

INSPECTION REPORT

SHOTTON HALL SCHOOL

Peterlee

LEA area: Durham

Unique reference number: 114314

Headteacher: Mr I. Mowbray

Reporting inspector: Ms J. M. Jones

12460

Dates of inspection: 7th – 10th May 2002

Inspection number: 199613

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of students: 11 to 16

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Waveney Road
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr R. Simpson

Date of previous inspection: 27th April 1998

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12460	J. M. Jones	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and students' achievements How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
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4689	M. Christian	Team inspector	Art and design	
13734	H. Davies	Team inspector	Geography Religious education	
8756	P. Hanage	Team inspector	Mathematics	
22906	B. Hodgson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
19915	P. Hooton	Team inspector	History Equality of opportunity	
3943	D. Innes	Team inspector	English	
22524	S. Innes	Team inspector	Design and technology	
27665	A. Lees	Team inspector	Music	
7958	G. Lewis	Team inspector	Provision for students with special educational needs	
14446	B. Simmons	Team inspector	Physical education	
17799	A. Stoddart	Team inspector	Science	
17404	J. Tolley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Shotton Hall School is an average sized mixed comprehensive school of 1005 students aged 11 to 16. Students come from the town of Peterlee and from surrounding villages. The area is one of high unemployment and significant deprivation and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average at 28.3 per cent. The school is a designated base for students with moderate learning difficulties and there are 19 such students, some from outside the local area. Overall the students represent the full range of abilities, but there are more students than usual with special educational needs, and 5 per cent of students have statements of special educational need. The attainment of students is well below average when they start in Year 7. There are very few students from ethnic minorities, or for whom English is an additional language. The school is within an Educational Action Zone and part of the local Community Action Network.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is improving and is well thought of by the local community. It is effective in enabling students to reach standards that are at least as high as can be expected in view of their levels of attainment when they enter the school. Teaching is good overall, and there is very good teaching in over one in five lessons. The school is well led and managed. The cost per student is well above average and the school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Leadership by the headteacher and senior managers is very effective in generating an optimistic and positive ethos.
- Achievement in most subjects is at least satisfactory; standards are rising and by the end of Year 11 are close to average in art and design, information and communication technology (ICT) and above average in physical education.
- There is a high level of care for students, particularly those with special educational needs, and relationships at all levels are very good.
- Links with primary schools are very good.
- The school makes very effective use of a wide range of initiatives and projects in the local community.
- High quality music and drama productions play an important part in the life of the school and the local community.

What could be improved

- Attainment is well below average by the end of Year 11 and a significant number of students underachieve in mathematics in Years 10 and 11.
- There is no effective literacy policy and many students cannot use language effectively in speaking or writing.
- Below average attendance has an adverse effect on standards, particularly in Years 9 and 11.
- Systems for identifying and assessing students with special educational needs are unsatisfactory.
- Systems for informing parents about their children's progress are unsatisfactory.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1998. Improvement since then is satisfactory. Teaching has improved; there is now a higher proportion of good and very good lessons. Standards are rising, at least as fast as nationally, and in Year 9 at a faster rate. Attendance, though still

below average, has risen significantly. Behaviour has improved, and the number of exclusions dropped. The school has better systems for assessing students and using the information, though there is room for better use of information for setting targets for students.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores¹ in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	D	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

National test results and achievements of Year 9 students

Over the four-year period 1997-2001, the results of national tests for students aged 14 were below average but improved at a faster rate than the national trend. In 2001, the results were below the national averages in each of the three main subjects English, mathematics and science. However, when compared with those of schools in which a similar proportion of students have free school meals, the overall results were above average. Girls do a little better than boys, by about the same difference as nationally.

The standards of work of the present Year 9 students are below average but most students achieve well in relation to their well below average starting points at the beginning of Year 7. The achievement of students with special educational needs is satisfactory. Standards are below average in English, mathematics and science, though students' achievement is good in English and satisfactory in mathematics and science. Students generally achieve their highest standards in history, ICT, art and design and physical education.

GCSE results and achievements of Year 11 students

The GCSE results are well below average but improved over the four-year period 1997-2000. In 2001, the results dropped and the governors' targets were not achieved. Students achieved their best results in English, media studies and art and design. Mathematics results were well below average. In most subjects girls did better than boys by about the same difference as nationally. In English and art and design girls did significantly better than boys. Current targets are ambitious.

The standards of work of the present Year 11 students are below average but better than the standards achieved in GCSE in 2001. Standards are just below average in English and science though they are well below average in mathematics, where there is underachievement by many of the middle and lower attaining students. Standards are above average in the GNVQ course in ICT and in the GCSE course in physical education. Standards are average in art and design, and other ICT groups. Overall, the students, including those with special educational needs, achieve satisfactorily, and the highest attainers achieve well.

¹ Where A*=8, A=7, B=6, C=5, D=4, E=3, F=2, G=1

Standards in literacy are well below average and the main reason for the low achievement in subjects that depend heavily on the use of language. Standards in numeracy are below average but adequate for the requirements of subjects requiring number work. Standards in ICT are average.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Students are proud of their school. A few older students are reluctant to work hard and teachers have difficulty motivating them and maintaining a positive atmosphere.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. An effective rewards system is raising standards and the incidence of exclusions has dropped very significantly over the last year. The lack of support in many lessons for students with special educational needs sometimes leads to lower standards of behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students and staff treat each other with kindness and respect. Bullying is uncommon, and students are confident that it is dealt with swiftly and effectively.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory. Although attendance is improving it is just below average at 90.3 per cent, and below the required standard of 92 per cent, mainly because of below average attendance in Years 9 and 11.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Good	Good

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

Teaching and learning are good in all years. Teaching is good in English, where teaching was good in four out of five lessons and very good in about a quarter. Two thirds of the teaching in science is good or better. There is a little unsatisfactory teaching in mathematics, although teaching and learning in half the lessons seen was at least good. The most able students are well taught in mathematics where work is challenging and stimulating. Most teachers in all subjects plan well so that students know what they have to do and as a result they learn effectively. In the best lessons they use resources imaginatively to capture and sustain students' interest, and in a number of subjects, particularly geography, growing use of computers is helping students to explore ideas for themselves. There is a need to extend this use. In most of the small proportion of unsatisfactory lessons, teachers did not use the school's good behaviour strategy and students worked too slowly and achieved too little. Teaching meets the needs of most students, including gifted and talented students, well. Students with special needs are taught well when they are withdrawn for separate lessons, but they learn less well in lessons where they do not have any additional support.

Literacy is not emphasised enough in many subjects. School policy is still being developed and the Key Stage 3 Strategy² is not fully effective. Strategies for teaching numeracy are shared and teachers in subjects such as science reinforce numeracy skills effectively.

² A national initiative to improve numeracy and literacy among all students between the ages of 11 and 14.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11 where there is a good range of additional and alternative courses. The work related curriculum is very good. Links with primary schools are also very well managed and highly effective.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Unsatisfactory because although students' personal development is well supported and much effective help is given, assessment of needs and difficulties is not rigorous and does not always identify students with special educational needs or enable their needs to be met fully. Their progress is not tracked accurately enough to evaluate the impact of the considerable, and often effective, provision.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Very good in the rare cases encountered.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision for moral development is very good and for spiritual, social and cultural development it is good. The school meets the requirement for a daily act of worship. Students celebrate their own immediate cultural heritage in a former mining community but are not fully prepared for life in the wider multicultural society.
How well the school cares for its students	Good overall. Provision for students' welfare, including child protection, is good, and students are well guided and supported in their studies by teachers and mentors. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory and students know how well they are doing.
How well does the school work in partnership with parents	Unsatisfactory, because although there are many good links with parents, and parents support the school and their children's education, formal systems of reporting to parents do not give enough information about their children's progress.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher has been in post for a year and has already made a big impact. He leads from the front and is well supported by senior staff. Most heads of department and heads of year organise and manage well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors know the school well and ensure the curriculum meets statutory requirements. Governors play a full part in decision making and financial management.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. New systems to establish baseline standards have been introduced, and are having an impact in Years 10 and 11. Performance management is up to date but monitoring the quality of teaching, and particularly marking, is not sufficiently rigorous.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Use of computers is improving and is good in some subjects. Support for some students with special educational needs is not sufficiently well targeted. The school has overcome staffing difficulties and has now sufficient staff to meet the needs of the curriculum. Resources are inadequate: the library section of the resource centre is unsatisfactory because books are out of date and unattractive. Accommodation is satisfactory. Principles of best value are well understood and applied when buying goods and services

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school is improving and they feel they can approach the school if they have concerns about their children. • Expectations are high and children make good progress • Teaching is good • The school is well led and managed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children do not get enough homework • There is not enough information for parents about their children's progress.

The inspection team agreed with all the aspects of the school that parents like. They found that homework is usually set, but that sometimes teachers do not insist that it is completed. They agree that formal systems for reporting progress to parents are unsatisfactory.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

Results of tests and examinations

1. Results in tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science at the age of 14 were below average in 2001, but above average for schools with a similar proportion of students entitled to free school meals. The trend over the last four years has been an improving one, with results going up at a faster rate than national figures. In 2001 English and science results maintained the improvement well but mathematics slipped back a little. Girls do better than boys by a little more than the national difference in English, but in mathematics and science the difference is a little less than the national difference.

2. Results in GCSE over the last four years have also been improving, at a similar rate to schools nationally, but results in 2001 were against the improving trend and fell back significantly. Overall 2001 results were well below average and below similar schools. In relation to their tests two years earlier this year group underachieved, and results were well below expectations. There were some successes, however: results in media studies, and physical education were above average. Results were close to the national average in art and design, and in design and technology

3. Of the core subjects, the best results were in English. Although the proportion of students reaching the higher grades of A* to C was below average, students did better in English than in their other subjects. In science results in the dual award examination were close to average, but a higher than average proportion of students took the single award examination and their results were well below average. Mathematics results were well below average and it is clear that staffing difficulties meant that a significant number of students did not get the consistency of teaching they needed. Additionally, high absence rates in this year group had a severe impact on mathematics results because students got behind with their work during their absence. The difference between the performance of boys and girls is close to the difference seen nationally in each subject, although the difference in English and art and design is greater than the national difference, with girls doing significantly better. In 2001 boys did better than girls in science.

Standards seen in work and lessons

4. Standards seen during the inspection were generally in line with the previous test results by the end of Year 9, and by the end of Year 11 they are better than the 2001 results indicate. The school has set an ambitious and aspirational target of 40 per cent GCSE grades to be in the A* to C range. The headteacher thinks that a more realistic figure is 35 per cent. This would still be a significant improvement over 2001 and would match the best result for the last five years. Work seen in Year 11 and results of the Year 11 school examinations suggest that the school is well placed to achieve this target.

Standards by the end of Year 9

5. Standards overall are below average in English, mathematics and science, but there is some work of a high standard by the most able in all three subjects and particularly in mathematics and science. In a significant number of subjects, poor standards of literacy

prevent students reaching higher standards. This is particularly evident in geography and religious education.

6. In English, students can communicate effectively and the most able speak clearly, make accurate notes and comment critically on a wide range of texts. Middle and lower attaining students listen attentively and express opinions, but writing contains many inaccuracies, particularly of punctuation and spelling.
7. The most able students reach standards in mathematics that are above, and sometimes well above, average. They cope well with new ideas and can explain what they are doing. Other students are generally working at levels that are below or well below average. They are better at mathematical exercises, for example on the rules of arithmetic, than they are at applying the rules.
8. Standards in science are below average, but as in English and mathematics, the most able reach above, and sometimes well above, average standards. For example, they know the characteristics of chemical reactions and can use their knowledge of common compounds to interpret what they see happening when copper carbonate is heated.
9. In most other subjects, standards are below average by the end of Year 9, but in geography and religious education standards are well below average. In contrast, standards in art and design, ICT and physical education, where literacy has less impact than most, standards are average. Standards in history, where literacy skills are encouraged, are close to average.

Standards by the end of Year 11

10. The most able students are challenged by the work and are achieving standards in line with the national average in most subjects. For most students, standards are below average overall.
11. In English and science standards are below average at the end of Year 11, and in mathematics overall standards are well below at this stage. In mathematics and science a small proportion of students reach standards that are well above average, but most are working at below, or well below average. In English fewer high fliers were seen, but more of the year group is working close to average standard. Standards of most students in mathematics are lower than in their other subjects. This is not due to lack of learning in lessons, because this is usually at least satisfactory. Rather, it is because of a lack of consolidation of this learning over the last two years, when attendance was lower than now and when many lessons were taught by temporary teachers.
12. The highest standards seen during the inspection were in examination groups for physical education where standards are above average, and in art and design they are close to average, with boys in the current Year 11 not showing the difference that resulted in much better results for girls in 2001. Attainment is also above average in media studies, and in the group following the GNVQ course in ICT.
13. Standards are well below average in geography but religious education is better than in earlier years and standards are below, but not well below average. Standards in modern languages are also well below average.
14. Although standards are below average overall in design and technology, standards in resistant materials are close to average.

15. In music, standards are below average and lower than at the time of the previous inspection. However, this is partly due to the increase in the number of students choosing the subject. The department has also suffered from the lack of sufficient specialist teachers.

Students' achievement in relation to what could be expected

16. The school has not in the past used tests to establish students' levels of attainment when they start in Year 7. The only information available is from the tests taken at the end of Year 6 in primary schools. This is not complete and cannot therefore be used reliably to establish a baseline standard. For example, the school has information on English test results for 185 students in the current Year 7, out of a total of 214.

17. The school has just started to use nationally validated testing for the current Years 7 and 10, but the results for Year 7 are not yet available. From the limited evidence, inspectors judged most students' attainment when they started in Year 7 as below average at best, and in other years, attainment was well below average when students started in Year 7.

18. Over the Years 7,8 and 9, students make at least satisfactory progress in most subjects from their low base, and overall, their achievement is good. In English, art and design, design and technology, geography history, ICT, modern languages and physical education their achievement is good. In all these subjects students make significant gains in their skills and knowledge.

19. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in most subjects. However, in Years 7 to 9 they are disadvantaged by the system of withdrawing them from the same lesson each week to give them extra help in reading, writing and spelling. While the extra help is valuable, it places these students at a disadvantage, particularly when they miss half (or in a few cases all) the lessons each week in a subject.

20. The achievement of students in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall, and in a number of subjects achievement is good. Students continue to make good progress in English, and achievement is satisfactory in science. However, in mathematics, in spite of very good achievement by the most able, many students have not built successfully on work in earlier years or acquired sufficient understanding of basic ideas, and overall there is significant underachievement. In modern languages and history students' achievement is satisfactory, but not as good as in the earlier years.

21. The school is beginning to make additional provision for students identified as gifted and talented, and in most subjects these students achieve at least as well as other students in relation to what could be expected of them. In mathematics in Years 10 and 11 their achievement is better than that of most other students. Where students have significant individual needs, such as having exceptional musical talent or being at an early stage of learning English, these students make good progress through sympathetic and effective provision.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

22. Relationships in the school are very good and a significant strength. Behaviour is usually good and students have positive attitudes towards learning. These all-important

features are helping students to learn effectively. Behaviour in and around the school has improved since the previous inspection and parents are more positive about students' behaviour than they have been in the past.

23. Parents agree that their children enjoy school. When asked by inspectors about several aspects of school life, students spoke with pride about their new uniform, their pleasure with the re-decorated school canteen and the way they feel the opportunities for them are improving. A significant proportion of students have very good and even excellent attitudes but a small minority of mainly older students sometimes have unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour in lessons.

24. Students generally enjoy lessons and are happy about expressing their opinions or volunteering information. This was evident in a personal, social and health education lesson, conducted as a formal debate at the students' request. With the proposal that 'this house believes that smoking should be banned in public places', the lesson was organised in such a way that students were too busy enjoying themselves to realise they were learning! The thorough way speakers, both for and against the motion, had prepared their arguments meant that their speeches were convincing. The very good relationships in the class and the skilful way the teacher asked pertinent questions, for instance, 'can you explain why you feel menthol cigarettes help you breathe?' meant learning was very good. Students' willingness to share painful and clearly upsetting family experiences connected to the effects of smoking was admirable, and made the arguments against smoking so much more powerful. The audience reacted sensitively and the teacher was kind and compassionate and kept the speeches going well.

25. The overall quality of behaviour is good and has improved significantly in recent times. Parents, students, and staff confirm this is the case. The number of exclusions has fallen dramatically over the last twelve months. There have been 27 temporary exclusions but no permanent ones. Most of these have been used in response to acts of aggression towards staff and students. Students are very happy that bullying is becoming much more rare and is not tolerated by the school.

26. In a lesson in which all the students in the group had specific behavioural difficulties, attitudes and behaviour were very good in a circle time session. Students were very good at taking turns, listening to others' views and showing patience for their turn to participate in discussion.

27. In a small minority of lessons behaviour was unsatisfactory. Here the teaching was not of a sufficiently high enough standard to keep students interested. The inspection took place during the first week back from work experience for Year 10 students. This is a traditionally a time when some students can become frustrated with school, having enjoyed the freedom of the outside world. Certainly, most of the unsatisfactory behaviour was seen in Year 10 lessons with students, some who said they were not enjoying the course, where the subject had been their second choice. The school feels this is out of character with the way these students normally behave. Behaviour also deteriorates in lessons where students with special educational needs are not given an appropriate amount of adult support to help them understand the work.

28. Students often ask to raise money for specific charities. 'Children in Need' day saw them raising more money than they had ever done before. To make this up to a round figure, they then asked to organise a talent show. They respond well to opportunities to take initiative and show responsibility in school life. Year 7 students show independence and good organisational skills by producing their own newspaper.

29. The school has made very good progress in raising students' attendance since the previous inspection, when it was highlighted as a key issue for improvement. However, the attendance rate remains below the national average for secondary schools, although close to the county average. At the time of the previous inspection, attendance was 86 per cent. It is currently running just over 90 per cent with unauthorised absence reduced from five to one per cent. This is very good progress in an area which takes a considerable amount of work from school and outside agencies to produce a small increase. The growing practice of parents taking holidays during term time is also adding to the problems; in one autumn term week term this would have made 4 per cent difference.

30. There are some success stories of which the school is justly proud, where students who had stopped attending have been supported back to good attendance. There are around 60 families with whom educational welfare officers and the school are working closely. Court action has been and is being taken with some families, but this does not always lead to improvement.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

31. Teaching and learning are good overall, and making a significant contribution to the school's rising standards. There is little difference in the quality of teaching between Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11. The diagram below illustrates this. The higher number of unsatisfactory lessons in Years 7 to 9 was due mainly to a few lessons where teachers had difficulty managing classes with a high proportion of students with special educational needs, and no additional help. Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The proportion of satisfactory lessons has risen slightly but there has been a big increase in the proportion of lessons where teaching is good or very good. Four outstanding lessons were seen, in drama, ICT, history and physical education.

32. Teaching is satisfactory in mathematics and music in all years and in modern languages in Years 10 and 11. In all other subjects teaching is good in all years.

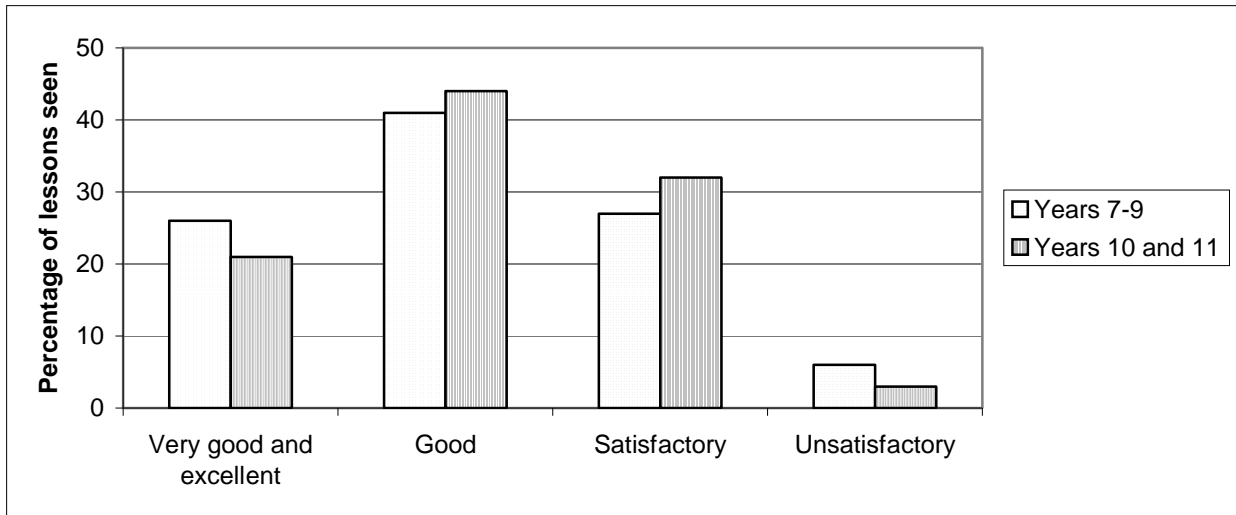


Figure- Quality of teaching seen during the inspection

33. Some of the best teaching during the inspection was seen in English, where of the high number of lessons seen, more than four out of five were good, and almost a third were very good. There is also a high proportion of good and very good teaching in ICT, science and art and design. Teaching in modern languages is good in Years 7 to 9.

34. Teaching is satisfactory rather than good in music, mathematics in all years, and modern languages in Years 10 and 11. In all these subjects the school has had difficulty filling posts, and a succession of temporary teachers has meant that some classes have become disenchanted with the subject, and teachers are finding it hard to make some students motivated or enthusiastic.

35. The school has made a successful effort to improve teaching, through a working party led by the special needs coordinator. This has looked at learning styles and led to training for all staff. The effects of the training can be seen in lessons across the curriculum, where teachers use a lively introduction, move on to the main focus of the lesson, and finish by summing up the lesson in an active session that encourages students to think about what they have learned. Teachers are aware of the need to challenge the most able students, including those identified as gifted and talented, and in a number of subjects this is having a positive impact on these students' learning. This is especially evident in mathematics. There is also an element of sharing ideas across departments, so that drama lessons explore literary texts such as 'The Iron Man', and mathematics uses examples from science when looking at data.

36. In the most effective lessons across all subjects, teachers have well established procedures and clear rules that enable them to start lessons briskly, and maintain good-humoured order. They use the school's reward system well and students appreciate the calm and business-like way in which most lessons are taught.

37. In the best lessons students learn well because they are challenged to think hard and make discoveries for themselves. Teachers use their good knowledge of their subjects to question students closely, giving them opportunities to explore ideas and put their conclusions into words. On the other hand, in a number of lessons teachers direct students too much and deny them the opportunity to think for themselves.

38. Teachers use a wide range of strategies and resources to help students understand new ideas. In a very good mathematics lesson in Year 7 on symmetry the teacher used technical terms throughout, while frequently checking that students understood them. The teacher used the overhead projector effectively to show examples, and involved students in demonstrating and explaining in front of the class. By the end of the lesson all the students had grasped the idea of rotational symmetry and could answer difficult questions about orders of symmetry.

39. Science lessons are characterised by clear explanations, and regular checking that students understand the basic ideas. In a very good lesson in Year 9 on chemical reactions, the teacher used a demonstration to introduce the idea that reactions lead to a new product that must be formed from what was present before the reaction started. Students learned well because they had to respond to challenging questions that made them think about the reaction, so that when they did their own investigation they were well prepared to observe and draw conclusions. The lesson reinforced their understanding, and enabled them to speculate authoritatively about the outcome of other different reactions.

40. In the few unsatisfactory lessons, students do not do or learn enough because teachers do not motivate and engage all students. In some lessons, particularly in Years 7 to 9, this is because a number of classes have a high number of students with special educational needs, and often there is too little support, particularly in Year 7 where the students have not yet had the benefit of so much intensive literacy work done by the learning resource team. In these lessons, where a number of students can barely read, the teacher is very stretched trying to make sure all students can get something from the lesson.

41. In a few lessons, particularly with older students, the teacher does not establish high expectations of behaviour or work. In these cases the lessons are not disorderly, but the students set the pace of working and too little gets done by most.

42. Although teachers know how students are doing, through frequent discussion and testing, work in books is not marked carefully enough and marking does not help students see how to improve. Most marking consists of perfunctory ticks and a few grades. Spelling, even in headings, is not corrected, writing goes unpunctuated, and sometimes work that is wrong is ticked. Exceptions are English and history, where work is often marked carefully.

43. Parents were concerned by the lack of homework, but inspectors found that suitable homework is usually set. However, in some classes, a significant minority do not do it, and this is not always followed up. Homework is not used effectively in withdrawal groups; it is identified in teachers' planning but not always communicated to students.

44. A common feature of the excellent lessons is the very effective planning and management in situations where students are learning actively and often make different demands on the teacher:

- In an ICT lesson in Year 11 the teacher was exceptionally skilful in enabling a large class of students studying for several different examinations, to learn very well, through a large range of appropriate tasks.
- Students made very good progress in a Year 7 drama lesson through a combination of paired and group work, moving from one activity to another without loss of time or interest.
- In a Year 8 history lesson with middle to lower attaining students, students carried out effective research because the lesson was so well planned. Resources were suitable, students were given deadlines to work to, shown how to prepare presentations. Imaginative activities, including a short video clip reinforced the theme of the lesson.

45. The quality of teaching by members of the special educational needs department is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory overall in Years 10 and 11. Support seen in mainstream lessons, though limited, is at least good and sometimes very good. Learning support assistants work well with class teachers ensuring that students with special educational needs have access to the subject.

46. The quality of learning of students with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. In some lessons students are engaged and participate fully in discussion. Students do improve their literacy skills, knowledge and understanding. However, that improvement is impeded by too little target setting for individual students and lack of targeted support. The pace of work is often too slow and lacks challenge, especially in mixed age and ability groups. Students interviewed from Year 10 had a clear view of their learning; students in Years 7 to 9 who have special educational needs have less knowledge of how well they are progressing.

47. In the most successful lessons, teachers use methods that give students with special educational needs a range of activities; reading aloud, writing, discussion in groups or pairs. The pace of lessons is brisk and students are moved forward with specifically directed tasks, and they use worksheets that help them to think and discuss.

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

Learning opportunities

48. The daily life and climate of the school reflect its commitment to equal opportunities and provision for all needs, from its motto "Achievement through partnership" to the many ways in which it tries to meet students' needs and interests.

49. In Years 7, 8 and 9 students are taught the full range of National Curriculum subjects, including separate ICT lessons as well as a weekly personal, health and social education lesson. Students are able to take a second language, German, in Years 8 and 9. However GCSE German lessons are held after school in Years 10 and 11. In Years 10 and 11 students are able to study for GCSE courses as well as vocational courses such as GNVQ in ICT, drama, media studies, health and social care and business studies. In addition some students are able to take specific work related courses, which are very appropriate to their needs. All students in these years have a separate ICT lesson each week, in which they are able to gain a key skills ICT qualification. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and includes religious education for students in all years. The time allowed for most subjects is adequate. The time for double award science is well above average at 24 per cent, and the results do not justify this high investment of time.

50. Work related schemes offer suitable alternative certificated courses for many students who find GCSE overwhelming. Links with outside agencies extend the flexibility of these. Gifted and talented students benefit from opportunities like university-based master classes. Work by the careers adviser with high attaining Year 10 students is specifically aimed at increasing their aspirations for the future.

51. All students follow a personal, health and social education course based on citizenship, environment, health, careers and economic awareness. The programme is well structured and planned, and is taught by form teachers. Health education, sex education and drugs education are covered in sufficient depth and visiting speakers contribute to these courses. Procedures for dealing with incidents of racial abuse are in line with the school's effective policy and meets requirements.

52. Careers education is very well provided in personal, health and social education lessons, with the use of the 'Real game' in Years 8 and 9 leading to more specific careers work in Year 10 that culminates in two weeks work experience during the summer term for Year 10 students. In Year 11 students receive further effective careers advice.

53. There is a good range of extra curricular activities, which provides opportunities for all students including those who are gifted and talented. Students can take part in a number of sporting activities such as soccer, athletics, cricket and girls' football. There are a number of clubs, which students can join at lunchtime and after school. These include computers, woodwork and revision classes in subjects such as science, mathematics and geography.

54. There are strengths in drama and performing arts, with major drama productions every year. The lively musical scene includes regular musical productions and termly musical evenings involving choirs and instrumental groups, as well as an enthusiastic staff choir. A brass instrumental group is being formed, with some support from the Peterlee town band. Students with musical talents are encouraged and a student has just won a scholarship to an internationally known music college. Assemblies regularly feature musical performances by students.

55. Community links are very good. The East Durham Partnership, a local charity established in 1989, relocated to the school in April 2002. The partnership makes extensive use of the school's resource centre, particularly the twenty newly installed computers. Adults work alongside students during the day, as well as having access to the resource centre in the evening and on Saturdays. The project coordinator has played a central role in these developments and the planned location of other groups to the school in September further strengthens the school's role in the community

56. Links with partner institutions are very good, particularly with local primary schools. Performing arts students and the 'CragRats' drama group have given a number of performances over the past year in local primary schools. Curriculum links are well advanced, particularly in mathematics with a bridging project, 'Maths in the Workplace' recently started. ICT teachers have visited primary schools, and most departments now have a nominated primary liaison teacher to develop curriculum links.

57. The school has also formed good relationships with other schools and colleges to provide a work related curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11, as well as opportunities for post 16 students to continue their studies at East Durham Community College and Durham Sixth Form Centre after leaving Shotton Hall.

58. The curriculum for students with special educational needs provides some valuable alternative teaching in small groups. However, the benefit is off-set by the schedule for withdrawing students for this help. Some of students in Years 7 to 9 miss most or all of their lessons in the same subject, week after week, and are unable to catch up.

Personal development

59. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There has been considerable improvement in spiritual development, which was a key issue for improvement from the previous inspection. Moral and cultural development have also improved. There are still too few opportunities to explore the traditions and diversity of other cultures.

60. The school provides good opportunities for spiritual development. The headteacher and senior staff broadcast carefully considered 'Thoughts for the Day' through the public address system. These convey inspirational messages, giving students opportunities to reflect on their personal aspirations, on the importance of learning, on aiming high, as well as responding to national tragedies and stories of hardship and bravery. Termly visits to St Cuthbert Church nearby, such as the Christmas and Easter services, involve nearly all the school and bring everyone together in prayer and thanksgiving. Religious education, and some aspects of English and history also contribute to the good provision.

61. There are very good opportunities for moral development. The school's strong moral approach to life is contributing to the improvement in behaviour. The code of conduct beginning 'courtesy and respect characterise the behaviour of all at Shotton Hall' is paramount in setting the right tone. The reward system is motivational in encouraging the high standard of behaviour seen.

62. The school council has considerable autonomy in decision-making, and is one feature of the good provision for social development. The council was given free rein in decorating the dining room and ordering furniture. Opportunities through Young Enterprise, Duke Of Edinburgh award and World Challenge all provide students with opportunities for experiences and responsibilities they would not normally meet. Visits to nearby universities, such as the Year 7 visit to Sunderland, are all helping to broaden students' horizons and raise their expectations of being involved in higher education.

63. Opportunities for cultural development are good, with drama being a star player. There are many outstanding performances held over the year, including Romeo and Juliet. A

resident actor from CragRats, a professional theatre group, provides students with professional expertise. 'Artists in residence' in media studies and art and design (next week a visit from a glass sculptor) add to the range of different experiences provided for students. Multi-cultural education is covered well in some subjects, particularly in English and religious education. In art and design, students study the different cultures including Aboriginal and Egyptian art and Mendhi patterns. However, multi-cultural education does not thoroughly permeate the school in order to prepare students fully for life in today's multi-cultural society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

64. The school provides a good range of support services. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' personal development are good. There is a strong pastoral system working closely with a number of support agencies. This means students have a number of specialists, as well as teachers that they can turn to for help and advice on a range of issues connected to teenage life.

65. The underlying emphasis of the pastoral system is clearly on raising students' achievements and teachers provide a good range of revision classes, including Saturday sessions and the opportunities for residential revision courses.

66. The Education Action Zone funding provides a youth worker, an educational welfare officer, attendance assistant, and two learning mentors. A Connexions adviser has just moved into offices in the school. These are all helping with the often complex social and emotional problems students have to cope with, both in and out of school. Both learning mentors have carved their own niche by providing good quality sensitive support for students who are not achieving the high standards of which they are capable. Anonymous case studies show how students have been helped to stay on courses, complete coursework and apply to colleges through the dedication, perseverance and support of the learning mentors and school staff. They are making a real difference to the lives and prospects of many students.

67. There are good systems to encourage students to behave well. The school has worked very hard to improve students' behaviour with a significant degree of success. Staff feel that the introduction of subsidised school uniform cannot be overestimated when analysing just why students have more pride in the school or why behaviour has improved. The systems in place are working well and rewards, using Education Action Zone money, are valued by all. The significant reduction in the numbers of students excluded for poor behaviour is testimony to the success of the systems now in place. Occasionally, the system is not used when it should be, where behaviour is deteriorating in class, and then students are seen to be 'getting away with it'.

68. The school makes effective use of weekly data gained through a points system to pinpoint any students whose behaviour is starting to deteriorate. Sept³ tutors and heads of year are conscientious in the work they do supporting and encouraging those who find good behaviour a challenge. The headteacher has inspired both staff and students in his zeal to improve the behaviour since his arrival. Staff, parents, and students point, with pleasure and pride, to the considerable improvements over the last year.

³ Sept – the name used in this school for form or tutor groups

69. Students with special educational needs, particularly those who are most vulnerable, are well supported in their personal development. There is effective help for students who have difficulty accepting and conforming to the school's code of behaviour. The behavioural support team provides a good service that is carefully documented. Students are referred and then assessed by the behaviour support teacher using classroom observation, referral information and interviews with the student to ascertain need. A bank of targets is discussed and three or four selected, including one that is more easily achieved. When all targets have been met the student and teacher select the next targets. This process provides students with short term targets which build their confidence and helps them to progress in managing their behaviour. The system developed by the behaviour support teacher is easy to understand, and progress can be plotted.

70. Students with statements of special educational needs have individual education plans. However, in most subjects, targets are not identified; instead, individual education plans provide actions or strategies. This means that students sometimes do not know what they have to do to improve, and neither they nor their teachers can measure achievement accurately.

71. There are very good systems for encouraging regular attendance and for monitoring absences. Staff work tirelessly to encourage students to attend school more regularly. Students enjoy competing for worthwhile rewards such as a visit out for a burger or to the cinema. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good and well thought out. There is a good multi-agency approach and good support from two Educational Welfare officers and an assistant who work in partnership with senior staff.

72. Students are happy with the way the school deals with bullying. Inspection evidence confirms procedures are very good. Students explained that the amount of bullying and oppressive behaviour has been significantly reduced in the last year. Staff take incidents seriously and follow them up. 'Thought for the day' is well used to highlight whole school behavioural issues, such as bullying, when they arise.

73. Procedures for child protection are good and the named person is trained and experienced. All heads of year have received training from social services concerning their responsibilities. Staff show a high degree of care and concern for the individual needs of students and are well aware of those who are vulnerable. The school's good practice in encouraging good behaviour, monitoring attendance and handling child protection is not fully reflected in its written policies, which are currently under review.

74. Provision for students' health and safety is satisfactory. The person responsible is experienced and trained, with more courses planned. A recent action plan for the development of health and safety is in place and has correctly identified the need for governors to have an overview. The school should ensure the health and safety concerns regarding the kiln, mentioned in the art and design section, are attended to.

Assessment

75. Arrangements for assessing students' work are satisfactory. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. The school is currently reviewing and monitoring systems which have been established with the intention of improving their efficacy. Teachers of all

subjects are provided with information about students' attainment in English, mathematics and science, based on tests taken at primary schools in Year 6. Thereafter, the results of assessment of students' work in subjects of the curriculum are collated and monitored by senior members of staff who make recommendations about which students need to be supported to make the best progress they can.

76. The lack of objective reliable information on all students' attainment and potential when they enter school in Year 7 is a weakness recognised by the headteacher and from this year the school will have information from nationally recognised tests taken at the start of Year 7. Assessment of students with special educational needs is dealt with later in this report.

77. In most subjects, students' work is assessed against national criteria and they are awarded levels in each subject from Year 7 onwards. Students know the levels they are achieving in lessons and how they relate to national targets for their age. The assessment and monitoring of students' work is especially good in English, science, art and design and ICT. It is good in geography, design technology, mathematics and religious education. It is unsatisfactory in music. In other subjects it is satisfactory. Marking of students' work across the curriculum is insufficiently helpful in providing clear guidance for improvement for individual students on a day-to-day basis.

78. Satisfactory use is made of assessment information to guide planning for the curriculum. Results of examinations are analysed and trends identified to modify the curriculum in order to match more closely the needs of all students. For example, vocational courses have been introduced in addition to GCSE courses. However, the lack of objective tests on entry at present restricts the school's ability to measure the progress of students against their potential.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

79. The school has good informal links with parents and is actively pursuing ways to encourage parents to be involved in the work of the school, or to become adult learners themselves through the community action network. Partly as a result of this, and also because their children are clearly happy at school, parents have positive views about many aspects of the school. Through the results of the pre-inspection questionnaire, written comments and views from the pre-inspection meeting, parents told of their pleasure with the way the school is improving. They see clear signs that the school is growing in its respect from the local community. Some point to the introduction of school uniform being a catalyst for change. The number of students wanting to come here in September is one of the highest ever. This is a testimony to parents' growing faith in the headteacher and school.

80. The school conveys a willingness to work with parents and when approached, teachers are more than happy to discuss students' work. There is good contact where there are difficulties over behaviour or unsatisfactory attendance. There are a number of special meetings held about issues pertinent to different year groups, for example, a 'settling in' meeting for Year 7 parents, an option evening for Year 9 parents a Year 10 coursework evening and a GCSE meeting for Year 11. These are usually well attended. The very well attended Open Day is popular because parents can visit classes, talk to tutors and see their

children's work. However, some parents would prefer annual meetings for all years to talk to subject teachers.

81. Results of the parents' questionnaire revealed significant dissatisfaction with the extent to which parents are informed about their child's progress. Inspectors agree with parents that the current arrangements for informing them of progress are unsatisfactory. Annual reports do not provide enough information about how students are progressing or highlight weaker areas where they need to improve. Currently, there is too much commentary on students' attitude towards the subject and not enough information about progress in the subject. There are inconsistencies in quality between subjects; those for physical education are often more detailed than most. Few subjects mention targets for students' future improvement. In addition, there are few meetings where parents can discuss their child's progress with subject teachers. Such meetings are planned from September.

82. The headteacher successfully conveys his aspirations for the positive future of the school through colourful, friendly, newsletters. These help parents to appreciate all that is going on as well as sharing in their pride at students' achievements in and out of school. The prospectus, currently a temporary publication, does not skimp on quality and is an enjoyable and interesting read for prospective parents. There is insufficient information about the success of the special educational needs policy in the governors' annual report to parents.

83. Parental involvement in school life is currently satisfactory and well poised to grow. Parents who are governors play an active role in the overall management of the school. Other parents who have volunteered to help in the past have often been encouraged to apply for jobs within the school, either in an administrative capacity or directly helping students in class. Parents give good support to drama productions and sporting events.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

84. The leadership of the headteacher is a very good. At the time of the inspection he had been in post for a little over a year, and in this relatively short time he has taken positive steps to move the school forward. The strategies already evolving stem from the judicious extension of responsibilities within the senior management team and there is cohesion within this management group that is bringing about considerable change and improvement to the way the school is organised. Members of the senior management team have complementary strengths and give strong support to the headteacher.

85. The headteacher works tirelessly on behalf of the school, promoting its name, ensuring that it is properly recognised for the achievements of its students, and that all agencies are exploited fully if they can be used to the advantage of the school. He has already gained the respect and co-operation of teachers, parents and students, and has engendered a new sense of purpose and optimism that permeates all aspects of the school's life. He is a visible presence around the school and makes himself accessible to students, parents and staff alike. He is harnessing the considerable potential of both staff and students and much progress is being made.

86. With the re-structuring of the leadership team the proportion of women in senior posts has increased and they feel well integrated and effective. Performance management, based on this team, is on line to be completed within the required time limit.

87. Whilst the overall management of the school is good there are some weaknesses. The school still needs to improve the overall attainment of its students and although some monitoring of teaching and learning is taking place, especially in some departments, in the school as a whole it is not rigorous enough and this is hindering progress. As yet, there is no systematic monitoring within departments and no shared planning to develop quality.

88. Departments are mostly effectively managed. Senior management recognises that there is now a need for the school's middle managers to take responsibility for all aspects of their department's work and the professional development of departmental colleagues. There is an immediate need to ensure that marking policies are in place and to monitor their implementation.

89. Pastoral care is provided effectively by heads of years. Good standards of support and guidance to students, and of the provision for their welfare make a positive contribution to educational standards and help students to be happy and secure. The school has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Pastoral staff know their students very well and students confidently turn to them for help. The high quality of co-operation between staff on pastoral matters is an important feature of the school.

90. The management of in-class support and withdrawal for students with special educational needs does not always meet the needs of students on the register. The special educational needs co-ordinator has built an effective team who work well together. The resource base provides a safe and secure base for students who experience difficulty in mainstream classes where students and their needs are well known by all the team. However, the organisation of this support is not fully effective, because there is insufficient assessment to ensure that the balance between in-class support and withdrawal for specialist teaching is effective. At present there is too little support provided in lessons and this is having a negative impact on many subjects.

91. Liaison with external agencies is good with some very effective work being done with students who have emotional or behavioural difficulties. The referral system and the practice of the behaviour support teacher ensures that these students make very good progress in overcoming their difficulties.

92. Governors know the school well. They ensure that the curriculum meets requirements and financial planning is effective. At present, due to a resignation, there is no governor with responsibility for special educational needs or literacy. It is important to make these appointments quickly to such a crucial area of the school's work.

Efficiency

93. The school's finance officer is part of the senior management team. This enables the senior management team to link educational and financial planning closely. Very effective use is made of local and national initiatives, all of which are well integrated into the school's drive to raise attainment. Funding and support through the Education Action Zone and Excellence Challenge initiatives are used very well to support both large and small projects that have a direct bearing on standards, and raising students' confidence and aspirations.

94. There is good understanding of the principles by which the school ensures that it obtains the best value for all its spending and activities and these principles are applied effectively. The school compares its performance and spending with others, and consults staff, parents and students about changes.

95. Although heads of departments have a basic allocation of money, they are required to identify needs in their annual review and can make extra bids. There is an open-minded approach to individual teachers' requests, although generally these needs are linked to performance management targets and to the school's overall priorities.

96. The lack of effective assessment of students with special educational needs means that help is not always directed at the areas of greatest need and some of the considerable funding for special educational needs is not targeted efficiently.

Staffing

97. Good progress has been made on most staffing issues arising from the previous inspection. Budgetary constraints mean that some teachers with extra responsibilities are still overstretched despite the fact that the leadership team is teaching more. Solutions have been found to staffing problems in music, physical education, English and science. Recruitment problems and variability of supply teachers have adversely affected standards in mathematics, but an appointment has been made for next term that completes the mathematics team. Otherwise there are sufficient appropriately qualified teachers across the curriculum. There is a team of trained learning support assistants. Technician support in science is excellent, and the efficient and friendly administration staff make a positive contribution to the effective running of the school. The school's concern for its students and the quality of teaching is evident in the very good support for newly qualified, trainee, and temporary teachers.

98. Strong and wide-ranging investment in in-service training underpins the school's drive for higher standards through effective teaching. The school feels it receives value for money from its partnership agreement with Durham Local Education Authority. Subject-based termly training meetings for heads of department, "Investing in Excellence" courses and eighteen hour contracts for support within classrooms on management techniques are supporting the professional development of the staff.

Accommodation

99. The provision of accommodation for learning is satisfactory overall. It is good in some subjects, such as art and design, physical education, information technology and geography. Accommodation needs upgrading in music, and some classrooms in mathematics are cramped when classes are large. Displays in the public areas of the school emphasise the importance of learning, and celebrate students' successes. The building and site are very well cared for by the site staff, and students respond by treating the area with care and respect.

Resources

100. Provision of learning resources is unsatisfactory; the main reason for this is the inadequate library. As a result of expanding community computer resources, the space for the library has been considerably reduced. Many of the remaining books are out of date, and there is not enough room for new books. The existing provision does not help students to develop their literacy skills.

101. Provision for other resources is generally satisfactory. There are enough textbooks and apparatus in science and most other subjects have enough textbooks. In some areas, for example mathematics, there are plans to improve the quality and amount of stock when decisions on course choices are made. There are not enough artefacts in religious education. There is not enough equipment in design and technology to teach the control module fully.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

102. In order to raise the attainment of students, the governors and management should:

- (1) Raise standards in mathematics in lower and middle attaining groups by ensuring that basic mathematical ideas are reinforced more thoroughly.
(Paragraphs: 20, 129)
- (2) Improve standards of literacy throughout the school by:
 - implementing a literacy policy in which all subjects make an appropriate contribution to students' language skills;
(Paragraphs: 118, 123, 124, 149, 153, 159, 160, 162, 167, 233)
 - improving the quality of marking so that students are more aware of their mistakes in written English;
(Paragraphs: 42, 77, 88, 137, 163, 172, 206, 236, 237)
 - giving students more opportunities to carry out independent research and write about their findings;
(Paragraphs: 169, 180, 236)
 - extending the use of oral activities such as discussion work in groups;
(Paragraph: 124)
 - Re-locating and improving the stock of library books so that students can use and borrow books in a setting that encourages reading and study.
(Paragraphs: 100, 118, 122)
- (3) Explore different ways of supporting students and families, to encourage parents to see that their children attend school regularly.
(Paragraphs: 29, 114, 126, 137, 149, 155, 177)
- (4) Improve the provision for students with special educational needs by:
 - improving assessment so that their progress can be measured and help targeted appropriately;
(Paragraphs: 103-105, 107)
 - discontinuing the system in which students are withdrawn from the same lesson each week for long periods;
(Paragraphs: 19, 96, 170, 199)
 - providing more support in lessons where a high proportion of students have special educational needs.
(Paragraphs: 27, 31, 40, 127, 170, 174, 189, 234)
- (5) Improve the quality of reports to include information about students' progress and targets for improvement.
(Paragraphs: 81, 172, 237)

In addition to the above key issues, the school should consider the following other less important issues for inclusion in its action plan:

- Improve the way the school prepares students for life in a multicultural society.
(Paragraphs: 63, 182)
- Increase the use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum.
(Paragraphs: 106, 146, 157, 176, 180, 194, 195, 204, 215)
- Increase students' opportunities to think for themselves in lessons.
(Paragraphs: 37, 112, 114, 155, 160, 169, 181, 198, 236)
- Improve monitoring in departments by:
 - formal observations of lessons and increased opportunities to share good practice
(Paragraphs: 87, 134, 164, 183, 207, 237)
 - monitoring and evaluating the quality of teachers' marking
(Paragraphs: 88, 134, 145, 172, 183)
- Ensure that the governors' annual report to parents includes sufficient information about the progress of students with special educational needs.
(Paragraph: 82)

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

103. The assessment and monitoring of the progress of students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory. Although there is good informal knowledge of students, and the degree of care for their personal and emotional development is high, there are no suitable arrangements for measuring the progress of students who have literacy and numeracy difficulties. Students' files contain a substantial amount of information which is not effectively used to set appropriate targets to ensure that students make progress.

104. There is a reliance on national tests for eleven year olds to establish attainment when students enter the school and there is no baseline testing carried out at whole school level. This lack of accurate baseline assessment limits the way in which progress can then be measured. The special educational needs group, identified using Year 6 data, is tested for their reading ages. Diagnostic testing is carried out on students with specific learning difficulties but little testing is carried out on students at the 'school action' or 'school action plus' stages of the new code of practice.

105. Learning support assistants who listen to readers withdrawn from lessons keep careful records of students' progress, but these do not indicate the students' starting point or the improvements made in their reading. Comments are concerned with fluency and accuracy but reading books are not chosen for the opportunities they provide to enable students to improve on their particular weaknesses.

106. Teachers' and learning support assistants' knowledge and understanding is good within the Resource Base. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory. However, students who need to improve reading skills do not have a structured programme that assesses their needs, sets them targets and illustrates progress against their reading ages. Teachers' expectations with regard to behaviour are very high but their expectations with regard to improving literacy skills do not always offer the level of challenge needed to make good progress. The reliance on Key Stage 2 data does not accurately target resources for students. Little challenging use is made of ICT in literacy support lessons or in the reading carousel.

107. The files of students with special educational needs do not contain a cover or summary sheet which would identify the students' attainment and achievement over time. Although students are taken off the 'withdrawal' group list and others are added, it is not clear what the criteria are for addition to or removal from the special needs register or withdrawal groups.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	141
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	48

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	4	29	60	41	7	0	0
Percentage	3	21	43	29	4	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 students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	1006
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	291

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	50
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	197

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	0

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	26
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	27

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.7
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	2.1
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)

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	115	107	222

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	43	53	62
	Girls	71	66	64
	Total	114	119	126
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	51 (48)	54 (53)	57 (50)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (18)	33 (31)	28 (24)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	25	58	60
	Girls	56	73	65
	Total	81	131	125
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	37 (49)	59 (56)	57 (36)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	10 (10)	33 (27)	26 (18)
	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 students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	107	97	204

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	25	83	99
	Girls	28	84	92
	Total	53	167	191
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	26 (36)	82 (85)	94 (95)
	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 student	School	27.8
	National	39.0

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1002
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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	68	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	57.2
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.6

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	15.5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	523

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	21.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2 711 459
Total expenditure	2 712 021
Expenditure per student	2 674
Balance brought forward from previous year	42 438
Balance carried forward to next year	124 964

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	11
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	9

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	4.5
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	2.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	854
Number of questionnaires returned	171

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	55	11	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	31	60	5	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	26	54	8	4	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	47	17	11	3
The teaching is good.	26	61	7	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	39	28	5	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	42	6	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	53	41	4	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	22	51	18	4	5
The school is well led and managed.	40	44	4	2	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	53	12	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	18	48	13	6	15

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning in lessons are good.
- There are good relationships between students and teachers.
- Leadership and management of the department are good.

Areas for improvement

- Levels of literacy are well below average.
- The attainment of boys is well below that of girls.
- The department does not work within a whole school framework to improve literacy.
- The school library has inadequate books and accommodation to encourage reading.

108. Standards of work seen during the inspection are below the national average, both by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. Students enter the school with well below average standards. At this time, most have insecure understanding of previous work, little experience of reading for pleasure or to gain information and have restricted vocabularies. Good progress is made in improving knowledge and understanding but not in improving basic skills of reading and writing. Overall, standards remain below the national average, but test and examination results are above average by comparison with similar schools. This represents good achievement across all years and results from good teaching and students' positive attitudes based upon their good relationships with teachers and each other.

109. Results of national tests for students aged 14 in 2001 were below the national average but above the average for similar schools. Girls gained higher results than boys by a margin greater than the national difference. The trend of improvement is similar to the national trend.

110. The proportion of students gaining grades A* - C in 2001 in GCSE English was below the national average but most students gained higher grades than they were awarded in other subjects for which they were entered. The proportion of students gaining grades A* -C in English literature in 2001 was well below average partly because the school entered more students than is typical and also because a new component of the examination proved to be unexpectedly difficult. Girls' results were better than those of boys in both examinations and by a wider margin than is found nationally. Results in both subjects generally show improvement over the last few years. Results in media studies were well above average.

111. Standards of work seen in Years 7 – 9 improve from the time of entry, but at the end of Year 9 are still below average. This is because the majority of students arrive with limited experience of reading either for information or for pleasure. They draw upon restricted vocabularies and have little understanding of elementary grammar, or the construction of paragraphs and sentences. Spelling is inaccurate. Standards of speaking are below average but by Year 9 the higher attainers are able to offer clear answers to questions and to explain reasons for their opinions. Others are limited to short answers often because they seem unable

to find the words to communicate their understanding. Almost all become able to read aloud accurately. Apart from the most able, most students need the help of teachers to gain adequate understanding of their reading. When asked to highlight aspects of writing being studied, or to make notes on texts they show a developing ability to identify and explain significant detail. When working in small groups, they often develop good understanding because they share opinions and reach sensible agreements. All students take care with the presentation of written work. The majority have learned that they need to use language differently for different purposes such as when writing informal or formal letters. The most able understand how to achieve particular effects in their writing. They make appropriate use of a variety of sentence patterns and draw upon wide vocabularies. The effectiveness of the writing of the majority is reduced by the frequency of errors of spelling, punctuation and sentence construction. In the worst examples, communication with the reader breaks down.

112. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are closer to but still below national averages. More students are able to offer opinions or judgements supported by reasons though the proportion able to offer lengthy contributions remains small. Lower attaining students in Year 11 responded sensitively and perceptively to a poem by Carol Ann Duffy which required them to consider appalling images of suffering in war. Helped by skilful questioning by their teacher they were able to describe how and why the poem affected them and to link their work to other writing they had encountered. The most able have good understanding of what they read. Most students have developed confidence in themselves and each other when exploring texts, especially when working in groups. Writing is better. All students succeed in communicating at least their main sense. Writing in paragraphs and sentences is generally improved. Many students, however, depend on teachers for guidance on how to select relevant material and to organise. Too many lack the clarity and accuracy needed to communicate in writing the full quality of their knowledge and understanding.

113. The quality of teaching and learning is good. About a third of lessons seen were very good and teaching was never less than satisfactory. Planning is very good. Teachers link lessons to previous and future work so that students understand their relevance. They include a range of activities so that students practise several skills and the variety helps to sustain their interest and concentration. In most lessons, including the best, teachers make good use of questions both to confirm and to extend understanding and also to ensure that students are contributing to their learning. Lessons end with a brief review of what has been learned and how well students have worked. This helps students to clarify their thinking and, usually, to feel pleased with their progress.

114. Students remember lessons learned earlier especially well when they are exploring ideas with teachers rather than being told what is significant. In a Year 9 class considering a documentary film about a school without rules, a student identified Orwell's '1984' as an example of a society with too many rules. This reference to a book read almost eight months earlier helped the class decide that it is important to achieve a balance between rules and freedom. Teachers have high expectations of students' individual achievement, effort and behaviour. They have good understanding of the needs and strengths of each student and aim to ensure that all are appropriately challenged. They have good management skills and examples of misbehaviour that significantly disrupts learning are rare. Because students have good relationships with each other and with teachers, they respond positively. They gain confidence because teachers value their efforts and classmates are always supportive. Irregular attendance disrupts the learning of several students especially in Years 10 and 11.

115. Homework is set at appropriate intervals and is relevant to work being done in class. Most marking helps students to learn because it notes the strengths of their work and indicates means of further improvement. Teachers have good understanding of how the work of students is measured against national standards. They share this with students so that they can set their own targets. Grade and level criteria are displayed in most classrooms together with samples of work, posters and other displays. Most rooms have a positive effect upon learning because they are pleasant yet purposeful work bases.

116. Students with special needs make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 and good progress, in line with other students, in Years 10 and 11. Almost all gain better grades at GCSE than might be expected on the basis of teachers' estimation of their standards when they enter the school. They gain in confidence and skills because they are well taught both by specialist teachers as well as teachers of English. A class of students in Year 11 showed excellent attitudes, and a mature and sensitive ability to discuss complex emotions and experiences. The progress of those with individual education plans would be increased if the targets set for them were stated more precisely so that teachers might understand more clearly how they might better help these students.

117. Higher attaining students and those who are gifted and talented, are provided with good opportunities to extend their learning but occasionally they are allowed to work at too leisurely a pace in Years 7 – 9. Although the attainment of boys is generally below that of girls, their rates of progress are similar. Students of both genders are equally positive in their attitudes, with boys, especially in Years 7 – 9, being even more willing to contribute to discussion.

118. The leadership and management of the department are good. Although several members of the department have significant whole school responsibilities, all contribute to the development of its work. Strong team spirit was evident during the inspection when a new unit of work was being introduced to classes in Years 9 and 10. All the teachers involved were keen to share their experiences of how students were responding. Their willingness to share successful practice is evident in their agreed style of lesson planning. The curriculum has a good range of activities to develop the skills of the subject including those associated with drama and media studies. Schemes of work identify opportunities for the use of word processing and desk-top publishing and more use is made of computers than at the time of the previous report. Improvement since that report is satisfactory. The range of fiction available to classes in Years 7 – 9 is still too narrow to support the department's aim to establish more widely the habit of reading. The stock of books in the library is inadequate to support the teaching of research skills or to encourage reading for pleasure. The school lacks a strategy to which all subjects contribute to raise levels of literacy.

Media Studies

119. Students consider aspects of media studies such as advertising, newspapers, magazines and film in their work in English. Media Studies has been successfully introduced as an optional course at GCSE. In each of the last two years, the proportion of students achieving grades A*– C and grades A*– G has been above the national average.

120. Evidence of the inspection confirms that students have good understanding, for example, of how the camera can be used in films to suggest character and to set a story in a

particular location. They make appropriate use of technical language and are confident in contributing their opinions to class discussion. They show interest in their work and enjoy it. Some have problems in understanding what examination questions expect of them and in organising and expressing their ideas clearly and accurately.

121. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject. They have high expectations of students' achievement and use a range of good resources to illustrate the principles and concepts that need to be understood. Their enthusiasm and insights positively influence students' learning.

Literacy across the curriculum

122. Standards of literacy are well below average. The majority of students have limited vocabularies, rarely read and their writing lacks the clarity, organisation and accuracy needed to show how much they know and understand. The school library has hard working staff but lacks the accommodation and the range and quality of texts required to encourage students to use and value books.

123. Previous reports clearly identified the need to promote access to books and implement a policy to improve literacy skills across the curriculum. There is some evidence of improved provision in the work of some subjects. In most classrooms, there are displays of words that students need to know and use in the different subjects and this is helpful. Only in English, design technology, history and some science lessons are students given guidance on writing longer pieces. There are too few opportunities for students to discuss an issue in groups and then feed back to the class. Some effective working in pairs was observed in history but only in English and drama were interactive discussions between students and with teachers noted as evidence of effective teaching and learning. Departmental documentation usually refers to the National Literacy Strategy but only in the handbooks for English and history was clear acceptance noted of responsibility for helping students to raise their standards.

124. The school lacks adequate strategies employed throughout the curriculum to raise standards of literacy. The current policy is in draft form. It identifies some good provision mainly for students with special needs. It does not identify a sufficient range of strategies to raise the standards of all students. It makes little reference to the work begun in primary schools now being extended into secondary schools nationally. Each department has been asked to complete an audit of its provision in this area but there is no evidence of this data being collated, discussed and used for planning. Too many departments do not understand that they should plan opportunities within their schemes of work for students to practise the skills of discussion, reading for information and enjoyment and writing in a variety of forms both to demonstrate and clarify knowledge and understanding. There is only limited recognition of the need for review of teaching and learning styles.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and give good support to individuals, in and outside class.
- Good management has identified the key priorities for improvement and acted on them.

- Good progress by the higher attainers in Years 9,10 and 11 has resulted in their high standards of work.
- There is some good, and very good, teaching which is effective in improving achievement.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are well below average at the end of Year 11 and achievement in Years 10 and 11, especially for average and lower attaining students, is unsatisfactory.
- Class management is not effective in some lessons.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and learning is not rigorous enough, and successful practice is not systematically shared.

125. Students' attainment in mathematics, on entry to the school is well below average, though their facility with calculations is better than their understanding of mathematical concepts. Progress made in lessons is satisfactory, as is achievement for all students across Years 7, 8 and 9. By the end of Year 9 standards of attainment have improved and are below national expectations. The National Curriculum Key Stage 3 test results in 2001 are similar to the standards of work seen in the inspection; these results are below national averages, and in line with those of similar schools. The 2001 test results were lower than those of 2000, but otherwise the trend of results is upwards. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls; some years boys get better results, in other years girls do.

126. Achievement across Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory for a significant number of students. By the end of Year 11, students reach standards well below national expectations. The 2001 GCSE results are well below national averages, and well below those of similar schools. A high level of absence by students and problems caused by staffing turnover were key factors in this. This has affected the progress of average and lower attainers more than the higher attainers and gifted and talented students, who tend to have better independent study skills, and are more able to cope with changes of teacher. The 2001 GCSE results were lower than those of the two previous years. As in Year 9, in some years girls achieved better GCSE results than boys, in other years it is the reverse. Work seen during the inspection shows that learning in lessons is at least satisfactory, and for higher attainers it is good. However, not all students are currently sustaining the progress made in lessons over a longer period. Attendance for higher attainers was higher than in other classes, as was their attendance at revision classes, important factors in their better progress over time. Work seen during the inspection shows that the range of strategies used to help students to improve their standards of work is showing some success. Results from trial examinations show that this year's GCSE results should be higher than last.

127. During the inspection, no significant difference was seen in the attainment or achievement of boys and girls. Students with special educational needs generally make similar progress to the others in their class. However, in some classes, there is a large proportion of students with special educational needs, and no additional support, and this makes it difficult for the teacher to make sure all students make satisfactory progress. When teaching is good, or very good, this is not a problem. All teachers provide good individual support to students, in and outside class, and students appreciate this.

128. Lesson observations and scrutiny of previous work show that higher attainers, and gifted and talented students, develop a good mathematical foundation as they progress through the school. Especially from Year 9 onwards, their skills develop well, and they are able to choose from a wide repertoire of techniques to solve a particular problem. Year 11 students can find unknown angles in complex diagrams combining circles and triangles, and are able to explain the reasoning behind their solutions. Their attitudes to work are positive, as shown by the quality and quantity of work they do, both in and outside class.

129. In all years, average and lower attaining students increase their knowledge and skill base in terms of learning how to use standard techniques. Their understanding of what they are doing does not increase at the same rate. For example, lower attaining students in Year 10 can work out simple number patterns with familiar numbers, but need prompting to describe the rules behind the calculations and then apply them to more difficult ones. Average attaining students in Year 10 can use trigonometric ratios to find unknown sides in right-

angled triangles. However, more time than expected has to be spent at the beginning of lessons making sure students who have been away when the topic was first covered are able to catch up with the others. For some older students, their frequent absence prevents them from maintaining a satisfactory rate of progress.

130. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. All teachers observed, including supply teachers and those who teach part-time in the department, have a secure base of mathematical expertise and are able to find good examples to help students understand new, or difficult, topics. They use resources well to develop understanding. An example was the use of prepared transparencies to help Year 7 students visualise rotational symmetry. Students found it easy to understand the principles involved and were able to use the diagrams as a visual 'prompt' for difficult questions.

131. When teaching is good, or very good, the management of potentially unwilling learners is extremely skilled; a calm, persistent manner and well understood classroom routines are used to create a good atmosphere for learning. Students respond well, are keen to learn, and also are prepared to try to solve problems by themselves, instead of asking for help immediately they feel it might be hard. Questions are used skilfully to make students think about what they are doing, and they are prepared to try to explain it to others. In lessons with higher attainers, the brisk pace of teaching and strong focus on understanding mathematical ideas means students have to concentrate and work hard to keep up.

132. When teaching is satisfactory, rather than good or better, the teacher often spends too much time dealing with some difficult behaviour. This does mean that other students can get on with their work, but at times slows the pace of the lesson. In the occasional unsatisfactory lesson, class management is not strong enough to deal with disruptive students, and so others cannot make enough progress.

133. Staffing in the department has changed considerably since the last inspection. These changes have meant that some classes have had frequent changes of mathematics teacher, including some supply cover. The supply teachers have sometimes been mathematics specialists, sometimes not. The school has worked hard to minimise these disruptions.

134. The new head of department has been in post for about a year. She, and the second in department, form a good management team. Teachers work well together and have coped well with difficult staffing issues. Departmental priorities have been identified and action taken, especially in Years 10 and 11, to improve results. Regular revision classes are an example of this. Funding from Excellence Challenge has been used to provide effective day conferences for Year 11 students, helping different groups of students to improve their mathematical skills and understanding. The good systems for regular assessment provide a clear picture to teachers and students of current standards, and whether they are high enough. As yet there is no formal system for monitoring teaching and for regular scrutiny of written work, therefore the good practice in the department is not being shared enough. A programme of systematic classroom observation is planned for the next school year.

135. Most students' work is marked regularly but the amount of written feedback varies between teachers, and is often not detailed enough. This makes it more difficult for some students to use their books for revising previously covered work. However oral feedback on work completed in class or for homework is at least satisfactory. Presentation of written work is usually satisfactory, but diagrams are sometimes badly drawn.

136. The mathematics curriculum meets statutory requirements, and is increasingly enriched by methods and ideas from the National Numeracy Strategy. Satisfactory use is made of ICT in teaching, for example in analysis of data and presentation of coursework.

However access to computers is more difficult in Years 7, 8 and 9 than in Years 10 and 11, where there is regular timetabled access to a computer room.

137. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. Provision for higher attainers has improved, as have standards at the end of Year 9. It is taking longer to improve the rate of progress at Key Stage 4. This is due to the cumulative effect of staffing issues, and some students' unsatisfactory attendance and poor retention skills. Some progress has been made in improving marking but more could be done to achieve consistency across the department.

Numeracy

138. The provision for developing students' numeracy skills is satisfactory. The whole school training day on numeracy has encouraged the development of links between the mathematics and other departments. For example, in one mathematics lesson in Year 9 on interpretation of graphs, examples from science were used to help students apply their mathematical skills in a different context.

139. Students generally have the necessary skills and techniques to help them to make satisfactory progress in other subjects. In science, high attaining students in Year 11 can use a wide variety of algebraic skills to solve equations. Younger ones can solve simple equations, especially using whole numbers. Students are not as good at drawing diagrams; sometimes these are inaccurate, with a poor use of scale. Students in history can interpret straightforward statistics, but do not have enough opportunities to handle data such as health statistics in industrial Britain in the nineteenth century. High attaining students have sufficient skills help them make progress in geography, but average and lower attainers have more problems, for example with interpretation of statistics. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory in art and design; for example in the use of symmetry and in understanding proportion.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- There are good relationships between students and teachers.
- Students' behaviour is good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards by the end of Year 11 and Year 9 are below average.
- There is not enough marking of homework or setting targets for improvement.
- Standards of drawing are low.

140. In the recent past the department has had difficulty recruiting sufficient full time staff and has used a succession of temporary teachers. The quality and continuity of some students' learning has been affected.

141. In the GCSE exams in 2001, results were below the national average. The proportion of grades A*-C for dual award science was close to the national average but that for single

award was well below. Direct comparison with results at the time of the previous report is not possible because of changes to entry patterns. For instance, students no longer do separate sciences but some now do single award science. However, analysis of GCSE results shows that, compared to students' previous performance at the end of Year 9, there was a significant improvement in achievement in 2000 and despite a small drop in the proportion of the higher grades A*-C in 2001, this improvement was maintained. Boys' results in 2001 were better than girls'.

142. Standards by the end of Year 9 are below the national average. In the last three years the proportion of students gaining a Level 5 or better in their National Curriculum tests, though below the national average, has risen and is closer to the average than at the time of the previous report. The proportion gaining Level 6 or better is close to the national average and there is no difference in the performance of boys and girls at this age. Compared to similar schools, test results are above average.

143. Standards of work seen in Year 11 match examination results. Higher attaining students understand how waves are reflected at straight and curved barriers, how total internal reflection occurs and how seismic waves travel through the Earth. They use a wide range of equations and calculate accurately. They write balanced equations of chemical reactions in symbols and understand the structure of the periodic table. Lower attaining students write chemical equations in words, recall the symbols for some elements and compounds and calculate using simple equations with whole numbers. They know the effect of unbalanced forces but the results of practical work are displayed as bar charts rather than line graphs.

144. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are below national expectations though a proportion of students reach very high standards. Higher attaining students understand atomic structure and how electrons are arranged around the nuclei of elements. They express chemical reactions in word equations, calculate moments or pressure correctly, understand how metals are extracted from ores and use a wide range of scientific terms correctly. Lower attaining students perform few arithmetic calculations and show variation from day-to-day in the standard and amount of work done. Confusion about common facts, such as the effect of acid on litmus paper and misspelling of scientific words is common, though students use terminology correctly.

145. Older students draw graphs to a very high standard. They understand how to deal with anomalous points, why multiple readings increase accuracy and how to interpret graphs. Curved graphs, such as that obtained when investigating the current through a filament lamp, are well done but across the whole age and attainment range diagrams are poorly drawn and are often careless freehand sketches of apparatus, sometimes in ink. All work seen had been marked but comments from teachers were brief and gave few targets for students to improve their standards. Unsatisfactory homework is not followed up so gaps in students' knowledge persist.

146. Students' achievement is satisfactory. They enter school with levels of attainment below average, progress steadily but are still below average by the end of Year 11. In the early years, manipulative skills are limited but the use of a wide range of apparatus develops students' ability to take measurements and to plan and evaluate an increasingly sophisticated range of investigations for themselves. Those with special needs achieve satisfactorily, particularly when they have the support of an additional adult in the classroom and where

tasks are appropriate to their attainment. There is limited use of ICT to log data, simulate experiments, use computers as sources of information or for students to word process their work. Gifted and talented students also make satisfactory progress and are given additional chances to widen their knowledge of science and of opportunities in higher education.

147. Students' behaviour is good and in nearly half the lessons seen it was very good. Teachers know students well, relationships in the classroom are relaxed and mutually respectful and little time is lost controlling classes. Lessons are productive as a result.

148. Overall, teaching and learning are good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen, more than half was good and the occasional lesson was very good. Effective lessons are brisk and well planned with a variety of activities and an element of practical work, which helps students understand the underlying theory. Tasks are set at a level appropriate to students' attainment with sufficient work to keep all fully occupied. Teachers' enthusiasm and the good relationships in the classroom produce a positive atmosphere where students make good progress and enjoy their lessons. Where teaching was not of such a high standard it lacked pace, variety or clear structure and learning was slower.

149. Although the time allocation for teaching science is above average, students' achievement is not as good as their day-to-day learning because opportunities to consolidate work are missed. Homework is not used effectively to back up what is done in class and in some low attaining groups of older students, a significant number do not complete homework. Since these are often students whose attendance is unsatisfactory they make little progress. Some worksheets are well chosen to reinforce learning but on occasions, especially with higher attaining students, they limit answers to short phrases and literacy skills are not being developed. Similarly they restrict students' opportunities to draw. Because printed diagrams are provided students get few opportunities to improve their drawing.

150. Leadership and management of the department are good. The teachers have a balance of experience and youth and are deployed to make good use of subject specialisms, though the use of temporary teachers causes problems with standards and continuity of work. Students' progress is well monitored. Test results are used to predict future performance and progress is regularly reviewed. The scheme of work is efficiently organised with links to resources so students get well-planned and effective lessons. The laboratory technicians play an important part in the efficiency of the department and in the very effective displays in laboratories and corridors. There is a cooperative and mutually supportive atmosphere within the department, which now needs to concentrate on improving standards in tests and exams. Learning aims are not linked closely to homework to improve the quality of short-term target setting and the standard of presentation of students' work needs to be improved.

151. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards at the end of Year 9 are improving, students' achievement is satisfactory and the changes to GCSE entry patterns allow students to follow a course more suited to their needs. The size of classes, though large in some cases, is lower than previously and there are no shortages of equipment.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Students have very good attitudes to art and design and their behaviour is very good in lessons, securing good learning in the subject.
- Teachers' class management is very good, so students have maximum time for work.
- The quality of assessment is very good, ensuring students understand their strengths and weaknesses and how they can improve.
- Leadership and management are very good, securing very good improvement since the previous inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Some of the research and theory work is too difficult for students with low levels of literacy.
- There are limited resources for ICT, which restricts the amount and type of work attempted.
- The kilns are not guarded.

152. Overall, standards of work in art and design seen during the inspection are average. Standards of attainment are average at the end of Years 9 and 11 and show good improvement since the previous inspection when standards were judged as below average. Students' achievements in relation to their starting points at the beginnings of Years 7 and 10 are good and represent good improvement since the last inspection when most students were making unsatisfactory progress. The quality of specialist teaching of art and design is good and this, coupled with very good students' responses to the subject, leads to good learning.

153. Students make good progress in their early years in school as they enter school with few skills and limited knowledge and understanding in art and design. In 2001, results of teachers' assessments for students in Year 9 show an unusually high proportion of students gaining Level 5 and above, but a lower proportion attaining Level 7. In the work seen during the inspection, standards are average at the end of Year 9 in painting, drawing and printmaking, but above average in ceramics. For example, students' clay work, on tall pots, shows good understanding of the problems of working with clay, keeping it pliable and skill in using tools and strengthening tubes to gain good shapes. Work is strongest when students look at real objects or pictures for inspiration. Their imaginative work is relatively weak. Knowledge of art and artists is average, as students occasionally study chosen artists and use the computers to search for information, but knowledge of art periods is weak. Students who are gifted and talented do most work on this aspect. Students are building up good understanding of art and crafts from other countries and cultures. At the end of projects, students are encouraged to assess their own work. Those with poor literacy skills find this difficult as they cannot remember the sequence of processes and cannot formulate sentences to express opinions.

154. Students continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11 on the more demanding GCSE courses. In 2001, the proportion of girls gaining A* to C grades in GCSE was well above the national average, but it was well below for boys. Overall, GCSE grades A* to C in

2001 were a little below the national average, but over the past four years results show an upward trend and most students usually gain at least a G grade. Results in art and design are the second highest in school; it is the best subject for girls and the second best subject for boys. All students build on to their previously learned skills in painting and drawing and make good progress when attempting new work on printing, textiles and computer aided art. The highest attaining students, usually girls, interpret themes and work on them in a variety of media, showing individuality in composition. Most of these students produce a good amount of work in folders and use their sketchbooks well to record experiments, collect pictures for inspiration and practise techniques. Some of the lower attaining students do not produce enough research and are very heavily reliant on the teachers for each piece of work. Most students produce some coursework that is above average as they can choose specific courses in art and design to suit their particular skills. Some of the lower attaining students, for example, cope very well with pottery and others attain highly on printmaking. Students who are gifted and talented show very good understanding in painting and drawing and can emulate and analyse the styles of famous artists such as Modigliani, Klimt and Morris. The display of Egyptian-inspired work done on a recent Arts Week shows that many students are capable of creating impressive work on a large scale and in two and three dimensions.

155. Students have very good attitudes towards art and design. All are responsible for preparing their workspaces and for storing their work at the end of lessons. Most students are self reliant, use the support literature sensibly and concentrate hard. A few of the lower attaining ones rely very heavily on their teachers for suggestions but make good efforts to do what is asked of them. Poor attendance is hindering progress and attainment for a number of students in the upper school.

156. Teaching and learning are good overall. The art and design specialists are both talented enthusiastic artists who inspire the students and create a good climate for learning in lessons. They plan and prepare well for lessons, choose high quality examples to set appropriately high standards and give students good quality materials, which bring about good quality work. A particular strength in the teaching is the quality of assessment, which ensures students are working to their potential. Because teachers manage students very well, they do not have to waste time in getting order and discipline and they give maximum time in lessons to help students on a one-to-one basis. Clear marking and commenting helps students to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and students' own comments about their work, help to increase their awareness and give opportunities for developing literacy skills. Teachers value students' work and display it prominently in the art and design studios and around school. This enables students to assess their own work alongside that of their peers. Teachers are very patient with the students who have special educational needs and give them help and encouragement in practical work, but the starting points in theory need to be better focused on their levels of understanding.

157. Leadership and management are very good and the department has made very good progress since the last inspection. The head of the department gives very good support to less experienced colleagues and the quality of teaching has improved. The curriculum is wider, now includes more work with computers, helps students' literacy and, to a lesser extent, numeracy skills by, for example, introducing key words and concepts of proportion and perspective. Students all have sketchbooks and regular homework. They make visits to museums and galleries and practising artists and sculptors visit the school regularly to extend students' cultural education and give them insight into art and design as a hobby or career. At

the recent county art exhibition, students from this school gained first prize in the senior section. There is only one computer, which severely restricts the amount of work attempted in art-linked ICT. The art and design studios are well arranged, but the kilns in the pottery room are unguarded, constituting a health and safety hazard.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Achievement in relation to prior attainment is good.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Management of the department is now good.

Areas for improvement

- Day-to-day assessment of students' work is not used sufficiently to set short term targets for improvement.
- Accommodation, particularly in food technology, does encourage students to aspire highly.

158. In the 2001 GCSE results, the proportion of students gaining grades A*-C was well below the national average. Boys did significantly worse than girls reflecting the national pattern. There has been a small improvement in results over the last three years.

159. In work seen, standards are below average by Year 9 but much improved on the standards indicated in teachers' assessments in recent years. The most significant improvement is to standards in resistant materials where the quality of teaching is very good and teachers have adjusted teaching methods to match the needs of students more closely. Students have a sound understanding of the materials they use and good practical skills. They know the names of tools and use them safely and accurately. Students have a good working knowledge of the design process which they use to design and make products which are unique to them. For example, they make fabric bags in textiles lessons which are decorated skilfully and imaginatively, using computerised sewing machines when appropriate. Students have satisfactory drawing skills which they use effectively to communicate design ideas. This compensates, to some extent, for the weaker standards in literacy, which mean that students cannot always express fully what they know and can do. However, teachers provide structured guidance for students' writing which prepares them appropriately for the more demanding writing required for examination work.

160. Standards overall in work seen are also below average by Year 11 but in resistant materials, the improvement continues from earlier years. Good improvement is also evident in graphic products where the course has become established and teaching methods are very good. Students have good drawing and presentation skills which they use to develop well organised coursework. Literacy skills are weak and restrict overall standards of communication but teachers provide good support and teach them to manage and present coursework well. Students have sound practical skills in all aspects of the subject and are aware of risks in workshops so that they work safely when using hand and machine tools. In food technology, students have satisfactory basic skills for food preparation but below average knowledge of nutrition and of the function of ingredients which restricts the variety of food products they plan and prepare. They rely too much on the teacher for guidance and do not have good recall of previous work. Students have good skills of formal drawing and communicate ideas effectively in graphics products lessons, using, for example, perspective drawings which are enhanced by rendering techniques. Lower attaining students, including

those with special needs, complete work accurately but are heavily reliant on teachers to guide them through processes.

161. The good standard of behaviour and students' positive attitudes to learning are particularly helpful to the standards they reach in practical lessons in all years and for coursework in Year 11. They take care to present work well and enjoy opportunities to work creatively.

162. Achievement is good. Students enter the school with well below average experience and knowledge of the subject and make rapid progress learning to use a wide range of hand and machine tools and materials. This is particularly evident in Year 7 when most of the work is new to them. They learn to work safely in workshops and to follow the design process to plan and make products from food, fabrics and resistant materials. They learn to draw effectively to communicate ideas and to record their work logically in workbooks. By Year 9, students have acquired a good working knowledge of designing and have practical skills which prepare them effectively for GCSE courses. In Years 10 and 11, students are encouraged to make written notes independently and to use them to illustrate processes, for example in the form of flow charts to describe the printing process. A strong emphasis is placed on accuracy when students measure and mark materials and when they draw, which assists their progress with numeracy skills. Students make good progress with learning to manage their coursework projects and with improving their presentation skills. They use computers effectively to present work and are making good progress with using computers to design products. There are insufficient resources available, however, for students to gain enough experience of computer aided manufacturing. The most able students have opportunities to extend their knowledge and skills, working creatively and independently, and gain a better understanding of the concepts of, for example, food science and materials in all aspects of the subject. Students with special needs make similar progress to others with practical skills but make less progress with writing skills because the targets set for them in individual education plans are insufficiently clear.

163. The quality of teaching and learning is good. It is often very good, sometimes satisfactory and very rarely unsatisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers use teaching methods that very effectively match the needs of individual students and inspire them to want to achieve highly. They provide choice and challenge in lessons that leads to the production of individual work in which students take pride. Teachers have very good relationships with students and manage them well so that confidence and self esteem are raised. This is especially helpful to students with special needs. Although very good individual support is given to students in lessons, marking is not always sufficiently helpful in setting targets for future work. Very occasionally, students are set work which is insufficiently challenging or not well explained so that students become restless and learning is unsatisfactory. Teachers prepare their lessons well and include a variety of activities to maintain the interest and concentration of students. In the best lessons, learning is reviewed at the end to encourage students to think about what they have learned and to help them to remember it. Teachers often successfully integrate learning about materials with their teaching of new practical skills. A good emphasis is placed on environmental issues when students make products from wood. The technician is a helpful and supportive presence for students and teachers in resistant materials lessons and makes an effective contribution to the smooth running of the department generally.

164. The department benefits from effective leadership, which has brought about changes to the way teachers work and share ideas informally. There is a very good team spirit, despite accommodation being split. The effectiveness of teachers' strong and shared commitment to

raising standards is shown in the significant improvement in attainment this year. However, there is not yet a formal system for monitoring teaching and learning through lesson observation.

165. There has been good improvement, since the previous inspection, to the quality of teaching, the standards students reach and systems to monitor the performance in the subject. The accommodation, particularly for food technology, is out of date and does not give students experience of current working practice. More up-to-date resources and an improvement to accommodation, particularly in food technology, are needed to raise the aspirations and self esteem of students even more.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The leadership and management of the department is good.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Computers are used effectively to aid learning.
- Assessment procedures are good; assessment information is used well in planning the curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are well below the national average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
- Marking and information in reports do not give enough guidance to students to help them raise the standard of their work.
- There is not enough formal monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.
- The subject does not contribute enough to improving the quality of students' literacy skills.

166. GCSE results in 2001 were well below the national average for higher A*-C grades but above average for students gaining A*-G grades. In fact, all students entered gained a grade, and the overall point score was below, but not well below, average. Boys' results were better than the girls'. Results have improved in the last two years compared to previous years. Students achieve well in geography in relation to many of their other subjects.

167. By the end of Year 9, overall attainment is well below the national average. This however, represents good achievement in relation to students' attainment on entry in Year 7. Geographical knowledge and skills are very weak when students enter the school. From observations in lessons and scrutiny of books, students develop a good range of basic mapping skills but many have a weak knowledge of place. In the top sets in Year 9, many students are beginning to describe and explain geographical patterns and processes but the majority still find explanations difficult. Progress though good, is restricted by weak literacy. There is a need for greater attention to developing students' writing, reading and speaking as well as constant reinforcement of basic geographical knowledge and language. In presentation is often weak, particularly of graphical and diagrammatic work. Most students by the end of Year 9 have developed good computer skills.

168. From observation of lessons and looking at students' books, standards in the current Year 11 are below average overall. Standards are well below the national average in relation to the higher A*-C grades but close to the average for overall A*-G grades. Achievement overall is good in relation to attainment at the beginning of the course. The use of computers is well integrated into lessons and students are competent at using them to acquire information, to present their findings and represent data. In their coursework study of Peterlee, as an example of a new town, higher attaining students have satisfactory analytical and evaluative skills but most students find these more advanced skills difficult. In one Year 11 lesson, most students show sound knowledge and understanding of the causes and effects of the monsoon climate on the lives of the people of Bangladesh. Students in Year 11 have a satisfactory understanding of geographical language.

169. Teaching and learning overall are good. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and understanding. Lessons are mostly well planned with clear learning objectives and a range of teaching strategies to meet the needs of students. A good example was seen in Year 8 when students were examining the characteristics and distribution of ecosystems. Modern technology in the form of an interactive white board and power point presentations are used effectively to assist learning. In some lessons, however, there is over-zealous direction by the teacher, direction resulting in too little challenge being placed on students to think and develop their independent learning skills. There is however, a very small percentage of unsatisfactory teaching associated with slow pace and unsatisfactory class management, which leads to underachievement by the students.

170. Despite the efforts of class teachers, students with special educational needs do not learn as well as other students mainly as a result of inadequate in class support, and because some are withdrawn from many of their geography lessons for help with English, and are not able to catch up. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 because some miss many or all their lessons. Achievement in years 10 and 11 is satisfactory.

171. Work is marked but there is too little use of constructive comments and targets to help students improve the standard of their work. Although there is some topic work and extended writing in the form of newspaper articles and letters, opportunities for writing at greater length and strategies to improve writing and speaking are limited. As well as the good teaching, students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good overall and contribute to the good learning observed.

172. The subject is led and managed well. There is a commitment to raising standards and a capacity to succeed. Appropriate priorities have been identified for development. There are good opportunities for practical work and computers are used very well to assist students to develop their knowledge and understanding. Assessment procedures are good and the department uses information gained from appropriate assessment tests to plan lessons and monitor students' progress. The department now needs to improve and monitor the day-to-day marking in students' books as currently far too few constructive comments are provided to help students improve the standards of their work. This is also true of the quality of information provided in annual reports, which do not advise students of their weaknesses or tell them how they can improve their work. More formal monitoring of teaching and learning will enable the good practice observed to be identified and shared. Despite these areas for development there has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in assessment and the use of computers in lessons.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Teaching has improved because of more use of activities that fully involve students in their learning.
- Focus on students' literacy needs leads to confidence with source materials, accurate knowledge and secure understanding.
- Good planning and efficient use of time keeps students motivated and accelerates learning.

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough opportunities in Years 7 to 9 for students to find out information for themselves and write about it at length. This lack of prior experience restricts their progress in Years 10 and 11.
- There is not enough evaluation of teaching strategies against students' day-to-day learning.
- The overall performance of the department is not monitored rigorously.

173. Standards of work seen during the inspection are close to average by the end of Year 9. Students' achievement overall in relation to their standards when they began in Year 7 is good. By the end of Year 11 standards are below average but the achievement in relation to these students' starting point in Year 10 is good. In all years teaching is good and teachers' focus on history key skills is contributing to students' progress. Students behave well and have positive attitudes to their lessons.

174. The achievement of students with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. They progress well when they are supported by non-teaching assistants, and when teachers target specific needs, like reading aloud. However, in the lowest Year 7 set, progress of some students with learning difficulties is slow because there is insufficient additional support for the larger-than-usual number of students with individual problems.

175. Otherwise, students' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. By the end of Year 9 the standard of work seen during the inspection is at near-average levels. Students are skilful at interpreting and extrapolating information from sources of different types, including video, poetry and numerical data. They know how life for ordinary people changed, through hard-won political freedoms, through industrial prosperity and poverty and through wars, from Roman Times to the twentieth century. They understand the feelings of victims of war, soldiers in World War I or evacuees in World War II, writing imaginatively from alternative points of view. They come to respect the wisdom and culture of North American Indians. Since teaching is focused on important questions, students become adept at balancing conflicting evidence and seeking alternative insights. For example a Year 9 class, obviously moved by the emotional reactions of evacuees, their hosts and their parents during World War II, explored other feelings like excitement and relief.

176. The use of ICT is developing. Teachers produce their own documents from which students 'cut and paste' and there is a range of encyclopaedias on CD-ROM. Frustrations

result from current booking procedures and lack of technical help when, for example, printers break down.

177. GCSE results in 2001 were well below average. Most students achieved their predicted results although they did not do as well as they did in other subjects. There is no significant difference in attainment between boys and girls and the subject generally attracts a balance of boys and girls. Attendance is a significant problem, because students lose marks for not completing coursework. Action taken to reverse the three-year downward trend in numbers choosing the subject has succeeded.

178. Standards of work seen during the inspection are better, though below average by the end of Year 11. Analysis of previous results and current progress has led to support strategies ranging from revision packs, special history timelines, targeting students on the C/D grade boundary and mentoring to ensure that students attain predicted GCSE grades. A change in the examination itself for next year's students and earlier coursework will mitigate the effects of poor attendance and allow students to re-draft as appropriate. Good teaching to secure students' examination technique for source work questions was well exemplified in a Year 11 lesson. They were re-visiting the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, one aspect of the course on twentieth century conflicts in Europe and America. Alternating paired and whole-class analysis, they "marked" four specimen answers using examination criteria, identified the skills present or missing, identified characteristics of the best one, fine tuned it with annotations and finally set out to write their own answer. This step by step teaching nurtures confidence as students collaboratively learn techniques to get the most marks. Overall progress is therefore good, because literacy skills develop simultaneously. Students with special educational needs have more difficulty with language, but make satisfactory progress.

179. Higher attaining students thread their way well through complex arguments about war in Vietnam to arrive at clear conclusions using appropriate terminology and well-structured sentences. Good preparation for writing means that all students produce well understood, accurate accounts, but many are unable to give it their personal stamp because of limited imaginative language.

180. There are no opportunities for fieldwork or independent enquiry in Years 7 to 11, where planning, sorting a range of information and incorporating different ways of presenting findings are important skills. This affects attainment in Year 11, as does the absence of ICT in Years 10 to 11, where coursework is a greater challenge than it should be.

181. Teaching is overall good, at times very good, leading to good learning. There are more lessons where students are actively engaged than where they depend on the teacher too much. Very good planning incorporates several changes of activity in lessons, so that they move at a good pace keeping students stimulated and involved. Students work effectively in pairs, reading aloud, scanning text for information, teasing out meanings together, structuring a reasoned explanation. This develops speaking skills and students become partners in their own learning. Alongside, teachers are good at devising ways for students to organise information, into categories or grids for example, as a basis for writing a letter or a newspaper front page. Teaching literacy skills in this way ensures students' accurate learning of terminology and facts. More variety, rather than simply extra work, would better meet the needs of higher attaining students.

182. Management of history is satisfactory. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Standards have been maintained. The main improvements since the previous inspection are evident in teaching and in students' awareness of their achievement. There remain insufficient opportunities for students to appreciate the values of a multicultural society.

183. Monitoring the department's performance through lesson observation, exercise book sampling and analysing overall trends in attainment is inadequate. There are not enough professional discussions about matching teaching strategies more closely to targeted skills in order to raise standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Teachers have very good relationships with students.
- Students are interested in the subject and they behave well in lessons.
- There are good developments in assessment, making use of National Curriculum levels.
- Students are achieving well in Year 9 and very well in GNVQ in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and sharing of good practice.
- The number of computers and other resources is below average and many subjects do not yet make enough use of ICT in their teaching.

184. The results of students age 16 in 2001 in their GCSE examinations were below national averages. Teachers' assessments of students age 14 in 2001 indicate that they are just below national levels.

185. The standards of work seen during the inspection, by students in Year 9, are at the levels expected for their age. Overall, standards at the end of Year 11 are average. Students taking GCSE ICT courses in Year 11 are reaching standards that are below national expectations but students taking the GNVQ ICT course, which was introduced in September 2000, are producing work in line with expectations for the age group.

186. By Year 9 most students have a satisfactory understanding of spreadsheets and can apply filters to search for specific information. They are confident users of computers, and make good use of clip art and desktop publishing as they complete their projects about sports day. Students in Years 10 and 11 are working on projects specific to their GCSE and GNVQ courses. In all of these projects students use the wide range of skills they have acquired earlier in the school. They use word processing and desktop publishing successfully. Where they need to use spreadsheets, students use more complex formulas, although only higher attaining students have a good understanding of the modelling capabilities of spreadsheets. Students make effective use of power point presentations in their work, and a few higher attaining students show a good understanding of programming to create web sites. The standards of work in GNVQ in both Years 10 and 11 match national levels.

187. Students generally learn well in lessons as they increase their skills in using software and their knowledge and understanding of the subject. In Year 7 students can log on to the network and know the importance of the confidentiality of their password. They have some understanding of databases, but not all are sure what is meant by a field. They have made good use of word processing skills to create data capture sheets, and can make use of simple

formulas in spreadsheets. Students in Year 8 have produced web pages, and made good use of their word processing skills to create business cards and letterheads for a travel company.

188. In general, students are achieving well in the subject. Testing in Year 7 indicates that many students have not reached the expected levels for their age on entry to the school, but by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 they are reaching the national standard.

189. Students with special educational needs make good progress overall, but there are strengths and weaknesses in the provision. Progress is very good where small class size and a very experienced teacher can set work at the appropriate level for these students. However the progress of students with special educational needs in mainstream lessons is not as marked, although it is better where a teaching assistant is available. In a Year 8 class over half the students were on the special educational needs register and only the very good work by the teacher, without additional help, ensured that all students made some progress.

190. Teaching and learning is good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge as well as knowledge of examinations to give clear explanations that help students learn, and discover what they need to do to get the best results in their examinations. The very good relationships between students and teachers mean that students respond well to the teachers' instructions, and this contributes to their learning. Lessons are usually well planned and tasks selected are appropriate to students' attainment levels. Teachers have high expectations of students being able to work independently. Good explanations and use of focused question and answer sessions at the start of lessons help students understand what is expected of them. The newly introduced individual student target setting for lessons supports this well. Where lessons are less successful, particularly with mixed ability groups, insufficient account is taken of what students have completed in previous lessons. The occasional excellent lessons have pace, very good explanations of examination requirements, first rate class management and a very positive working atmosphere where there are high expectations of students to work independently.

191. Students are interested and enthusiastic about the subject. They stay focused on tasks set and work independently when given the opportunity, but also cooperate well when working in pairs. In question and answer sessions, students are responsive. Students have good relationships with teachers and behave well in lessons.

192. There is good management of the department, with clear leadership and a commitment to improve standards. The appointment of a network manager, a full time technician, the creation of new ICT rooms and the purchase of new equipment have been significant contributions to the good improvement of the department since the last inspection. The curriculum has been improved and the mini project work based on a nationally recommended course in Years 7, 8 and 9 and the introduction of GNVQ in Years 10 and 11 are helping to raise students' standards.

ICT in other subjects

193. Cross curricular ICT continues to be developed and particularly good use is made of this in geography. However, at present the school has fewer computers than average. This is improving, because a suite of computers has recently been installed, for joint use with the community. Their use has not yet had time to be assimilated into teaching schemes.

194. Although many departments have planned the use of in their schemes of work in ICT, there is still insufficient use made of this technology in teaching. Its use is growing in mathematics and science but it is still not used enough. Students manipulate images and carry out research on the Internet in art and design. In history, computers are beginning to be used but not sufficiently. Teachers are beginning to use ICT effectively in modern languages but in music students do not use computers enough.

195. The training for teachers, financed by the New Opportunities Fund, has been re-started and now forty teachers are involved with this. The lack of computers in departments and the difficulty in accessing free computer rooms restricts the use of ICT across the curriculum. This limits students' opportunities to practise and improve the skills they have acquired in ICT lessons.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Progress made by the majority of students in Years 7 to 9 in French is good and standards are improving.
- Students' attitudes towards their learning are positive and behaviour is very good.
- Teachers manage students well and have very good relationships with students.
- ICT is used effectively to support students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- Standards achieved in GCSE examinations are well below average.
- The provision for the teaching of German is unsatisfactory.
- Withdrawal from lessons of students with special educational needs adversely affects their progress in French.
- There is not enough use of assessment to plan for the progress of students of differing attainment in lessons.
- Opportunities for students to increase in confidence and independence in speaking and writing are insufficient.

196. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well below the national average by the end of Year 11 in both French and German. This represents satisfactory achievement in relation to prior attainment. However, in Years 7 to 9 in French, standards achieved by students are below average and are improving. This represents good achievement in relation to prior attainment and is a result of good teaching. In addition students' positive attitudes and very good behaviour cause the quality of their learning to be good. In German standards achieved are well below average and their progress is slow because of inadequate arrangements for the teaching of the second language.

197. In 2001 the proportion of candidates gaining A*-C and A*-G grades in GCSE examinations was well below average in French and German and, in French results have declined since 2000. In work seen during the inspection standards achieved by the end of Year 11 are well below average overall. Students write at length and in detail to describe leisure activities, their home and their work experience in the past present and future but the

majority are dependent upon models and written notes to do this. Higher attaining, and gifted and talented students have a good understanding of the way the languages work but writing contains many basic errors and inaccuracies. Students prepare presentations on a variety of topics and express simple opinions but the majority lack independence in manipulating the languages for themselves and find difficulty in responding spontaneously to questioning or to the views of others. The majority of students identify the main points and some specific detail from extracts of speech at near normal speed.

198. By the end of Year 9 standards are below average. Teachers' assessments indicate that standards achieved are well below average but these are unduly pessimistic. Students describe events and express their opinions simply. They describe their routine, school, leisure activities and family in the present using set phrases and adapting them to suit their purposes. They are beginning to identify and apply patterns in French and can explain basic agreements and verb endings. They respond well to visual cues and participate in dialogues to exchange information. Progress in some classes in French and in German is too slow and students do not achieve as well as could be expected because they rely heavily on guidance from model dialogues and on prompting from the teacher to express their ideas. In some lessons expectations are too low.

199. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall but the progress of a number of students with significant learning difficulties in Years 7 to 9 is slower than those of other students because they are withdrawn regularly from language lessons for extra help with basic skills.

200. Overall students' behaviour and attitudes are very good. Students listen attentively and concentrate on tasks set, working sensibly both as a whole class and in pairs. They respond particularly enthusiastically to oral activities where they are given visual cues, or when games, computer programs or pair work are used to practise new language. In a small minority of lessons students do not listen to the teacher or complete tasks

201. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Teaching overall in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory and in Years 7 to 9 it is good. Two unsatisfactory lessons were seen, in Year 7 in French and Year 8 in German, leading to unsatisfactory learning.

202. There are significant strengths in the quality of teaching. Teachers have a very good command of the languages they teach and usually use this knowledge well to conduct activities in the language being learned. In a Year 8 French lesson, for example, the language used to question and instruct students was very well matched to students' experience and capabilities and used very effectively to develop all students' listening and speaking skills and effectively challenge higher attainers to interpret for others.

203. Control and management of students is good in the majority of lessons with teachers having clear expectations of students' behaviour and effort; when this is the case students respond positively and settle quickly. However, in a minority of lessons where expectations are not made clear or not reinforced, some students fail to settle and set out to disrupt lessons. The resulting poor behaviour slows the pace of learning considerably. Objectives are usually shared with students so that they have a clear idea of what is expected and learning is reviewed at the end of lessons; this is effective in reinforcing learning and in enabling students to evaluate their progress.

204. The overhead projector, computer presentations and flashcards are used well to make the meaning of new language clear and to enable students to identify and apply patterns. For example in Year 8 lessons students were rapidly able to tell the time in French because of the clear presentation using a clock face and the opportunity they were given to practise asking each other the time afterwards. Teachers also make good use of ICT to enable students to work at their own pace, for example in a Year 9 French lesson students made their own computer presentations about transport in France and developed both their ICT skills and their writing skills in French. However access to these facilities is limited because classes need to be booked into ICT rooms to use them, and often the rooms are in use by other classes.

205. Students make good progress when given the opportunity to practise informally, for example in a Year 11 lesson students were confident in using the structures necessary to ask permission and express their wishes because of skilful questioning by the teacher and then through practice in pairs. Progress is slowed when students are given insufficient opportunity to practise and assimilate new language before moving on to use that language in new situations. In a Year 8 German lesson, for example, students had difficulty in telling the time because they were not sure about their numbers in German and, because they were being taught away from the German area, could not benefit from support from the display usually available.

206. There is some inconsistency in expectations across the department and the quality of marking is also inconsistent. Some marking is thorough and regular, giving students clear guidance about how to improve, whereas in other cases there is no indication of how to improve and basic errors are left unchecked or marked as being correct. In the less effective lessons expectations are low and students' progress is often restricted to becoming familiar with new vocabulary items rather than developing skills in manipulating the language to express their ideas.

207. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory overall. The head of department has a clear idea of strengths and weaknesses within the department but progress in implementing policies and taking appropriate action to raise standards in modern languages is slowed because of other responsibilities. Although GCSE examination results have not improved since the last report, this is mainly due to recent staffing difficulties affecting Years 10 and 11. However there is significant improvement in standards achieved in Years 7 to 9 in French mainly due to the introduction of more appropriate course materials. Satisfactory procedures for assessment have been introduced and National Curriculum levels are used to track the progress of students in end of unit tests but the use of assessment to plan for the progress of students in lessons is as yet underdeveloped. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is not yet sufficiently well developed to ensure consistency across the department.

208. The arrangements for German are unsatisfactory. For lower attaining students, progress in German is too slow because they have only one lesson each week and find it difficult to recall previous learning. There is no timetabled provision for German in Years 10 and 11 so that in order to pursue their study of both languages students have to attend after school lessons.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- GCSE examination results have been above average over the last few years.
- There is a good tradition of music making and productions in the school.

Areas for improvement

- The assessment procedure is unsatisfactory: it is insufficiently developed to be effective in helping students to improve their musical skills.
- There are too few computers for students at all levels to develop their composition skills.
- Instability in the teaching staff has adversely affected standards.

209. Standards of work seen during the inspection in Years 9 and 11 are below average. As students enter the school with little or no experience of music this represents satisfactory achievement by the end of Year 9. By the end of Year 11 achievement is also satisfactory. These standards are achieved because teaching and the students' attitudes are satisfactory.

210. Standards by the end of Year 9 are below average. Students in Year 9 play keyboards and compose a piece using chords. A few students experiment and are more adventurous with the chord choice and sound. The majority of students' compositions, however, are very short and use a very limited range of chords. They show little understanding of compositional techniques or style. Students at this stage do not use computers to help them with composition as there is only one in the department. Performances on the keyboard are generally competent as students listen carefully to each other as they play. In 2001 the majority of students achieved Level 4 in the teachers' assessments for music. This is below average and matches the judgement of this inspection.

211. Standards by the end of Year 11 are also below average. Students' background knowledge about instruments is shaky for this stage in their course but they research effectively on African instruments. Some students use 'Sibelius' software on their own computers to compose for their examination. However not all students have this facility. The single computer in the department is inadequate for their use. Students in Year 10 learn to play a reggae riff, which the higher attainers do easily and quickly in preparation for their own composition. Others take longer to achieve this, showing a lack of confidence in their keyboard skills. However, their background musical knowledge is sound and this enables them to answer questions on 'Crazy Baldheads' by Bob Marley successfully. For several years GCSE results have been above average with most students achieving a grade between A* and C and all achieving a grade between A* and G. The course was offered as a twilight session and generally higher attaining students studied and achieved well. This arrangement allowed the department to include younger talented students. In 2001 a Year 8 student was successful in the examination. Now that the course is timetabled during the day, the profile of the students has changed, reflecting a wider spread of abilities.

212. The department has undergone a period of instability over the past few years, and in the last few months a succession of different teachers has had a negative impact on standards of work and affected the quality of students' interest in music. As a result their attitudes to

music are very mixed. In well directed practical lessons, students really enjoy what they are doing, as seen in a Year 7 percussion lesson and in a Year 8 keyboard lesson. Where practical work is not so well organised, students soon become disaffected and lose concentration and interest in what they are doing, wasting time and losing their focus. In most lessons students behave satisfactorily and sometimes well. They are mature and responsible when moving furniture and keyboards and work done together in groups and pairs is good.

213. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are strengths and weaknesses. Lessons are well planned, activities are progressive and in the best lessons, students are given clear objectives that they have to achieve in the lesson. In a Year 8 keyboard lesson, for example, students worked through each objective at their own pace, building on their skills, in order to learn a chord sequence with improvised melody. An ethos of hard work is well established. Teachers give good advice to individual students as they monitor their work. This is especially effective for lower attaining students and those with special educational needs. With these students, time and patience are given with good measures of encouragement to help them make progress in lessons. Many students with special educational needs make satisfactory and sometimes good progress as a result. Demonstrations by the teacher are also very useful in helping students to learn quickly and are effectively used in individual and paired work. In some lessons, higher attaining students, although given good advice, are insufficiently challenged by the tasks they are given to do. As a result they soon lose concentration. For example, opportunities were lost to extend the skills of an able keyboard player in Year 10, who quickly achieved the reggae riff set for the whole class. Good strategies for learning help students to make progress in lessons. For example, well constructed work sheets in a Year 11 lesson in the learning resource centre, guided students' research into African music. A CD-ROM allowed students to access information on a wide range of African instruments and also hear the sounds that they make. In a useful plenary at the end of this lesson the teacher gave good advice on learning, by relating the style of music to the region of Africa.

214. The assessment of students' work is at present haphazard. In lessons where performances and improvisations are assessed, students are gaining an understanding of their National Curriculum levels and what they have to do to achieve more. This is not done consistently in all classes, however, and many students do not have a good grasp of their standards nor how to improve their weaknesses. Teachers do not assess practical work at all levels nor keep a detailed record of all students' grades. Neither do they involve the students in their assessment at all levels through regular reflective and evaluative discussion and self-assessment.

215. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Since the last inspection good improvements have been made to the curriculum and the schemes of work. The department still does not have sufficient computers to develop the composing skills of students at all levels effectively. As composition is the students' weakest skill these are urgently needed. The difficult situation in the department has had a dispiriting effect, but the department now has very good support from the headteacher. A new appointment has been made for an assistant music teacher to start in September. The time is now ripe for regeneration in the department, particularly with the help of a number of committed student singers and players.

Drama

216. Standards in drama are currently below average. However, this represents good achievement because the department is relatively new: the subject is taught regularly only to Year 7, briefly to Year 9, and has been offered at GCSE only for the last two years. Numbers of students opting to do the subject at this level are promising and show the level of commitment already there. From September onwards Years 7, 8 and 9 will have regular drama lessons as part of a developing strategy for the subject. This good achievement has been produced in so short a time because the teaching is very good and many features are excellent. Students' attitudes and commitment also cause the quality of their learning to be very good. The department is excellently led.

217. Standards in by the end of Year 11 are improving. Several students in Year 11 have chosen this course with the express intention of improving their self confidence. In Year 10, students show their engagement with the subject in their work on Wilfred Owen's poem 'Dulce at Decorum Est'. In their tableaux they interpret these moving passages, understanding and commitment reflected through their posture and facial expressions.

218. Lessons are highly enjoyable affairs. They are also demanding and students are inspired to work hard and quickly, which they did in every lesson seen. The pace of the lessons is excellent and each activity is planned meticulously to build on their skills and understanding. There were very good examples observed of the teacher's skill in knowing when to slow the pace for emphasis, reflection and further probing of students' ideas and opinions. Students show, through careful questioning and suitable activities, that they can empathise with people that they may not understand. For example, students in Year 7 studying *The Iron Man*, were encouraged to empathise with this monster when he was captured in a pit, through dramatic interpretation. Students are inspired to work by the dynamism and energy that the teacher puts into the lessons. Very good group work allows them to develop independent learning and collaborative skills.

219. An actor in residence, from the group CragRats, works with students from the school and from local primary schools. As an extra-curricular activity this is drawing students of all ages and abilities from across the school. This excellent initiative means that students are working with a professional actor exploring aspects of the subject which are exciting and innovatory. Their current production will be performed in promenade format around the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- There is strong leadership of the department.
- Examination results are above average.
- Teaching is good.

Areas for improvement

- Not all students are engaged in the planning and evaluation of their work.
- GCSE in dance is not offered, in spite of high standards in Years 7 to 9.

220. In September 1998 the school began offering students the opportunity to take a GCSE examination in the subject. An impressive number have taken up the offer and the percentage of students gaining the higher A*-C grade pass has been consistently better than the national average. Students' results in this examination compare very favourably with the results the same students obtained in their other subjects. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

221. Students arrive from their primary schools bringing with them a varied range of physical education experiences and skills with many below that expected. They quickly settle into the school, make good progress and, by the time they are 14 years old, most are attaining levels that are in line with national standards. Students understand the principles of invasion games and are able to apply a set of simple rules within small-sided games. Students are aware of the need to warm up effectively before undertaking a physical activity and some are able to lead their class with appropriate stretches and cardiovascular exercises. In dance most students arrive at the school with very limited experience of the activity. They quickly become involved and by the end of Year 9 they are able to take responsibility for choreographing and developing a story line and then performing it with fluency and control.

222. This good achievement continues throughout Years 10 and 11 and by the time they are 16 years old students' levels of attainment are at least in line with the national average. Standards of those in the examination groups are above average. Good levels of skill are clearly evident in a wide range of activities, and they are able to transfer the skills learned in practice into full game situations. They have a good knowledge of rules and conventions of a number of games and activities and are able to undertake a wide range of roles including performing, officiating and coaching. In athletics, above average ability has been successfully converted into expertise in several events in both track and field. Students understand the effects of exercise on the body and prepare themselves properly for their activities. Students in the examination groups are developing an understanding and expertise in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject. Higher attaining students present written work that is well structured, and some use their ICT skills to produce good quality course work folders. However some have limited subject knowledge and their course work folders are sometimes incomplete and of varied quality. Some students find success in the theoretical aspects of the course hard to achieve.

223. Students with special educational needs are well integrated and given much support by their teachers and other students. Their achievement is good and they reach levels of attainment that are commendable for them. Teaching is sensitive and there is no evidence of students with special educational needs being disadvantaged by the curriculum that is on offer.

224. Talented students are encouraged to extend their skills both in school and through out-of-school clubs. Many teams take part in inter-school matches and competitions and gain much success. A number of students have represented Durham in rugby, swimming and cross-country running. Some individual students have attained very high standards and have gained national recognition. A student in the current Year 11 has represented Great Britain at roller hockey, a Year 9 girl has recently been a member of an acrobatic gymnastic team to win a national under 14 year olds competition, and a Year 10 boy has been training with the national swimming squad.

225. In spite of there being some staff changes since the last inspection, the good standard of teaching that was reported then has been maintained. All lessons observed were judged to be at least satisfactory, the majority judged to be good or very good, and a minority excellent. All lessons begin and end in an orderly manner with objectives being clearly stated and understood by the students. Lessons are well organised and conducted at a brisk demanding pace achieving a wide variety of activities and offering all students a range of challenges. Some students are being required to evaluate their own and others' performances, but in order to meet the National Curriculum requirements fully this aspect needs to be improved. There is an expectation that all students will work hard and achieve well, and generally these expectations are met. Teachers inject fun and enjoyment into their lessons and students respond positively. They are enthusiastic, behave well, and the majority of them are prepared to work hard. Their enjoyment of their work is very evident.

226. The curriculum has been revised since the last inspection. There is now a much better balance of time allocated to games, gymnastics and dance. Students in Years 10 and 11 are now able to take a GCSE in the subject, and this opportunity has been taken up by enthusiastic groups of students. Students in Year 10 now have the opportunity to take part in the Junior Sports Leaders award. This is an award which is a starting point for young people who wish to develop their sports leadership skills. Although day-to-day assessment of performance in lessons is regularly used to enhance teaching and learning, recording of assessment is not yet being consistently used to inform students of their progress or plan courses, or to help set individual student targets. There is sufficient expertise and enthusiasm to justify offering students the opportunity to take a GCSE in dance.

227. Staff give very freely of their time to provide a range of extra-curricular activities and inter-school matches and competitions. Departmental staff also organise an outdoor pursuits residential course at Ullswater during which students take part in sailing, climbing, orienteering and mountain craft.

228. The accommodation for the subject is good, although the outdoor playgrounds are in need of resurfacing. The introduction of the GCSE course in the subject has created a need for a permanent classroom base for theoretical lessons. The time allocation for Years 7 and 8 is good, and allows students to cover the requirements of the National Curriculum. However students in Year 9 receive only one hour per week and this is barely adequate for them to

meet the demands of the National Curriculum. Good quality departmental displays around the school effectively stimulate the students' interest in the subject.

229. This is a well-led and managed department with a strong ethos. Good quality documentation covers all aspects of the department's work and helps in the teaching of the subject. Talented teachers work well together, support each other, and show a strong commitment to their students and to the improvement of the department.

230. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. There has been a review of the curriculum and the range of topics is now wider and more balanced. The introduction of the GCSE course has been completed very satisfactorily, and the Junior Sports Leader Award has been taken up by an enthusiastic group of students.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Students achieve well in GCSE examinations; they do better than might be expected in relation to their attainment on entry to the school.
- There is good leadership and management and the department has the commitment and capacity to raise standards.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment at the end of Year 9 is well below the national average.
- Day-to-day marking does not use constructive comments to help students improve the standard of their work.
- Computers are not used enough.
- The range of strategies to improve students' writing and speaking skills is too limited.

231. GCSE results in 2001, with a small group of 8 students, were well below the national average for the higher A*-C grades and below for overall A*-G grades. Their results were not as good as in their other subjects. There is no clear trend in the results: in 2000, results were well above the national average for both A*-C and A*-G grades.

232. Results in both years for short course GCSE were above the national average for overall A*-G grades, which represents good achievement in relation to students' level of attainment on entry to the course.

233. By the end of Year 9 overall attainment is currently well below the expectation of the Agreed Syllabus. This however represents satisfactory achievement in relation to students' knowledge and understanding of the subject on entry to the school in Year 7. From observation in lessons and scrutiny of books, students have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the nature of symbolism in religion and of the beliefs and religious practices in Christianity and other major world faiths. Work in books tends to be knowledge-based but in lessons there are opportunities to discuss beliefs and how they influence peoples' lives. In one lesson in Year 7, students had good knowledge of the differences between Jesus' teaching and Jewish laws on wrongdoing. In some books of the top set in Year 9 there is evidence of

good knowledge of the nature and content of the Bible and its relevance to Christian beliefs and ways of life. Achievement is hindered by weak literacy skills and the inability of many students to remember earlier work. Opportunities to write in a wider range of formats and frequent reinforcement of knowledge are necessary if standards are to be improved.

234. Despite the efforts of class teachers the majority of students with special educational needs are making unsatisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 as they receive too little support in lessons in all years. Achievement overall is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 as, although students in the main lessons still receive little support, those following the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) course are given work that is well matched to their needs and they achieve well. Some students on the ASDAN course contribute well to discussion. A good example was observed in a lesson on violence in the family and in society.

235. From observation of lessons and looking in students' books, standards in the current Year 11 are below average overall, but standards in the full GCSE course are above average. This represents good achievement in relation to attainment on entry to the course in Year 10. Students taking the short course GCSE are also making good progress over time and a high proportion are working at a level to achieve a grade in the examination, although the percentage working at the level corresponding to higher A*-C grades is well below the national average. As in the earlier years, constant reinforcement of knowledge and understanding is needed to overcome students' difficulty remembering and recalling what they have learned. In one Year 11 lesson most students showed a satisfactory knowledge of the Christian viewpoint on the sanctity of life and in another of the Christian outlook on forgiveness. They showed confident discussion skills in the latter lesson, using the Myra Hindley case as the basis for debate. The small class of full GCSE candidates is able to differentiate effectively between approaches to prayer in the different Christian denominations.

236. Teaching and learning overall are good. There is some good and very good practice and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. This is an improvement on the last inspection. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and create a good atmosphere for learning through their good classroom management skills. Relationships overall are good and this contributes positively to students' learning. The lack of use of constructive comments to help students improve their work, is however a weakness of marking. In the good and very good lessons focused questioning and the use of a range of motivating learning strategies have a very positive impact on learning. A good example was seen in a Year 7 lesson on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, when students developed teamwork skills, as well as making good progress in their knowledge and understanding. As was the case at the time of the last inspection, this subject makes a very significant contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In some lesson, activities are too tightly controlled by the teacher, with some tasks lacking a sufficient depth of challenge to enable students to improve their independent enquiry and learning skills.

237. The subject is well led and managed and there is a department-wide commitment to raising standards, combined with a capacity to succeed. There is a good range of courses available to meet students' individual needs. The head of department has identified some areas for development but subject development planning needs to be more structured and formalised. Resources for learning overall are satisfactory, but the department possesses an

inadequate range of religious artefacts with which to raise students' knowledge and awareness of world faiths. While unit assessment tests are used effectively to provide information on students' progress, day-to-day marking fails to provide constructive comments to help students improve the standard of their work. Annual reports also fail to give parents enough information about how their children can improve. Other areas for development include the wider use of computers to help students both to acquire and present information and the regular monitoring of teaching and sharing good practice in order to raise standards.

BUSINESS STUDIES

238. Business studies is available as an optional subject for students in Years 10 and 11. The present Year 11 students are taking a GNVQ course. Students in Year 10 are taking a new GCSE course in the subject. The subject is well managed and meets the requirements of the examination board syllabus. Both courses provide additional vocational courses for students in Years 10 and 11 and are appropriate to their needs. Lessons are generally well planned but, in some lessons, teachers do not expect enough of students in terms of the speed at which they can work. In these circumstances, students are not sufficiently committed to the subject.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

239. Health and social care is being taught in the school for the first time this year. Previously it was taught off site. Students now in Year 11 are the first to complete the two-year course at intermediate level. Last year they recorded low standards and only a very small proportion achieved pass grades for the units of work they completed off site. Standards have improved significantly this year. Most are achieving pass grades with a small proportion reaching merit and distinction grades. This is because they are benefiting from very good teaching and have worked hard to complete assignments to a good standard. There are excellent relationships between students and teachers in Year 11 and lessons are very well focused to help students to improve on their grades from the previous year. They have well-researched coursework projects that show a good understanding of issues related to health promotion, relationships and social development that has been developed through meaningful discussion in lessons. Year 10 students are achieving well and are all on target to achieve pass grades in the units they are studying. The subject makes a very effective contribution to the curriculum because students achieve well and gain in self-esteem, confidence and social development.