; pastoral management is a strength.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses; there is an effective committee structure. Communication between the school and governors is open and productive. Statutory requirements are not met in respect of ICT in Years 10 and 11.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Systems for review and evaluation are being set in place. Annual department reviews are effective and there is some lesson monitoring, although this is not yet happening across the school.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Detailed planning enables resources to be efficiently deployed; there is a systematic identification of priorities and clear indication of action to be taken. Strong commitment to achieving best value is being well established. The school consults effectively.

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 like coming to school and they make good progress. • They think the teaching is good. • The expectation that pupils and students work hard and achieve of their best. • The school is approachable and well led. • The school helps their children to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information they get about their children's progress. • Working more closely with parents.

The inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by most parents. The use of targets and improved reports give a good analysis of pupils' and students' progress and achievements. The school has actively supported a Parent/Teacher Association, which recently folded through lack of parental interest. The school recognises the problems of communication in a large catchment area and is reviewing ways of gauging parental views on a more regular basis.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The size of the sixth form is in line with most other schools with a sixth form provision. There are currently 169 students, the great majority of whom are studying for AS or A levels. It provides a wide range of subjects and a vocational GNVQ course. Over half the students from Year 11 continue into the sixth form and a few students join from other schools. The 16+ examination results are well above average; the majority of students embark on two-year programmes leading to A level. The overall standard of attainment on entry is marginally above average.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provision is very good. Standards of attainment are well above average and students are achieving very well. Teaching is good in most subjects and very good in music, mathematics, German and psychology. On balance, standards have significantly improved since the previous inspection. The wider needs of students are very effectively met through an extensive enrichment programme. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The sixth form shows good cost effectiveness; the overall provision is a significant strength of the school.

Strengths

- Students achieve good results overall. The performance of boys at A level was in the top 5 per cent nationally.
- Students are mature and confident young adults.
- Teaching is good, with an above average proportion of lessons very good; subject knowledge is impressive and enables students to make substantial gains in their learning.
- The school offers a wide range of courses and provides rich opportunities for students' social and personal development.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are very effective and sensitive.
- The school provides good guidance and support for its students.

What could be improved

- More opportunities to engage in independent learning
- A programme of study skills so that all students acquire the necessary skills for lifelong learning

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 are well above average. Students achieve very well as a consequence of very good teaching.
Chemistry	Very good. Standards of attainment are well above average. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Physics	Very good. Standards of attainment are well above average. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Music	Excellent. Standards are well above average; students achieve very well because of the very good teaching. Students have positive attitudes and very good facilities are provided. A full range of instrumental tuition is available and in addition there is high quality extra-curricular work.
Geography	Satisfactory. Results are in line with the national picture. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching sometimes lacks sufficient challenge; there are few opportunities for fieldwork.
History	Very good. Results have improved and are now well above average. The overall quality of teaching is very good.
Psychology	Very good. Standards of attainment are above average as a result of very good teaching.
English	Very good. Standards of attainment are well above average. Teachers' considerable subject knowledge, enthusiasm and very high expectations enable students to achieve very well. The overall quality of teaching is good.
French	Very good. Results in 2001 were significantly above average. Students achieve very well as a result of good teaching. There is a tendency for some lessons to be too teacher-led.
German	Very good. Standards in German are high. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.

Work was sampled in other subjects. Teaching was good overall in these subjects; for example, in art and design, physical education and theatre studies students achieve well, and the standard of work is above average. In a GNVQ lesson the very good teaching enabled students to achieve well and make good progress in their learning. Standards in business studies are average where the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, but there are insufficient opportunities for independent learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. Very effective support and guidance are maintained through Years 12 and 13. They are provided with good guidance on academic studies and future opportunities. The assessment of students is good and their progress is monitored very well. Students are given clear realistic targets that motivate them.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. Development planning is very good. The performance of all groups of students is carefully analysed and evaluated. This information provides useful pointers for improvement.

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">• Their choice of courses.• Information about courses in the sixth form.• Academic support.• The teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information about their progress.• Careers advice.• Outside activities, including enrichment courses.• Their treatment as responsible adults.

About one third of the sixth form replied to the survey. Of these about 90 per cent said they would recommend the school – over 40 per cent would strongly recommend it. Whilst not questioning the validity of the survey, interviews with students by inspectors did not bring to the fore any of the points for improvement as being issues, indeed sixth formers appeared very happy with the sixth form provision, including information about their progress and the careers advice they receive.

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

Standards of attainment in examinations and tests are well above national averages.

1. Standards of attainment at the age of 14 are well above the national average. In the National Curriculum tests (SATs), pupils' standards in the core subjects were well above the national average. The results in 2001 were the best the school has ever achieved. Standards in mathematics and science were higher than those in English, although the latter was still above average. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls within the school. However, the performance of boys in these tests is significantly higher than the national picture for boys. Girls' attainment was much closer to the national situation. The pattern of high levels of achievement is reflected in teacher assessments for other subjects. Attainment in most subjects is above, and sometimes well above, the national expectation. The overall standard of performance in modern foreign languages and ICT was in line with national expectations.
2. The high standards achieved at the end of Year 9 are also repeated in GCSE performance. Results in GCSE examinations for 5 or more A* to C grades are well above the national average. This level of performance has been maintained in recent years. It is a significant achievement for the school that they have managed to sustain this level of consistency in their examination results. Some subjects recorded particularly high standards – these were in design and technology, English language and literature, drama and music. Overall standards in French were not as high as they should be, but some pupils did get the highest grade, A*. The attainment of boys and girls, relative to the gender comparisons nationally, were well above average. The hard work of pupils and staff was reflected in the fact that the school exceeded its predicted target by 2 per cent.
3. The overall performance of boys in A level examinations placed the school in the top 5 per cent of all post-16 providers. This is a significant and creditable performance. The overall standards achieved by girls was also significantly high, but were marginally outside the top 5 per cent category. The school is very successful in developing the potential of all its students. The expectation in most subjects is to produce above, and well above, average results. However, there are a few exceptions; for example, general standards in geography and religious education are below average, and in art and design they are well below average. The school pays appropriate attention to developing the complementary key skills of communication, number application and information processing.
4. In order to sustain this level of high achievement, the school has used its substantive data on the potential of pupils to address the problem of underachievement. To that end a small group of pupils in Year 11 have been identified and they have been encouraged to follow an innovative 'performance enhancement programme'. Pupils are given guidance and tasks related to study skills. A time management activity has been set up to help them to plan their work more effectively. Pupils are enthusiastic and appreciative of the efforts the school is making in order to support them. The course is staffed by the senior management, which reflects the importance of the school's commitment to the principle of maximising the potential of all pupils and students. The school is meeting the specific needs of these pupils well.

Pupils and students are taught well.

5. The high levels of pupil and student achievement are a reflection of the good quality of teaching they receive. Particularly high standards of teaching are evident in drama, design and technology, history, music and physical education. The starting point for high quality teaching is the teachers' knowledge of their subjects. Teachers are able to use their expertise to extend and challenge pupils' understanding. For example, in a Year 11 music lesson, the teacher skilfully questioned and drew effective comparisons about different musical styles so that pupils were able to successfully identify the distinguishing features of Renaissance, baroque and classical music. In a Year 8 lesson on 'global warming', the subject expertise and enthusiasm of the teacher promoted good learning outcomes; pupils were motivated and wanted to contribute to the lesson. The use of open-ended questions such as 'Why is this?' 'What can you tell me about this?' created an environment conducive to pupils to express their ideas. Occasionally, lessons can be too teacher-directed. For example, in a Year 11 business studies lesson, the teacher was the main resource for information, and in consequence there were too few opportunities for pupils to discover points for themselves. Generally there is insufficient use of ICT in these lessons. Most subject lessons are well planned to ensure appropriate coverage of the course material, using a range of resources, and for setting of homework. Most parents felt that the homework set was about right in quantity and was sufficiently challenging for their children.
6. In almost all lessons, teachers have high expectations of achievement and anticipate high levels of productivity. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson involving the study of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', the tasks set by the teacher had short timescales for completion. This effectively maintained a good pace of learning and stimulated the pupils to produce a lot of interesting ideas. The pupils responded well to the challenges set. Similarly, in a Year 10 lesson on child development, the teacher's skilful change of activities from discussion, to class reading, to individual and group tasks, presented continuous challenge for the pupils. The range of responses produced was particularly impressive.
7. The staff have a high degree of professional competence and are keen to be involved in promoting new initiatives. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson on algebraic equations, the teacher began the lesson very effectively with a practice of numerical skills; this activity is in line with the government recommendations in promoting a numeracy strategy for schools. In relation to the comparable literacy initiative, most staff give appropriate attention to the consolidation of key terminology and give guidance as to how written work could be structured. In a Year 11 lesson on parliamentary reform in the 19th century, the teacher led a very informative discussion on comparisons with our electoral system today. Pupils showed a good understanding of the basic tenets of democracy and their potential role as 'citizens'.

Pupils' and students' attitudes to learning and behaviour are very good.

8. Pupils and students have enquiring minds and actively seek to improve their standard of work. In many of the lessons, pupils' and students' attitudes were very good. They want to learn, entering into a genuine partnership with their teachers to do so. Pupils work hard. This commitment to their studies was clearly shown in a Year 9 English class who were learning about characterisation in Macbeth. Despite the fact that this was the last lesson of the day, pupils were keen to answer questions and were concentrating hard. Pupils listen to their teachers, and to each other, responsibly and maturely in nearly all lessons. They contribute very well. Pupils and students form constructive relationships with one another and with teachers and other adults in the school.

9. A notable feature of pupils' and students' attitudes to learning is the way in which they discuss their work. They constantly search for meaning. In a Year 9 history lesson which was looking at the role of women in World War 1, pupils were discussing in groups. They collaborated well with each other and listened carefully to the expression of ideas. A genuine respect for each other was being shown in their actions. Pupils are prepared to help one another. This lesson was a cameo of the underlying strength of the relationships within the school.
10. Pupils and students behave well in lessons and around the school. There are relatively few exclusions. Pupils are very sensible in the way that they interact and respond to each other. They do not take advantage of different styles of working in class. For example, in a Year 9 science class studying 'diffusion', pupils were invited to write their answers to a task on the board. They responded sensibly and maturely. All were keen to participate and wanted to share their learning with others. Pupils respect the rules, showing a high level of responsibility. Students in Years 12 and 13 act most responsibly. They follow the rules concerning use of time for private study, and they do not waste their time. Attendance is extremely high in the sixth form. Students have a strong sense of purpose and want to achieve high standards. In discussions with students in the sixth form, they explained that they viewed their time of A level study as an investment in their own future.
11. Overall, pupils and students have very positive attitudes to their work and develop well as mature, independent learners.

There is an extensive range of opportunities to broaden and enrich the personal development of pupils and students.

12. The school provides a very good range of opportunities for all aspects of pupils' and students' personal development. However, the atmosphere within the school, and the high quality of relationships throughout, have an even greater impact on pupils' and students' development into capable young adults. Staff provide very good role models, notably in terms of their integrity, high expectations and respect for students. However, the sixth form students, being closer in age, have an even more important part to play in providing an example for younger pupils. Older students play a very active role in the school; they take on many duties, including those of prefects and supporting younger pupils with their reading. To all their duties, they bring a sense of responsibility, good humour and commitment to the school.
13. There are high aspirations and great determination to succeed on the part of staff, pupils and students alike. The management of the school underpins these features by efficient organisation and, above all, care for, and sensitivity to, the needs of each individual student. A very strong feature of the school is the way in which it encourages and manages the social development of pupils and students. There are many opportunities for pupils to work together, both in school and on external visits. Staff give freely of their time to support pupils and students who experience difficulties with their work; there is a strong bond between teachers and their charges.
14. Curricular arrangements for GCSE courses are good; the sixth form provision is very good. Pupils and students are offered an appropriate range of choices in their options and some careful timetabling enables the great majority of students to have their first choice of subjects. The school asks pupils and students which subjects they want to study and then arranges option blocks around these choices. This good practice helps to ensure an initial interest and motivation for the subject to be studied. The extent to which the school's curriculum goes beyond the usual lessons is very good. The range

of extra-curricular activities is impressive. The opportunities offered include residential visits, foreign exchanges and theatre and museum trips. These events are supplementary to the clubs and activities which take place regularly during the year. Most teachers are responsible for at least one club or activity and all activities are open to every pupil and student.

15. The opportunities for the pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development are very good. Pupils are encouraged to take a full and active part in the Christian community and to put their beliefs into action. The school has well-defined spiritual and moral values. These values underpin the way the school operates; they impact positively upon relationships, behaviour and attitudes. The prevailing ethos is reflected in what happens in classrooms. In a Year 11 English lesson pupils were exploring the feelings of being a parent. The material under discussion was a poem in the form of a prayer for a child. Pupils were able to sensitively empathise with the feelings of the woman. A pupil also suggested that the relationship with God was an extra dimension to the poem. In a Year 11 drama lesson pupils had prepared set pieces for their examination assessment which poignantly expressed powerful emotions about love, loss, death and world peace. In Year 7, a PSHE lesson focussed on the theme of 'appearances'. The range of the discussion included practical issues such as hair colour, make-up for men, tattoos to ideas about the nature of beauty. The lesson offered many opportunities for reflection on non-material issues that affect their lives. In different ways the range of experience which is shown in these examples is also reflected in many other lessons. This shared expression of values is a strength of the school.
16. Planning for the introduction of citizenship in September is satisfactory. The school has carried out a thorough audit of its provision for citizenship across all subjects and in the personal and social education programmes. It has still to complete its plans to ensure that all the main elements of the citizenship programme of study are covered in Key Stage 4. A strong feature of the school's provision is the encouragement of responsible attitudes to the wider community through support for Catholic charities at local, national and international levels. The CAFOD child protection project launched during inspection week was inspirational in encouraging pupils to accept their Christian responsibility to help children caught up in war.

The quality of care for pupils' and students' welfare is very good

17. The school very successfully achieves its aim of being a safe and caring community whose daily work is underpinned by Christian values.
18. The quality of the school's care for pupils is particularly well supported through the pastoral arrangements. A strong feature is the commitment and hard work of heads of year and form tutors. They know their pupils very well, as do subject teachers. Parents are confident that the school will deal promptly and helpfully with any problems their children might have; they believe that teachers are always prepared to listen to pupils and students. The pupils themselves are confident that teachers will always help if there is a problem. In discussion with a group of Year 7 pupils one commented forcefully that bullying is not tolerated.
19. There are appropriate arrangements for child protection, including good, detailed guidance for staff. Good provision is made for first aid. Governors take their responsibility for pupils' health and safety seriously. Appropriate risk assessments have been made for various areas of the school; this was an omission at the previous

inspection. Very good arrangements are established for pupils' departure by bus at the end of the school day.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

There are no separate lessons for ICT in Years 10 and 11 and insufficient ICT opportunities for some Year 9 pupils.

20. The overall provision for ICT facilities is below the national average. The provision has been improved since the last inspection by the installation of a network. There is generally insufficient access for use of ICT within subject areas. Departments are unable to consistently build into their programme of study applications of ICT. Most subjects tend to work off short-term projects in order to meet National Curriculum requirements rather than working with computers on a regular basis. This is a particular feature in business studies. In Years 7, 8 and 9 most pupils have an appropriately designated lesson for ICT. The standards achieved are above average. However, the timetabling provision for a second foreign language means that a significant minority of pupils in Year 9 do not have the same continuity of ICT experience as others. This is a weakness in the school's provision. A significant proportion of pupils have their own computers but there are incompatibilities with the software the school uses for word processing and the standard package available on most PCs.
21. In Years 10 and 11 there are no specific timetabled lessons for ICT. This situation presents a further problem in sustaining the continuity of pupils' skills and competencies in ICT. For example, in a Year 11 extension studies lesson, for a few pupils this was their first experience of using computers in school again since Year 10. In consequence they had forgotten how to use some of the computer facilities. On balance, the provision for ICT is predominantly through the National Curriculum requirements of specific subjects. The constraint of limited access to facilities results in a 'patchy' provision for pupils.

The provision for multicultural education.

22. The overall strength of the cultural provision has been maintained since the previous inspection. There are many examples of work in lessons where pupils' cultural understanding has been enhanced. For example, in history, there is a major emphasis on studying different communities at different times. In psychology the effect of cultural differences is explored and how this subsequently impacts upon the nature of interaction between individuals. In music, pupils are made aware of the cultural significance of African drumming. However, it is this aspect of exploring multicultural and ethnic traditions, which is not strongly evident in the departmental guidelines of other subjects and which needs to be addressed. This aspect was identified as an issue for development at the time of the previous inspection.

Improve balance of roles and responsibilities within the senior management team and enhancing review procedures for the school.

23. In terms of its core activities of maintaining and raising standards, sustaining a high quality of teaching and ensuring an appropriate provision for the personal development of its pupils and students, the school is well managed and successful. However, the senior management structure which has currently evolved is not appropriate to the continuing development of the school. The composition of the team is too few and individuals are carrying too heavy a load of responsibility. This situation has arisen

partly because of the promotion of the deputy headteacher to the headship of the school and also because of the need of the governors to keep a firm control on staffing expenditure. Whilst individuals are working effectively within their own sphere of influence, there are severe constraints upon opportunities for sustained monitoring and evaluation of the school's activities. Within the team there is also an inequitable distribution of major responsibilities. The school has appropriately identified in its improvement plan a model for self-review. This process and the subsequent procedures for collecting information are in the early stages of discussion. In order to support this strategy the governors and senior staff will need to rationalise their work and management responsibilities.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to raise standards the headteacher, governors and staff should:

- Improve the curriculum provision in ICT for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and achieve a greater consistency in access to ICT lessons for some Year 9 pupils.
- Develop more awareness of multicultural education issues in the curriculum.
- Review the delegated responsibilities within the senior management team; introduce a programme of systematic monitoring, review and evaluation in the school.

Sixth form issues:

- Develop more opportunities for independent learning.
- Implement a programme of study skills so that all students acquire the necessary skills for lifelong learning.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	42
	Sixth form	40
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	0	14	17	10	1	0	0
Percentage	0	33	41	24	2	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	0	15	19	6	0	0	0
Percentage	0	38	47	15	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.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	835	1010
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	41	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	5	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	96	7

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	30

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.3
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	94	70	163

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	79	83	85
	Girls	58	57	57
	Total	137	140	142
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	84 (76)	85 (78)	87 (79)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	37 (44)	66 (58)	60 (51)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	76	85	78
	Girls	57	57	50
	Total	133	142	128
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (81)	88 (78)	78 (83)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	45 (48)	62 (60)	57 (48)
	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	91	74	165

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	61	90	91
	Girls	49	71	74
	Total	110	161	165
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	67 (70)	98 (96)	100 (96)
	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	47
	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)

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	44	31	75

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	23.8	22.1	23.1	-	-	-
National	16.9	17.9	17.4	-	-	-

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	n/a
	National	9.8

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	0
Indian	3
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	982
Any other minority ethnic group	5

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	17	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	59.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.2

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	191

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.7
Key Stage 4	22.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000 - 2001
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	£
Total income	2467027
Total expenditure	2424712
Expenditure per pupil	2401
Balance brought forward from previous year	116255
Balance carried forward to next year	158570

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	14.7
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	13.8

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	6
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	1010
Number of questionnaires returned	254

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	43	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	48	44	2	0	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	46	45	4	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	48	15	2	3
The teaching is good.	43	51	0	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	41	26	8	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	39	10	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	34	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	20	45	26	5	4
The school is well led and managed.	43	48	1	0	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	50	45	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	41	13	4	9

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

24. Standards in the sixth form are well above average and students are achieving well given their levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form. It is rare for a student to fail to complete a course of study.
25. Examination results in the 2001 A level examinations were well above average. The results for boys were very high – in the top 5 per cent nationally and for the girls it was well above average. Overall results were well above average for all schools and colleges, including independent schools. These figures represent an improvement on the results for 2000. Results in the new AS level examination mirror A level results, although the few entries in some subjects make it difficult to make secure national comparisons. The 2001 A level results showed that the students achieved well relative to their GCSE results. All students taking the Intermediate GNVQ in health and social care achieved a qualification in 2001, over a quarter of these gained a merit. These are above the corresponding national figures. A very small number of students retook some GCSEs. This involved over ten subjects, some with entries of only a single candidate, making comparisons statistically invalid. Nevertheless over a third of the entries resulted in a grade C or better.
26. As a result of changes in statistical methods it is not possible to compare A/AS average points scores with national figures before 2001 on a like-for-like basis. However, annual AS average points scores show that the results for 2001 were significantly higher for the school than in the previous two years. The school's results for these years were above the comparable national figures.
27. Results in the 2001 A level examination were well above average in biology, chemistry, English, French, history, mathematics, music, physics, but below average in geography and religious studies and well below average in art and design. All other subjects were average or above. Results in 2001 improved from 2000 in biology, chemistry, English, general studies, history, psychology, physics and sports studies. Improvement was particularly striking in history, although very credible improvements were made in biology, English and physics. Results were maintained in most other subjects, although there were small declines in business studies and communications studies. As mentioned above, entry numbers make national AS comparisons difficult, but the overall impression is that they broadly reflect overall attainment at A level. Well above average points scores were achieved by biology, chemistry, English, mathematics, physics and religious studies.
28. Students obtain better results in theatre studies, English, French, and design and technology than in the other subjects that they study.
29. The standards of work seen during the inspection reflect the well above average standards reached in examinations. Students are achieving very well in all subjects inspected, except in business studies and geography, where achievement is satisfactory and chemistry, physics and history, where it is good. The generally high level of achievement is the result of the combination of good teaching and the very good attitudes of students. The high standards evident at the previous inspection have been further improved.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

30. The previous inspection report remarked upon the overwhelmingly positive attitude to learning of all students, and also to the good behaviour and good personal development. These high standards have been maintained, and in the case of behaviour improved even further. Students show very good attitudes to learning. They work hard and with enthusiasm. They show a strong interest and commitment to their work. Students are attentive, respectful to adults and co-operate well with each other and with staff.
31. Behaviour is very good overall and there have been no exclusions in the past two years. There is almost a total absence of bullying or racism. The sixth form presents a harmonious atmosphere conducive to good learning and the maintenance of very good relationships with each other and with adults. The sixth form common room and other rooms used by students are free from litter and graffiti. The strong caring and 'family' ethos of the school, coupled with good positive support from staff, contributes substantially to the very good behaviour of students. The good relations with pupils in the main school can be attributed to the policy of having sixth form teaching rooms integrated within the main school.
32. The personal development of students is very good. Students take a full part in the life of the school, undertaking responsible tasks, such as head boy and head girl, and offering to be reading partners with pupils from the main school. Students also support a wide range of local and national charities, such as CAFOD. The sixth form committee works well and helps to foster independence, maturity and a sense of responsibility in those students involved. Sixth form students are well adjusted, realistic and a lively group. They enjoy their time at school, which the great majority specifically choose to attend, and contribute significantly to the life of the school community.
33. Attendance in the sixth form is higher than in the main school, 93 per cent compared to 92 per cent. These good figures arise primarily because of the rigorous and consistent monitoring of attendance and lateness by the sixth form staff. Students keep a record sheet of their own attendance, which is eventually stored in their file. Punctuality is good and lessons start and finish on time. The large scale 'bussing in' of students from a very wide catchment area occasionally results in lateness due to mechanical failure, bad weather or traffic congestion.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

34. The overall quality of teaching is good. This results in all students learning and achieving well. All lessons observed were at least satisfactory and three out of eight were either very good or better. Teaching is at least good in all subjects apart from business studies and geography where it is satisfactory. The standard of teaching in German, mathematics, music and psychology is very good.
35. Many of the good features evident in the main school are also present in sixth form teaching and learning. The greater maturity and increasing independence of students help the effectiveness of teaching. A significant strength of teaching is the very good specialist subject knowledge of staff. Teachers know the various examination specifications well and ensure students are fully conversant with examination technique. Other very good features of teaching that promotes students' progress are high teacher expectations and very good planning. In many lessons good questioning

skills allowed teachers to draw the best from students and to challenge their thinking; this was particularly apparent in English, mathematics, chemistry and physics.

36. Individual needs are well met in lessons. There is a good match between students' capabilities and the work they are given. All students are included well because effective support and guidance result in a generally good match of courses to individual needs and aspirations. A series of sixth form induction events supports this.
37. The school provides well for students with special educational needs. Teachers know which of their students have special educational needs and what these needs are, providing extra support in lessons. On several occasions the school has negotiated with examination boards on behalf of students. A GNVQ student has been provided with a laptop computer to assist in their studies.
38. The key skills of communication, use of number and information and communication technology are specifically taught in the intermediate GNVQ in health and social care. The sixth form management team has used experiences gained here as a test bed for the teaching and assessment of key skills generally – problems were found and have been ironed out. At present all Year 12 students will, in 2002, attempt level 3 communication within the course "Certificate in Catholic studies". Currently the school uses the key skills areas within subjects; for example, use of number in the sciences and communication skills in history. Once the planned upgrading of computer facilities is completed in the sixth form study centre, it is intended to increase students' effective use of information and communication technology. The strategy for the future is to develop the formation of key skills at subject level, building on teachers' experiences in GNVQ.
39. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the previous report. At that time reference was made to significant weaknesses in some lessons; this situation no longer applies.

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

40. There is very good overall provision to meet the interests, aptitudes and needs of all students. There is a good range of AS and A level courses that provide a good degree of development from previous work at GCSE. There are also some courses that are 'new' to the students. These include theatre studies, law, music, physical education and psychology.
41. The school, which already shares German teaching with the adjacent school, intends increasing this co-operation to allow for the provision of courses which would attract uneconomic numbers in a single school. A course that is under active consideration is politics.
42. There have been instances in the past of the school starting new courses as a direct response to students' wishes; these include theatre studies, psychology and, as previously mentioned, politics. Conversations with students suggest that the school effectively satisfies their choices of courses. The time allocation for subjects is equitable. Students have equal access to the curriculum.
43. Apart from students taking the Intermediate level GNVQ in health and social care, all students follow a four AS course in Year 12. Most then select three of these to continue to A level in Year 13. Students are also given the opportunity to take a general studies

course, to AS or A level. This appropriately broadens the areas of study. In addition in Year 12 and 13 there is a religious studies course which leads to a Certificate in Catholic studies. In both Year 12 and Year 13 there is a good range of physical activities, personal and social education, the opportunity for work experience and the chance to study a two year AS course in mathematics, English, religious education or further mathematics. Statutory requirements are met.

44. The sixth form curriculum provides many opportunities for students to develop as citizens. In particular, the Year 12 RE course highlights human rights and all pupils make a presentation, which is assessed, on an aspects ranging from the arms trade to refugees. The retreat week at Soli House includes discussion of global issues such as fair trade and the use and abuse of power in the world. In Year 13, the programme of visiting speakers in general studies widens students understanding of political issues such as the Arab/Israeli dispute, the role of NATO and the plight of prisoners of conscience. Students are well informed about the issues that are shaping the modern world.
45. Key skills are taught well through subjects, apart from in the Intermediate level GNVQ in health and social care, where they are taught as discrete subjects. There is also time within the PSHE programme for key skills monitoring. Communication skills are well developed through the Certificate in Catholic studies which all Year 12 students take. Numeracy and graphical skills, for example, are developed well in physics and chemistry. History, where there are opportunities to present and criticise views, makes a good contribution to the development of students' communication skills. In psychology too students are given opportunities to practise their communication skills. Opportunities for developing skills in ICT are more limited, though many students use computers at home, sometimes using the Internet for independent research. It is somewhat surprising that sixth formers are not offered an external qualification in ICT, such as a short GCSE or AS level.
46. Independent study skills are encouraged, but there is no structured course in study skills which could equip students for lifelong learning.
47. The opportunities for social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are very good. Spiritual development is very good; a strong Catholic ethos pervades all aspects of school life. Assemblies and a regular Mass promote a strong corporate spiritual ethos. However, there is little planned development of spiritual growth in subjects themselves apart from religious education.
48. Moral development is very good. The general studies course has a unit on culture, morality and humanities. Aspects of morality are also encountered in history, English and psychology. The general religious education programme deals with medical ethics and human rights. Moral issues are also reinforced in assemblies and in tutor groups, where a great deal of fund-raising is organised. There is widespread support for overseas development through CAFOD.
49. Social development in the sixth form is good. Students develop a sense of community from sixth form life. They organise Christmas card making for Amnesty International, help with paired reading and organise discos for younger pupils. There are also many opportunities for contributing to team sports in extra-curricular time. However, there are fewer opportunities for sixth formers to take responsibility than in some schools, for example, there is no school council.

50. Cultural development is good, with opportunities for theatre trips, debates, musical and drama performances. In the subjects English and music there are good opportunities to support the promotion of cultural development. Nevertheless, there are few planned opportunities to appreciate the diversity of other cultures. There is some limited study of world religions in religious education but very little direct involvement with representatives of these religions.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

51. The procedures for monitoring students' academic progress are good. The use of assessment to track the progress of individual students and to provide the appropriate support when needed is good. Students are aware of their target examination grades and what they need to do to attain or surpass them. The comprehensive records for each student are well maintained. These include all academic and personal achievements.
52. Effective use is made of national, local and school examination data to help form the basis for negotiating targets with individual students. There are regular meetings with form tutors in which progress towards meeting these targets is reviewed. Any concerns of subject teachers are communicated to form tutors who will investigate further and meet with the student concerned if necessary. There are formal sixth form clinics, which parents are invited to attend, for students whose progress is causing concern. Assessment data is well used to provide indications of concerns before they become major problems.
53. Assessment procedures and their use within subjects are good overall. They are very good in music, where the assessment includes a useful element of self-assessment. Marking overall is of a good quality and informative with clear pointers given for improvement. This is particularly so in chemistry, physics, mathematics, English and psychology. The quality of marking is variable in geography; there is no common approach to assessment and marking across the subject. Most departments make use of published and school value-added data to evaluate their own performance.
54. The large amount of examination data is also used as a tool to give indications as to the relative attainment and progress of students in their different subjects.

Advice, support and guidance

55. The report from the previous inspection noted the good care and welfare given to students within a purposeful Christian community. This is still the case, and the good care and welfare provided to students is a tangible strength of the sixth form.
56. Child protection procedures are well organised and effective. Most staff have received some basic child protection training and awareness. The school makes good use of appropriate external support agencies, such as Social Services, and the sixth form taps into these agencies as required. Health and welfare arrangements are good and students feel safe and secure in the sixth form. The school carries out good and thorough health and safety audits and pays good regard to first aid and fire safety. Apart from the high standards of pastoral care, personal support and guidance provided by the sixth form staff, the students themselves support each other effectively within an informal peer group system. There is an almost total lack of bullying and racism or

other inappropriate behaviour. There are good procedures in place to maintain and monitor the attendance of students.

57. The information and advice presented to parents and students by the sixth form staff are of a very high quality, for example the excellent sixth form prospectus, which is clear, readable and informative. The very good and comprehensive careers/higher education advice and the good PSHE programme are important features of the sixth form life, greatly valued by parents and students. The induction programme for new students is well structured and helps settle to them into the sixth form life. There is, however, no study skills programme which would help to develop students' independent learning skills and their capacity to cope with the heavy workload in the sixth form, which would prepare them for life in a university learning environment, as well as for lifetime learning.
58. The good pastoral care and support given to sixth form students contributes significantly to their well-being and happiness, leading to high standards of learning and personal development.

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

59. The previous inspection remarked upon the generally good links and partnership with parents. This is still the case and the school works hard to maintain and improve further these good links with parents. A constant difficulty is the very large catchment area of the school. This makes regular involvement by parents difficult and inconsistent. Regrettably, the parent-teacher association has ceased to exist due mainly to parent apathy and transport difficulties. For similar reasons, attendance by parents at the annual meeting of the governing body is low, with 20 parents attending the last meeting. Support from parents, however, is generally good, and the regular parent-teacher consultative meetings are well attended and productive.
60. Parents of sixth formers are supportive. The information they receive on their children's progress is clear and helpful. The sixth form prospectus is well written, clear and informative. Sixth form staff take great pains to produce lucid and helpful information for parents and students. Very few parents help in the school, although the sixth form does make good use of parents for careers advice; for example, a parent who is a lawyer gave a talk to the sixth formers on 'Careers in the Law'. Parents are involved with their children's homework and the homework diary is a useful device for parent-school communication and monitoring.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

61. Leadership and management in the sixth form are very good. The head of sixth form is very much committed to providing a high quality education to all sixth form students. He is very much aware of the changes and innovations in post-16 education at the present time. The heads of subject support him in this. He is always available for students for help and advice, which is much appreciated. Relations between students and staff are very good – a very positive ethos pervades the sixth form. This has a good effect on the overall culture of the school.
62. At the subject level, management and leadership are excellent in music. There are regular and rigorous departmental reviews, ICT is effectively used in the management of the department and there is a very supportive link governor. Management is good in the other subjects inspected, with the exception of geography where it is satisfactory. There is some unevenness in the extent of formal assessment of teaching by heads of subject. However, the same practice of teacher appraisal is followed as in the main school.
63. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities towards the sixth form. Through its committees it satisfactorily monitors both provision and performance. There are governors linked to specific subjects, but in many cases their role is sometimes limited to observing.
64. Resources are well used and the planning of the timetable is good. Financial planning is good. The sixth form is cost-effective, despite some relatively small teaching groups. The funds that the school receives for the sixth form effectively balance the spending on the sixth form. There is no significant use of school funds to subsidise the sixth form from other areas of the school.
65. The match of teaching expertise to the demands of the curriculum is good. The preparations and professional development to teach Curriculum 2000 have been good and have included training in the assessment and teaching of key skills by several teachers, as well as critical evaluation of the 'new' courses offered by the various examination boards.

Resources

66. The current accommodation used for sixth form teaching is satisfactory overall. The accommodation for music is excellent, good in modern foreign languages but not satisfactory in English because it is taught in three different buildings. For other subjects it is satisfactory. The sixth form study centre is a splendid building, light, airy and spacious. However, it will be much improved when its planned computers are installed in the near future.
67. The library, which is well managed overall, has a very modest stock of books aimed at sixth formers. Its computer resources are very well used at lunchtimes, mainly by main school pupils. Sixth formers do not perceive it as a significant learning resource. The insufficient use of the library as a resource is clear in English. Similarly, computers in the school are not used as much as they might be, as the quality of ICT hardware is insufficient to meet the high demand and, in some cases, considerable skills which many of the students gain at home.

68. The overall quantity and quality of learning resources are satisfactory, but with some variation between subjects. For example, in English lack of access to computers is a problem, in music resources are good but more are needed, geography has no ICT resources and aging book resources. In mathematics, the sciences and modern foreign languages there are some high quality in-house produced resources such as worksheets and booklets.

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

In the inspection, 10 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
Chemistry	1	-	43	-	5	-	0.77
Religious Studies	5	60	85	20	26	1.20	2.38
Geography	1	100	74	-	6	1.00	1.18
History	1	-	-	-	-	-	-

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	25	100	87	72	43	7.92	5.80
Biology	21	95	88	43	34	6.48	5.25
Chemistry	26	100	90	58	43	6.92	5.90
Other Sciences	3	100	90	-	30	2.67	5.16
Other Social Studies	11	100	87	18	34	4.73	5.30
Physics	20	90	88	50	40	6.80	5.67
Business Studies	10	100	92	-	32	4.00	5.50
Sports/Physical Education Studies	14	100	92	7	25	4.57	5.09
Religious Studies	11	82	92	36	38	5.27	5.84
Art and Design	11	73	96	9	46	2.91	6.57
Music	8	100	93	62	35	8.00	5.74
Full Design and Studies	8	100	91	25	30	5.25	5.38
Geography	13	92	92	31	38	5.08	5.74
History	12	100	88	33	35	6.33	5.45
Communication Studies	5	100	93	40	31	6.40	5.53
French	6	100	89	33	38	7.00	5.59
German	3	67	91	33	40	5.33	5.81
English Literature	17	100	95	53	37	7.18	5.91
General Studies	72	82	85	33	30	5.00	4.91

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health & social care		7	-	3	-	-	-

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- A level results in recent years have consistently been well above the national average.
- Students are well motivated and achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.

Areas for improvement

- More opportunities to explore mathematics individually in the form of short projects.
- More use of ICT to support learning in mathematics.

69. Over the last few years standards for A level have been consistently well above average. It is one of the stronger subjects in the school. The proportion of students gaining A - B grades in 2001 was 72 per cent, well above the national figure of 43 per cent. For the last three years all students have gained a grade A – E, compared with the corresponding national percentage of 88 per cent. The AS level results for the last few years, where a statistical comparison is possible, have been well above average. All students taking further mathematics A level in 2001 achieved the highest grade. Given the small entry, these results are difficult to analyse, but they are certainly above average. Statistical analysis of A level results in conjunction with students' GCSE results two years previously show that they make very good progress during the sixth form. There is no significant difference in attainment or progress between females and males. It is difficult to make national comparisons for the GCSE resit group; however, in 2001 almost 90 per cent gained an A* - G grade and 40 per cent an A* - C grade.
70. The standard of work seen in Year 13 matched the well above average A level results. Achievement is also well above average. There is no significant difference in either attainment or progress between males and females. Students take a pride in their work, keeping well-ordered and indexed notes that they make for themselves. Answers to questions are clearly laid out and algebraic working is easy to follow. Tables and graphs are drawn with care. An AS Year 13 group was able to draw box and whisker plots and was mature enough to ask for help after persevering with problems involved with this. An A level group, after some initial problems, used vectors to solve problems. They helped each other and were able to unravel problems involving vectors wrapped up in complicated contexts. Less able A2 students sometimes made the odd slip when manipulating quadratic equations, but were able to use elementary calculus confidently. Some able students also made careless mistakes involving negative quantities, although they could sketch graphs of functions and confidently solve problems involving the geometry of the circle. The most able also made the odd slip in their algebra, particularly when algebraic fractions were involved, but confidently applied calculus to complicated algebraic expressions.

71. The standard of work seen in Year 12 is in line with the 2001 AS level results – it is well above average. This is matched by well above average achievement. In common with Year 13, there are no significant differences in either attainment or progress between males and females. All students understand the concept of a mathematical model to mirror a ‘real’ situation involving the movement of objects, for example sliding down an inclined plane under friction. Less able AS students sometimes encounter problems as a result of the incomplete factorising of algebraic expressions, but they are able to write clear solutions to mechanics problems and to draw and interpret velocity/time and distance/time graphs. Some able students also initially encounter problems interpreting negative quantities and make careless slips when using trigonometry to solve mechanics problems. However, these students produce well- executed diagrams, solve problems involving Newton’s laws of motion, and accurately calculate standard deviations. The most able are totally confident with co-ordinate geometry, can solve a variety of equations using different techniques, but sometimes approximate too soon in numerical calculations.
72. Overall the quality of teaching and learning in all sixth form mathematics courses is very good. In all lessons teachers showed very good knowledge of the subject. Teaching in all lessons was good or better; in four out of six lessons it was very good. This enabled them to focus on, and challenge students with, common misconceptions. Lessons are very well prepared, have good pace and make demands upon the students; for example, a standard piece of ‘bookwork’ on binomial probability was changed into a challenging lesson by good questioning skills by the teacher who often answered a question by another question – forcing students to think for themselves, resulting in high quality learning. A similar piece of work was covered by another group sitting round a table discussing, with the teacher acting as chairperson – very much like a university seminar. All students were keen to contribute but were also willing to listen to others. The net result was some very real gains in understanding. In a Year 12 lesson on calculus students were ‘guided’ to discover a rule for integration and then challenged to specify when the rule would be invalid. In a Year 13 statistics lesson involving a review of mean, mode, median, range and standard deviation, students were mature enough to challenge the teacher if they did not fully understand, whilst the teacher involved the whole group by the careful use of questions directed at individuals. Students in a Year 12 lesson on probability were consistently asked to justify their answers. Relationships between students and teacher were very good, which raised students’ levels of confidence and resulted in high quality learning for all.
73. Marking is comprehensive and very helpful. Full solutions are given and sometimes the work is annotated with helpful comments, including hints as to how a difficult question could be answered – guiding the student rather than merely giving the answer. Students find these hints useful and act on them. Homework is set and marked regularly. There is a very good level of individual support in addition to the timetabled lessons, much appreciated by students.
74. This is a relatively popular subject. Numbers taking AS mathematics are between 15 and 20, with about 20 to 25 students taking the A level. At present there is one group taking the AS over two years. The number of females taking mathematics is typically roughly a third of that of the number of males. The number of students taking further mathematics is normally less than five. Very few students fail to complete their courses. Those who do leave within the first few weeks. The department makes every effort to support those who may be experiencing difficulties.
75. The examination regulations for the modules chosen do not require that students embark on a piece of work needing independent learning skills. Students are, however,

asked to read ahead in the subject, for example, in a Year 12 probability lesson, the group had to read a chapter in preparation for the lesson. Several instances of short presentations; for example one on graphing functions, were given by the students themselves. Students are expected to make their own notes – no lessons were observed in which students had to merely copy notes down. Note is sometimes taken of the various key skills ‘sign posts’ which are given in the syllabus, for example using a piece of graphing software to investigate the graphs of certain functions.

76. Leadership and management are good. Teachers are committed and the desire to raise standards is high. Knowledge and understanding of curricular and examination requirements are very good. Students’ progress is carefully monitored by regular assessment and examination results are analysed in depth. All teachers have experience of teaching A level mathematics. The teacher-produced worksheets and revision sheets are very good and make a good contribution to standards.
77. Since the previous inspection there have been improvements in the quality of teaching. This has produced a rise in standards, particularly evident in the 2001 A level results.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Results in 2001 were well above average.
- Students have a positive attitude. They have a good grasp of concepts and are able to apply them well in their classwork and homework.
- Teaching is good. It is methodical and lessons are well structured, with thorough opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and understanding.
- There is a good range of practical coursework.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- The range of learning opportunities needs to be broadened to give more emphasis to independent work and, as planned, to increase the use of ICT.

78. The A level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average. All students who took the examination obtained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the highest grades, A and B, was well above average. For the last four years standards in chemistry have been above average, or well above average. Students’ performance in chemistry in 2001 was in line with the standards in their other subjects and in the two previous years was significantly higher than in their other subjects.
79. The standards of work of current Year 13 students are also above average. In the lessons seen students were making good progress as a result of effective teaching. Lessons were well structured and activities gave a clear focus for students’ learning. In one lesson on mass spectra of organic compounds students made quick progress in identifying fragmentation products and explaining a double peak in terms of the presence of different isotopes. In a second lesson students showed, at the start of a topic, that they were developing a good understanding of transition metal complexes. Discussion with students showed an above average ability to explain the Born-Haber cycle and gas equilibria in terms of partial pressures.
80. Students in Year 12 have completed just over one term of their course. Standards in the work seen are again above average. Students showed a good understanding of

heats of reaction, enthalpy cycles and bond enthalpies. Students' work showed an above average understanding of trends in the periodic table and of volumetric calculations.

81. Teaching is good overall and, as a result, students work with interest and learn well. The main features of good teaching are well-planned lessons, conducted at a brisk pace with some variety of activities. The teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and their explanation is clear, although sometimes this is not supported by boardwork. Focused questioning is used effectively to check and develop students' understanding. Thorough opportunities are provided for students to apply their knowledge and understanding and students value sample mark schemes provided for past questions. At present there is insufficient use of ICT for research, sensing, and for simulations to support learning. The planned acquisition of extra resources for science will enable the department to rectify this situation and extend the range of learning opportunities for students.
82. Much of the written work completed by students takes the form of structured questions to consolidate and extend the work undertaken in class. The above average standards of this work indicate the ability of the students to work independently using textbooks and their notes. At present, however, there are insufficient opportunities for students to undertake more extended pieces of research and independent work. Numeracy skills are well developed in chemistry through a range of topics, which involve calculations and the presentation and interpretation of data.
83. The high standards in chemistry and the increasing popularity of the subject are a reflection of the good teaching and learning and of the subject being well led and managed. There is a commitment to high standards, and work in progress to develop a scheme of work offers the prospect of widening learning opportunities for students and improving teaching further. Monitoring of teaching needs to be implemented, as planned, for sixth form lessons. Development planning requires more detail. Examination results should be analysed more fully in terms of students' performance against their GCSE results.
84. The improvement in chemistry since the last inspection is very good. The pass rate at higher grades, A and B, has improved significantly, as has the overall pass rate. Teaching is consistently good but is on occasions adversely affected by a shortage of certain specialist items of equipment. It is a priority in the school's request to the DfEE for additional facilities to provide a new chemistry laboratory. This is undoubtedly needed as one of the present laboratories is small and lacks a fume cupboard.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Results in 2001 were well above average.
- Students work with interest, have a good grasp of key ideas and apply these well in both classwork and homework.
- Teaching is good. Learning goals are clearly established and lessons are well planned.
- A wider range of activities has been introduced to promote effective learning.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- The current use of ICT is limited by the resources available. The planned acquisition of additional resources will rectify this situation.

85. The GCE examination results in 2001 were well above average. The proportion of students obtaining pass grades was average and the percentage obtaining the highest grades, A and B, was above average. For the last four years standards in physics have been average or well above average. Students' results in 2001 were in line with their performance in other subjects.
86. The standards of work of the current Year 13 students are also above average. In the lessons seen students were making good progress as a result of effective teaching. In one lesson, for example, discussion with students showed they had a good understanding of calculating the distances and temperatures of stars. In the lesson they made good progress in developing their understanding of the life cycle of stars and the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram. Students' work is above average in terms of their understanding of electromagnetic phenomena, diffraction and binding energy.
87. Standards in the work seen for Year 12 are also above average. Students' work shows a good understanding of charge-coupled devices and of Young's Modulus and the physical properties of materials. In one lesson seen, however, involving an extended practical investigation, overall standards of practical work were just below average. Students need more experience of this type of open practical work where they are required to take the initiative.
88. Teaching in both Year 12 and Year 13 is good overall and the students respond positively and learn well. The principal features of good teaching are good lesson-planning, clear learning objectives, a brisk pace and a variety of approaches to bring about learning. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and give clear explanations. Effective use is made of questioning to develop students' understanding and to encourage them to reflect and speculate. In one lesson, for example, the teacher asked the students to predict how the lifetime of a star might depend on its mass. Different views were aired and discussed. Through exemplification with two different spectral classes of star the teacher then developed the idea through questioning of the class that the lifetime of a star is proportional to the mass divided by the luminosity. In another lesson theoretical work about lenses was followed by a short practical activity where students experimented to find the optimum distance between the eyepiece and objective lenses of a telescope, and were then expected to relate this to the focal lengths of the lenses.
89. Learning opportunities for students have been enhanced with the introduction of a new A level course, initially in Year 12, which involves research, group work, presentations

and the use of ICT. This is making a good contribution to the development of key skills. Examples seen of students' independent work on researching materials were above average. Numeracy skills are well developed in physics.

90. The good teaching and learning and the high standards result from the subject being well led and managed. There is a clear commitment to making further improvements. A new scheme of work has been produced which identifies a range of approaches to promote effective learning. Monitoring of teaching needs to be introduced, as planned, for sixth form lessons. Analysis of examination results should be carried out in more detail to examine the relationship between students' A level results and their GCSE performance.
91. The improvement in physics since the last inspection is very good. The proportion of students gaining higher grades is now above average. The popularity of physics has improved in the last three years and teaching approaches have been significantly broadened. One of the physics laboratories is, however, small.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

92. Work in design and technology was sampled in a Year 13 lesson. In this lesson students were totally absorbed finishing off their A level coursework. They could lucidly explain their projects with obvious enthusiasm. The teacher provided a high level of challenge, allowing students to think for themselves. The quality of the work was good.

BUSINESS STUDIES

93. Work in business studies was sampled in two lessons, one in Year 12 and the other in Year 13. The general level of attainment of students was average. Students have an increasing understanding of business and economic concepts and their application in real contexts. The subject knowledge of staff is good but lessons are too teacher-led and rely too heavily on the teacher being the major 'resource'. There are insufficient opportunities for independent learning and the use of ICT in lessons.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

94. At present the school makes no provision for AS or A level courses in this curriculum area.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

95. Work in sport studies was sampled in two lessons. The Year 12 lesson on 'motivation' was very good. The lesson was well planned and contained informative illustrations from a variety of sporting contexts. A variety of teaching techniques was effectively used which held the interest of students. The attitudes and involvement of students were very positive; they contributed significantly to the quality of learning in the lesson. The high quality of the student response was also reflected in a Year 13 lesson on 'exercise physiology'. The quality of teaching was good and challenged students to perform to their potential. Standards of attainment in both lessons were above average.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

96. A lesson with a Year 12 intermediate health and social care GNVQ group was sampled. The quality of teaching was very good with a very good match of work to students'

levels of attainment. The lesson had pace, variety and challenge. It held students' attention and interest, ensuring that the group all made very good progress.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

97. The inspection focus was on music, but theatre studies and art and design were lightly sampled.
98. One lesson of AS level theatre studies was seen, which was good overall. Standards are above average. Recruitment to the course is healthy, and students are making good progress, building on the good drama skills acquired at GCSE. In the lesson observed, students were drawing on the power of language in Antigone and using their voice, movement and evaluation skills to perfect a performance of an extract from the chorus.
99. A Year 13 art and design lesson was sampled. In this lesson students were productively involved in finishing off their A level coursework. They could lucidly explain their projects and their ideas for further development. All were very positive and enthusiastic about their studies. The teacher provided a high level of subject knowledge and support whilst allowing students to develop points for themselves. The quality of the work was good.

Music

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good; lessons are very well planned to match the needs of the students.
- Students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment.
- Students show mature attitudes and enjoy their lessons; relationships are excellent.
- Assessment is very effective in helping students to improve their work.
- The number of students opting for music is good and increasing.
- Resources are good and the specialist accommodation is excellent.
- The leadership and management of music are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Technical support is needed.
- More time should be given to enable the organisation of music.

100. The numbers taking A level music have been small over the last ten years and examination results have been broadly average when compared with all schools. Results in 2001 were well above average at A level with eight candidates and AS level with seven. Students achieved very well in relation to their prior attainment, building on their very good GCSE results in music.

101. The standard of work in the sixth form is well above average because of the very good teaching and students' positive attitudes. As a result, students achieve very well. There are four students taking music in Year 12 and three in Year 13. It was possible to observe both groups being taught, as well as to interview the students and staff and scrutinise work. Students' performing skills are very good when playing grade VI and grade VIII pieces in preparation for an evening recital. Performances were mainly accurate and expressive; students played with a sense of communication and enjoyment, for example in the theme from the adagio of Rodrigo's Guitar Concerto played as a cornet solo. Students' compositions show equally high standards with a secure understanding of harmony. Written work related to the history of music and set works show a very good understanding of the features of different periods and are diligently organised. Students' general music knowledge, for example of repertoire, is very impressive and they show very good knowledge and technical vocabulary when appraising their pieces or set works.
102. Teaching is very good and has many excellent features; students appreciate the quality of teaching, support and the overall provision in music. Teaching is characterised by lessons where the planning is very well matched to the needs of the students; objectives and explanations are clear because subject knowledge is secure and communication skills are strong. Teachers use their musical skills to engage the students in music making. As a result, there are very clear gains in lessons as students develop their performing and composing skills and increase their knowledge and understanding through their involvement with a wide range of music. Sessions are very well prepared, have a brisk pace and use a good range of resources so that students know what they have to do and how to do it. Teachers have very high expectations and students are motivated, challenged and stimulated so that they learn very well, with enthusiasm and concentration. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent; students very much enjoy their lessons and have much confidence in their teachers who encourage them all the way. Students learn very well and enjoy the opportunity to work as a class, in groups and at their own pace supported by the expertise of the teachers; students respect them enormously. Teachers check students' understanding constantly and their assessments are very supportive in identifying students' individual needs and setting clear targets, especially in independent work such as in composing. Students show good research skills and the capacity to work independently; all are well supported by having computers and music programs at home. They appreciate and make full use of the very good facilities for music available in the school including the excellent accommodation. Students are very attentive and work productively; they are very supportive of each other, keen to answer questions and contribute well to discussion, especially in Year 13. They involve themselves in a range of activities, which support school music; several of them run or help to run extra-curricular musical activities for younger pupils in school. They are deeply involved in musical activities beyond the school including the County Youth Orchestra, folk groups and rock bands. Many are considering careers in music.
103. The leadership and management of music are excellent. The energetic and enthusiastic head of department has clear ideas about building on what has already been achieved. There is a clear and shared commitment to improvement by the hardworking team of teachers and visiting instrumental staff. Music is very well organised and documentation is of a very high standard, including regular and rigorous departmental reviews. The curriculum is broad, balanced and well supported by work in Years 7 to 11, for example in composing (where students study harmony) and listening (where students engage with a wide repertoire). The wealth of musical activity in the school (including regular concerts and musicals such as *Joseph* and *Rock Nativity*), trips to concerts, workshops (such as the recent one in African drumming) and

concerts given for the community (such as those for feeder schools and the *Youth Makes Music* festival in Kidderminster) provide a very rich curriculum. Music makes a valuable contribution to the personal development of students and spiritual education is enhanced by regular Masses. Resources are good and support students' learning well except for the shortage of computers, which is now being resolved. There are very good links with other schools in Hagley including some shared teaching in music. Since the last inspection report there has been very good improvement. Take-up of GCSE courses has increased which has affected the numbers taking music in the sixth form and improved standards. Resourcing, especially of keyboards, has improved and the superb music block completed. This provides excellent facilities for making music that are fully used to the advantage of students.

104. An excellent range of instrumental and vocal tuition given by ten visiting teachers is available to students and there is a wide range of high quality extra-curricular activities such as the choir and orchestra where students gain additional experience. The high level of involvement of sixth form students supports the strength of these groups. The success of these reflects the commitment of staff, the support of parents, governors and staff and the enthusiasm of the musicians whose performances, in a wide range of musical events in and out of school, brings much credit to the school and this excellent department whose first-rate reputation is justifiably deserved.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, history and psychology.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Teachers are experienced and have a good command of their subject.
- Students achieve in line with their prior levels of attainment in GCSE examinations.
- Middle- and lower-attaining students achieve success at A level.

Areas for improvement

- The amount of challenge presented to students.
- The emphasis is placed on practical work, including fieldwork.
- The amount of detail in students' written work.
- The use of information and communication technology in teaching.
- Departmental management in relation to assessment and planning.

105. Standards in geography are about average. In A level examinations over the past three years they have been close to the national average with minor fluctuations from year to year. In 2000, for example, results were above the national average with average points scores of 7.5 compared to the national position of 5.3. In 2001 they were below with points scores of 5.08 compared to 5.89. For two of the past three years attainment at A level was just below that for schools in similar contexts. The small numbers of candidates entered for the examinations significantly affects the percentage of students achieving each grade though attainments are in line with previous performance in GCSE examinations for the majority of students. This includes a small number of higher-attaining students who successfully reach the higher grades A or B each year. Levels of attainment have remained consistent over the past three years and overall performance is below that in other subjects.

106. In general, students entering the sixth form have achieved average levels of attainment in their previous courses in geography. Few higher attainers join courses and occasionally students without any previous experience of geography in Years 10 and 11 take the subject. By the end of Year 12 all students currently in Year 13 achieved pass grades at AS level with over half achieving the higher grades A or B and girls' results marginally better than those of boys. For these students this represents good progress. Pupils achieve well when they are fully involved in learning as was seen in a lesson where they were asked to research information in a case study from Ghana and then to suggest, with reasons, what action they would take to improve food supply, bearing in mind the problems of food production existing in that area. Written work, however, is often descriptive and lacks the detail that would enable students to reach higher grades as exemplified when explaining the attractions of the West Indies for tourism as simply 'winters are warmer' and 'there are many cultural resorts'. There are too few opportunities to test hypotheses and seek solutions to problems that challenge students to reach higher grades in external examinations. Nevertheless, students make progress as they tackle more advanced topics such as the mass movement of waste, systems of coastal management and the sustainability of populations.
107. Students in Year 12 make satisfactory gains in knowledge as they undertake work on more advanced concepts such as drainage density, the use of hydrographs to predict flooding, the impact of global warming or the effects of the hurricane El Niño. Students have a good understanding of some topics such as river features; especially the processes by which river channels are eroded and they make good use of case studies in the Wye Valley to illustrate their work. Some written work, however, such as that on depressions, is at little more than GCSE standard; questions to respond to are too open ended such as "Write down your thoughts about" or "What are the major drawbacks to" with little challenge and few opportunities for comment or explanation. Like Year 13 much work lacks detail or shows little evidence of hypothesis testing or problem solving.
108. Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and use questions and answers to help pupils to learn. Lessons are planned and aims are clear. In the most successful lesson the teacher involved students in learning by using a case study to ensure that students were actively involved in the learning process. The students indicate, as did the observation of lessons, that teachers play too large a part in the lessons and that textbooks and duplicated handouts are used extensively and repetitively as an aid to teaching and as a source of information. The work of students shows little evidence of the use of a wider range of resources or of practical work, including fieldwork, as a means of learning. Although students are encouraged to make use of personal access to the Internet at home, the use of ICT does not form part of teaching. Relations between staff and students are good and students concentrate well throughout the hour-long lessons, thus making gains in knowledge and showing interest and understanding in their work. When asked to work co-operatively they do so effectively.
109. The department has adequate resources, though admits that many of them are dated. All pupils are provided with a textbook but the school library contains only few texts suitable for A level work to support departmental resources. Insufficient use is made of the rich local environment as a resource through fieldwork to promote essential geographical skills and raise levels of attainment. Currently the absence of a scheme of work, of a common commitment to the marking of the work of students and to full scale planning for the future of post-16 geography are drawbacks to ensuring that levels of attainment are as high as they could be.

110. The previous inspection called for a much wider use of practical approaches, especially fieldwork, in teaching. Although, for Year 13 students, some possibilities for work in the field were curtailed recently by restricted access to the countryside during the foot and mouth epidemic, there is still too little use of fieldwork as a means of learning. Levels of attainment in external examinations have remained constant overall but there is a measure of underachievement in geography despite the prior levels of attainment of students taking the subject.

History

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

Strengths

- Results improved significantly last year and were above average.
- Teaching is consistently good, using a variety of methods.
- There are high expectations that students should read widely and be aware of modern scholarship on the topics they study.

Areas for improvement

- The unit on Russian history from 1855-1964 needs planning in more detail, to ensure balanced coverage of the course.
- There needs to be greater variety in the approach to coursework on historical sources in Year 13.
- The department lacks a development plan to target priorities for further improvement in the sixth form and the main school.

109. After two years of below average performance at A level, the results leapt up last year to above average, equalling those in the top 25 per cent of schools on average points score. Students did particularly well on the British paper. Out of the 12 candidates, boys did better than girls but both scored higher than the national average. Students did at least as well in history as in the average of all their other subjects. AS level results were also above average from a large entry of 28 candidates. Nearly three-quarters of them achieved grades A-C and all passed.
110. In work seen, standards are above average. Students are making good progress on the A2 courses, keeping detailed files of their work and showing good understanding of issues in well-argued essays. They research topics well and make relevant references to the work of historians to support their case, as in last term's presentations on aspects of Stalin's rule. In a lesson on Chartism, students showed good knowledge of radical traditions going back to the English Civil War. They were able to identify accurately the chief characteristics of the movement from the historical sources provided. Students are less confident about source analysis, but they were able to cross-reference sources adequately, and use their background knowledge to compare Russian peasants' opposition to agricultural policy over the period studied.
111. In Year 12 students are achieving well on the AS course and reaching above average standards. In a lesson on the Russian revolution, they put forward good arguments for particular factors being the main causes of change, and were able to link together the different causes. This interdependence of causal factors needs to be brought out more in their essays, which also need to keep focused on the questions set. Students are developing their ability to write historical essays well, helped by the very good feedback they receive from teachers to help improve their style.

112. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is consistently good, and very good on the British history courses, where the teacher is also a practising historian. Teachers expect their students to read widely and take account of modern scholarship, inviting university lecturers into school and taking students to sixth form conferences. They have a very good rapport with students and create an atmosphere of joint collaboration over historical enquiry, which is highly motivating. The variety of activities employed in lessons promotes a high degree of student participation, which has a beneficial effect on learning. Students catch their teachers' enthusiasm for the subject and extend their knowledge beyond the confines of the curriculum. Feedback on assessed work is good, using essay review sheets that combine students' and teachers' comments to target what needs to be done to improve. Teachers use historical sources effectively in their teaching but the treatment of them for coursework in Year 13 is rather protracted and lacks variety of approach. The use of a student questionnaire is proving an effective tool for identifying those areas where adjustments need to be made to the curriculum to meet the needs of students.
113. History makes a good contribution to the development of students' communication skills. Lessons are based on discussion and there are many opportunities for students to present their views and share their findings. The transition from GCSE to advanced work is done well, setting tasks that develop research skills through imaginative exercises, such as display work on Rasputin. Students use ICT to some extent, to find out information and for word processing, but more guided use could be made of its potential for research.
114. Management of the subject has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Departmental policies and procedures are clear, as is delegation of responsibilities to teachers. Effective schemes of work guide teachers' planning, except for the A2 module on Russian history, which is under review. Leadership places the right emphasis on teaching and learning, making the subject exciting and challenging for students. There have been a number of staff changes in recent years but the present team of talented teachers offers the prospect of stability and continuity, to maintain the high standards achieved last year. Good progress has been made over the introduction of the new A level courses, with successful outcomes. The department now needs a development plan to determine its strategies for sustaining the high performance of history student.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good; teachers are enthusiastic and have good subject knowledge.
- Leadership is effective and resourceful.
- The wide range of relevant resources provided.
- Marking which is supportive and encouraging and which sets clear targets for improvement.
- The positive response of the students.

Areas for improvement:

- Widening the scope of research possibilities available to the students.
- Increasing the recruitment and retention of male students.

115. The first results in the traditional A level examination of 2000, whilst including an A grade for one male student, were overall a little below the A level points score average nationally and for the A level subjects taken by the school. The two students who completed the traditional A level course in 2001 were both successful and the average points score matched the national and school levels. Students who started the new modular AS/A level course in 2000 were examined at AS level in 2001 and their results were very good. All succeeded and the average points score of 7.86 was well above the national average points score per entry of 5.5 and well above the school's average of 5.8. Virtually all students improved their points scores from their average GCSE levels and some of the improvements are considerable. There are no significant differences in attainment by ethnic minorities but levels of recruitment and retention for male students are less than for females. The examination results of the male students on average are below those of the females, although some individual results are good. The trend in examination results is rising.
116. The standards of work in year 13 are above the levels expected nationally. Only two students did not continue to A level from those who gained well above average AS grades. Students have a good knowledge of the psychological concepts, demonstrating good levels of critical understanding of theories and research papers. Many of their essays are correctly given high grades for the knowledge they display and the capable ways in which they are expressed. In the research projects undertaken for their coursework, they show that they can design and report on their chosen project well. They virtually all choose appropriate hypotheses, justify their choices and explain their procedures clearly. They are well able to understand and correctly use the inferential statistics required for the analysis of the data for their research projects. Their findings are well and clearly presented with appropriate use of graphs and pie charts that are enhanced by the students' skills in ICT.
117. The standards of work in year 12 are generally above the levels expected for the time spent on the course. Virtually all students can already show a clear understanding of psychological concepts and theories and have the ability to accurately and appropriately relate them to experiences in their own lives or in the lives of those around them. They bring insight to the discussions in class and capably explore and support the views of others. They make appropriate and accurate use of psychological terminology, both in classroom discussions and in their well-presented essays.
118. Teaching is very well planned to meet the requirements of the examination courses and to extend learning beyond them in a relevant and topical way. Texts for the course are

well chosen and other learning materials are provided that the students also find very useful. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and ably use the experiences of themselves and the students to maximise the relevance of the subject for the students and enhance their learning. Students are encouraged to relate considerations of depression or stress to the experiences of themselves, friends or family and do this in a responsible manner that retains a proper sense of confidentiality. The concepts of the subject are well used in a practical way to aid understanding, such as in the use of videos to reinforce what has been said by providing a visual as well as aural aid to memory. Teachers are well able to establish and maintain warm purposeful relationships with their students and this enables students to be confident in the part they play in their lessons by asking and answering questions willingly and taking a confident role in discussion.

119. The care for the students and expectation of high standards carries on into the sensitive and encouraging comments made by teachers in responding to classroom inputs by students and into the marking of students' written work, where comments are supportive but also give clear guidance on what needs to be done for future improvement. It is perhaps unsurprising that students respond well to these high levels of enthusiasm, expectation and care by paying full attention in all lessons, contributing ideas, opinions and feelings, developing high levels of self-confidence and independent learning skills and gaining good results. Students also work well together in class and in designing and collaborating on their research projects. The psychology course is highly valued by its students and their views no doubt contribute to the rise in the numbers choosing the subject for sixth form study.
120. Leadership of the subject is very good. The member of staff responsible for the department is extremely enthusiastic about the subject, sets a very good personal example as a teacher and is a good co-ordinator of the teachers working in the subject. Enthusiasm and resourcefulness add to the quality of the provision for the subject because materials are avidly sought from a wide range of subject texts and periodicals. This ensures that a good range of relevant and topical material is presented to the students in print and video formats. This engages their interest and extends the material presented in their well-selected course texts. The need to provide staffing suitable for the increasing number of students is understood and advertisements for staff are already prepared. The need to extend the range of research possibilities and locations for the students is also acknowledged and will be tackled when the availability of staff time allows the necessary levels of supervision to ensure the security of students in any out-of-school locations.
121. Virtually all students have a good command of key skills. In listening and speaking they pay full attention, listen carefully to the teachers and each other, and take a confident part in the many classroom discussion opportunities that are provided. Their reading aloud is mostly good in terms of accuracy and reading with expression that reveals and communicates understanding. Their classroom contributions show that they have mostly read and understood well the demanding texts they have studied. In their written work, they virtually all show good levels of general accuracy in spelling and sentence construction and a good ability to use accurately and appropriately the specialist psychological terms. They deal well with the different styles of writing involved in essays and research reports and their presentation skills are high. They have numerical skills appropriate to the subject they are studying and that includes their understanding of, and ability to use, the level of inferential statistics involved. They use computing skills capably to enhance the presentation of their research projects by word processing and desktop publishing and to communicate their findings clearly by the relevant use of graphs and pie charts.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English, French and German.

English

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

Strengths

- Results at GCE A level in 2001 were well above average.
- Overall, results have shown improvement since the last inspection.
- Students obtained very good results in the first AS level examinations in 2001.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and very high expectations of their students.
- Students' positive attitudes contribute to the good progress they make.

Areas for improvement

- Introduce a greater variety of teaching styles in order to encourage students to participate more actively in the classroom.
- Strengthen the monitoring of all aspects of work in the department.
- Improve the representation in teaching plans of writers from different cultures and traditions.

122. Results in A level English literature were well above average in 2001; they were the highest since 1999 and a considerable improvement on those in the previous year. Overall this represents good achievement in comparison with the students' attainment at GCSE. Students also did well in comparison with other subjects at A level. There are usually more female than male students taking A level literature, but the overall performance of male students is better, with a higher average points score.

123. Results were above average in the first AS level examinations in 2001, with just over half the students achieving the highest grades. Students did well compared to their GCSE grades and female students did better overall than males. Most of those who took the AS level examination have continued to study English literature at A level.

124. The overall standard of work of the current students in Year 13 is well above average, and represents good achievement from GCSE. Students have very good analytical skills and show a thorough approach and considerable depth of insight when writing about texts. In one of the lessons seen, students gained the confidence to apply the critical skills they had previously acquired to the more demanding task of making a detailed comparison between two very different unseen texts. They were helped to do this by skilled questioning and scholarly exposition from their teacher. Evidence from the work of younger pupils shows that rigorous, detailed approaches to texts developed by Year 9, and flourishing in Years 10 to 11, have contributed significantly to the high level of analytical skill shown by most students at A level.

125. Students in Year 12 are making good progress. Helped by their teachers, who provide a useful framework for essay-writing and set their students challenging titles, the most able write essays in a mature, sophisticated style, showing a sensitive response to literature backed by detailed analysis of the relationship between use of language and meaning. Most students confidently use a wide range of literary terminology and, though somewhat hesitant, are starting to develop their own interpretation of literature. Weaker students are struggling to analyse texts in sufficient depth and detail for AS

level. Teaching is good overall. Teachers' scholarship, enthusiasm for their subject and expectations that all will work to the highest possible standard produce a positive response from students, who respect their teachers, come well prepared to lessons and show a thoughtful and serious attitude. All these qualities were seen in a very good AS level lesson focusing on short stories by Jane Gardam. Presentations by two students were used as a basis for further analysis by the teacher, whose clear exposition, wide-ranging approach and constant questioning and probing for more explicit judgements set high intellectual standards. There was, however, little variation in teaching methods in the lessons seen. Teachers talk for most of the time, students listen attentively, make notes diligently, answer questions in some detail whenever required to do so, but it is significant that they rarely pose their own.

126. Students do not always participate actively in lessons; many have a passive approach and there is a danger that they could become over-dependent on the teacher. Pressure caused by the introduction of the new AS level examinations in Year 12, together with teachers' conscientious wish to do the best for their students, has been partly responsible for an increased emphasis on teaching to examination requirements and a consequent feeling by teachers that there is no time to engage in wider approaches.
127. Students are given opportunities to develop research skills. They make relatively little use of the school library, but use resources supplied by the English department, their local libraries and the Internet. All students value the individual help readily given by teachers. Students in Year 13, however, feel they now have developed more confidence in their own capabilities and are beginning to be less dependent on their teachers. They appreciate the facilities provided by the school for private study, and feel there is a good environment for learning. Apart from the word processing of essays, there is little use of ICT in the course.
128. Since the last inspection, results have improved overall. After staffing problems last year, the situation is now more stable. Accommodation difficulties, which still remain, and which mean that a core subject is taught in three different buildings, do not make it easy to achieve departmental cohesion. The department is generally well managed, there is a clear wish for improvement, and work in the sixth form is in the hands of a committed team of teachers. There is now a need to improve the representation of writers from different cultures and traditions in the range of texts studied. Monitoring should be strengthened, which should help with the sharing of good practice, and should promote more effective and more consistent marking, for example. Teachers now need to vary their teaching styles so that students are proactive in the classroom, become less reticent, have more scope for creative work, and develop their questioning skills to match those of their teachers.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French and German are taught in the sixth form and both were inspected. There is a consortium arrangement for German with the neighbouring high school, which was visited in order to check provision in the subject. This year there are no Year 13 students for German.

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

Strengths

- The very good AS and A level results.
- Teacher knowledge and expertise.
- Thorough marking of work.

Areas for improvement

- To provide opportunities for trips abroad and work experience.
- To provide access within school for the use of the Internet and ICT.

129. A level results in 1999 and 2001 were very good and in the top 25 per cent in the country. There were no national comparisons in 2000 owing to low entry numbers, but again results were very good. AS level results likewise were very good, with a high proportion of A and B grades.
130. Standards in French are high. In the Year 13 lesson observed, students on this occasion were lacking in confidence in oral work. They spoke so quietly one could scarcely hear, yet their French was very good as regards fluency, pronunciation and accuracy. They were secure in their understanding of difficult reading materials.
131. The Year 12 students provided a sharp contrast. A number of this group are dual linguists. The lesson was entirely oral work, based on pre-release examination materials; the topic was based on 'Mobile Phones'. Students freely gave their opinions about mobile phones, for example on how often they use them, length of time used, the cost, text messages and parents' reaction. There were no inhibitions. They spoke like native French speakers. It was obviously a topic close to their hearts and they were enthusiastically involved in the discussion. Everyone had come fully prepared to the lesson which enabled very good progress to be made. There was a high level of interaction and idea sharing.
132. The scrutiny of work bears out the very high level being achieved. The Year 12 files are evidence of the amount of intensive study needed to bridge the gap from GCSE. Each topic is sequenced in such a way as to enable all students to reach their potential. There is a gradual build up of knowledge and students use this in different ways. There are extensive worksheets, authentic reading materials from magazines and papers. Students are encouraged to draft and redraft work, which is all thoroughly marked. The marking is a good indicator of strengths and weaknesses and how to improve to achieve a top grade. There were examples of highly imaginative work, at a sophisticated level.
133. Teaching is overall good. Teachers deliver lessons throughout in French and are to be commended. Preparation is thorough and subject knowledge is very good. Effective teaching was a result of skilful questioning technique, where the teacher and students became engrossed in discussion. By their very nature, the examinations leave little time to cover all the topics at the level required and there is the tendency for lessons to be teacher-led. More opportunities for independent learning would help to build

confidence. The teachers work well together and share ideas. They set high challenges for the students, which is borne out by the examination results.

134. The subject is well managed. The schemes of work are updated to suit the new course books. The latter have been well chosen. Accurate analysis is made of examination results and individual student progress is monitored. Students have been offered the opportunity to experience work abroad through local industry, but have been reluctant to do so. They would benefit from this enrichment.
135. The department continues to be successful at sixth form level; good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Examination results at that time were judged to be good and they are now very good.

German

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

Strengths

- Very good A level results.
- Teacher knowledge and expertise.

Areas for improvement

- To set up opportunities for work experience abroad.
- To explore the Internet within school, to promote independent study and access authentic materials.

136. Over the last three years low numbers have opted for German in the sixth form, with no candidates in 2000. Results are consistently very good and students perform well compared to other subjects. There are no national comparisons, owing to low entry numbers. There were no AS students in 2001, hence no current Year 13 German students this year.
137. Standards in German are high. Students are enjoying the challenges of the course in Year 12. They came fully prepared to give group and individual presentations on their own choice of a work of art. Previously they had been given written cues, which enabled them to research the painting and to develop in depth using individual skills. Ideas were conveyed effectively, using a wide variety of vocabulary and complex structures. Everyone was involved and spoke fluently and confidently. There was the opportunity for questions and spontaneous answers, which was a testing time well spent, as this type of activity is a confidence booster. Discussion was at a mature level. The same group was observed at the neighbouring high school, where the lesson on smoking and illness was equally challenging and exciting. Pupils were able to understand difficult texts and to pick out essential information for answers. The topic was new, but everyone participated in the discussion. Pair work and groupwork are enjoyed.
138. Student files are well ordered; for example, there were sections on:
- grammar with consolidation exercises;
 - vocabulary and structures relevant to topics;
 - questions and answers on topics with written pieces of work to complete each one.
139. Higher-attaining students had completed the latter in great depth. Worksheets by their very structure effectively cater for all abilities, providing ways to extend learning or to strengthen areas of weakness. There are detailed self-study exercises and comprehension for students to complete.

140. Two lessons were seen. Teaching was very good. The teachers are good role models in the use of German throughout lessons. Their enthusiasm rubs off on the students. High expectations are set and students rise to the challenge. The maturity of the students and their very good progress are a result of skilful teaching. Ideas and opinions are elicited through appropriate questions, which make the students think for themselves. Where there is difficulty in understanding, strategies are used to ensure that words or phrases are understood. This also helps to build up sophisticated language. Progress is well monitored and targeted. Students are made to feel secure about their learning. Work is marked consistently, with diagnostic and helpful comments. Good use is made of resources but students have no access to Internet sites in school or the library. They do use ICT at home, but would benefit from its use in private study time. Few have visited Germany. Work experience abroad would further enrich language learning.
141. The subject is well managed. By the very nature of the two-year courses, the gap between GCSE and AS level is great and in Year 12 the scheme of work addresses this, so that the students very quickly build up the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, which are all closely linked. Textbooks and study guides are appropriate for the courses.
142. Since the previous inspection good progress has been made in this already highly successful department and the results are now very good.