

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY'S COLLEGE

Kingston Upon Hull

LEA area: Kingston Upon Hull

Unique reference number: 118117

Headteacher: Mr J. M. Walsh

Reporting inspector: David Morton
13154

Dates of inspection: 12th – 16th March 2001

Inspection number: 223742

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:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M. Withers
Date of previous inspection:	25 th September 1995

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13762	N. Shelley	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
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21971	J. Glennon	Team inspector	Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
23926	D. Howorth	Team inspector	Geography Equality of opportunity	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
13620	G. Leech	Team inspector	Science (supporting role)	
27665	A. Lees	Team inspector	Music	
19452	A. Pearson	Team inspector	History Physical education	
19214	G. Price	Team inspector	English	
17923	M. Shaw	Team inspector	Mathematics	
17404	J. Tolley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	
21866	D. Tracey	Team inspector	Science	
13189	P. Walton	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Mary's College is a Catholic voluntary aided comprehensive school, larger than most secondary schools, with 1432 pupils on roll, of whom 230 are in the sixth form. The school is over-subscribed. Its population is stable, only a small percentage of pupils joining or leaving the school except at the usual times. It takes pupils mainly from neighbouring Catholic primary schools but includes a significant number from all over Hull and beyond the city's boundaries. The school's pupils come from a wide mix of social backgrounds; the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is about average. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and those for whom English is an additional language is low and none are at the early stage of language acquisition. The overall attainment of pupils on entry to the school at the start of Year 7 is average. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs, including those with statements, is broadly in line with the national average. The inspection of the school included a detailed inspection of its provision for pupils with special educational needs. About four-fifths of pupils continue in education after the age of 16 and over three-quarters of students leaving the sixth form move on to higher education, almost all of the remainder moving into employment. The school has been awarded the status of a specialist Sports College and has just accepted an invitation from the Department for Education and Employment to become a Beacon School.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. It is effective in providing a secure Catholic environment based on the five pillars of its mission statement. The school values people as individuals and provides opportunities for all pupils to achieve well and appreciate their time at school. The principle that all pupils have a right to social acceptance and the full comprehensive education provided by the school is epitomised in the successful Cornerstone provision that helps those pupils who benefit from additional support and guidance. The school is very well led with a clear vision of its purpose and future development. The teaching of pupils and sixth-form students is very good overall; standards are well above average in the sixth form, whilst in the main school they are generally in line with national averages and improving steadily. Nonetheless, standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 11 could be better. The sixth form is cost effective. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- It is true to its Catholic mission. This is reflected in very good, supportive relationships, the positive attitudes of pupils and the school's care for the well-being of pupils and sixth-form students. Efforts to develop pupils spiritually, morally and socially are very good.
- The sensitive individual support and guidance that Cornerstone provides in order to ensure that all pupils are included in the full range of opportunities offered by the school.
- It has provided outstanding facilities and a comprehensive curriculum for its sixth form. Students achieve results that are well above average.
- The leadership of the headteacher and leadership team is very good and sets the tone for the school's success.
- Teaching overall is very good and encourages pupils and sixth-form students to achieve their best.
- The school provides a full, rich and demanding curriculum, including an excellent range of extra-curricular activities appreciated by pupils and their parents.

What could be improved

- Standards achieved by pupils in English, mathematics and science in Years 10 and 11.
- The speedy implementation of the school's plans for a library and learning resources centre, thus rectifying a long-standing shortcoming and increasing pupils' opportunities for independent learning and research.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection in 1995. Standards have steadily improved and the quality of teaching is significantly better. Key issues of concern identified in 1995 have been successfully tackled, notably aspects of teaching, the use of assessment and measures to monitor the effectiveness of the school. To date, it has failed to provide library facilities, but the school now has the means to remedy this within months, through the establishment of an up-to-date learning resources centre.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	C	B	B	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	B	A	

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

In 2000, overall results attained by pupils in National Curriculum tests in English, and mathematics at the age of 14 were above average, and in science average, compared with the performance of pupils in all schools. Results were well above average compared with pupils in schools in which a similar proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. Although the overall achievement of pupils during Years 7 to 9 is good, rates of improvement in English, mathematics and science over the last five years have not been as rapid as those found nationally.

In 2000, overall results attained by pupils in GCSE examinations at the age of 16 were above average compared with the performance of pupils in all schools. Many pupils have obtained better results at 16 than they did at 14 even though overall rates of improvement have been slower than those found nationally over the last five years. When compared with schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals and with those schools with similar results at the age of 14 in 1998, results at St Mary's have been well above average. Results in English and mathematics have been broadly in line with the national average although those in science dipped in 2000 to below average. When comparing subjects within the school, the best examination results were in business studies, geography, physical education, religious education and office applications. Girls performed better than boys overall and performed especially well in mathematics, religious education and office applications. In relation to separate national averages for each gender, boys did better than girls; boys' best performances were in geography, history, physical education and religious education. Boys and girls were less successful, in relation to other subjects, in art and design, science and drama in 2000.

In 2000, overall A-level results were well above average and an improvement on 1999. In GNVQ examinations in 2000 at intermediate and advanced levels, pupils obtained results that were above the national average, four out of five obtaining qualifications, the majority at distinction or merit level. The best examination results at A-level in subjects with a reasonable number of entries were in English literature, mathematics, art and design, geography, German, general studies, sociology and theatre studies.

Overall standards of work seen during the inspection were average in Years 7 to 11 and above average in the sixth form. This reflects results in GCSE and A-Level examinations. In relation to pupils' prior attainment at the age of 14, and that of sixth-form students at 16, achievement is good, although less rapid achievement is made in English, mathematics and science during Years 10 and 11. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all subjects. The school has set itself realistic yet challenging targets for 2001. Pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are sufficiently well developed to provide full access to learning in all subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils like school and value their education; these good attitudes mean that the majority of pupils make the most of what the school provides for them.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good; pupils respond well to the values that the school promotes.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good and help to support the pupils' effective sense of responsibility and growing maturity in their approach to work and in their contribution to the general life of the school.
Attendance	Attendance is currently in line with the average for secondary schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very good	Very 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 very good overall and are the main reasons why pupils achieve well in relation to their previous standards. The proportion of good or better teaching is well above the national average and that which is very good or excellent is close to the national average. The quality of this teaching ensures that pupils learn effectively, are motivated and most respond enthusiastically and with a desire to learn. The teaching, overall, of English and mathematics is good and in science it is satisfactory. Teaching in the sixth form is very effective. Lessons make demands of pupils; mostly pupils respond well to the challenges set by teachers. Teachers' planning takes account of the day-to-day learning needs of pupils. Teachers are well organised and classroom management is very good. They are confident and enthusiastic about their subjects and this motivates pupils. Teaching was very good or excellent in 23 per cent of lessons and was at least good in over 75 per cent of lessons. In the sixth form teaching was very good in 32 per cent of lessons and at least good in 89 per

cent of lessons; the quality of sixth-form teaching contributes significantly to the success enjoyed by sixth-form students. In the best lessons, pupils and sixth-form students apply energy to their learning and maintain a sense of purpose and enquiry as they work with increasing independence. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is relatively better than that in Years 7 to 9; some teachers do not provide the larger classes of younger pupils with sufficient challenge linked to their identified learning needs. Pupils with special educational needs are also taught well and make good progress. Only two lessons were less than satisfactory so that teaching in nearly 99 per cent of lessons was satisfactory or better. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curricular provision is very good. Learning opportunities are good overall but very good in the sixth form, with a good mix of A-level and GNVQ courses. Provision for music and modern languages throughout the school is very good and there is an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Time allocated for drama in Years 7 to 9 is inadequate and insufficient time and energy are devoted to personal, social and health education for learning in this area to be as effective as it might be.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils with special educational needs do well. They have access to appropriate accreditation for their success; learning support assistants provide effective help to pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral and social development are very good overall. Whilst pupils enjoy very good access to the arts, the provision for their multi-cultural awareness is less well developed.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school's efforts to help all pupils are good and the very good Cornerstone provision helps insecure pupils have a sense of belonging to the school. All pupils are valued and the quality of care is very good. At present, not all teachers are sufficiently informed of procedures for child protection although arrangements for the general welfare and protection of pupils are good.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Inspectors agree with the positive and supportive views of parents; these allow the school to develop an effective partnership with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher and leadership team is very good. There is a strong and imaginative vision that guides the school's daily practice and points the way for exciting future development founded on its Catholic mission. The management of improvement in standards in English, mathematics and science is demanding and requires constant reinforcement, celebrating strengths and bringing about necessary development. The organisation of the school on a day-to-day basis is effective. Administrative staff gives good support and the site staff ensures an attractive, well-maintained school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are widely involved in the life of the school and know it well. They work well with the school's management and have played a significant part in promoting the school's success.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Procedures for self-evaluation have improved since the previous inspection. The school is now more self-critical and has taken steps to provide a bank of data that is used to set effective targets for itself, for pupils, and in the best practice, for departments.
The strategic use of resources	The management of staffing, accommodation and resources is good. The school understands and applies the principles of obtaining best value successfully. Developments in the school's accommodation provide an outstanding example of astute resource planning.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoy school. • Their children make good progress. • Behaviour is good. • Teaching is good. • The school is approachable. • Their children are expected to work hard. • The school is well led and managed. • Their children are becoming mature and responsible young adults 	Apart from a small minority of parents who feel the school could work more closely with them, give better indications of the progress made by their children and that homework is not always set consistently, parents expressed no significant concerns for aspects of the school needing to be improved.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents. Inspectors feel that the school makes all reasonable efforts to work with parents and keep them well informed of their children's progress; inspectors judge that the setting of homework is generally consistent and purposeful.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils enter the school with overall levels of attainment in line with the national average. Given this starting point, pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9. In 2000, overall results attained by pupils in National Curriculum tests in English and mathematics at the age of 14 were above average compared with the performance of pupils in all schools; in science, results were average. This shows a considerable improvement over the previous three years. Results were well above average compared with pupils in schools in which a similar proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. However, rates of improvement in these subjects over the last five years have not been as rapid as those found nationally.

2. In 2000, overall results attained by pupils in GCSE examinations at the age of 16 were above average compared with the performance of pupils in all schools. These results overall were consistent with those of 1999 and better than those of 1997 and 1998. Many pupils have obtained better results at 16 in 2000 than they did at 14 even though overall improvement has been slower than that found nationally over the last five years. When compared with schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, and with those schools with similar results by the same pupils at the age of 14 in 1998, results at St Mary's have been well above average. Results in English and mathematics have been broadly in line with the national average although those in science dipped in 2000 to below average. When comparing the performance of subjects within the school, the best examination results were in business studies, geography, physical education, religious education and office applications. Girls performed better than boys did overall and performed especially well in mathematics, religious education and office applications. Boys did better than girls when comparing their results with national averages for boys; there was a smaller difference between girls' performance and the national averages for girls than was the case with boys. Boys' best performances were in geography, history, physical education and religious education. Boys and girls were less successful in relation to other subjects in the school in art and design, science and drama in 2000.

3. In 2000, overall A-level results were well above average and an improvement on 1999. In GNVQ examinations in 2000 at intermediate and advanced levels, pupils obtained results that were above the national average, four out of five obtaining qualifications, the majority at distinction or merit level. The best examination results at A-level in subjects with a reasonable number of entries were in English literature, mathematics, art and design, geography, German, general studies, sociology and theatre studies.

4. Overall standards of work seen during the inspection were average in Years 7 to 11 and above average in the sixth form. This reflects results in English, mathematics and science especially at GCSE and in the overall A-level examinations. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and in relation to pupils' prior attainment at the age of 14, and that of sixth-form students at 16, achievement is also good, although less rapid achievement is made in English, mathematics and science during years 10 and 11. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all subjects. The school has set itself realistic yet challenging targets for 2001.

5. Pupils' skills in literacy are sufficiently well developed to provide full access to learning in all subjects. Pupils' work is usually neatly written or word-processed and thus well presented. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used as much as in most schools. Teachers in most subjects encourage the development of pupils' writing. Pupils' reading is competent and supports learning in all subjects. Pupils' skills of numeracy give them full access to learning in all subjects where numerical skills form a part of learning. For example, they measure accurately and use different types of graphs. In the sixth form the key skills course is extending students' skills of numeracy and communication to good effect.

6. In Years 7 to 9, standards of work seen in pupils' books, files and their lessons are above average in geography, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Standards in English, mathematics, science, art and design, design and technology, drama, history and ICT are average. Owing to good teaching overall, however, pupils achieve well in all subjects, in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, except mathematics and science where achievement is satisfactory and drama where it is unsatisfactory owing to insufficient time being allocated to the subject. Learning in individual lessons is similarly good, except in mathematics, science and drama where it is satisfactory, and it is very good in modern foreign languages. As a result, pupils make good or very good progress in most lessons.

7. In Years 10 and 11, standards seen during the inspection are well above average in music and above average in drama, geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education. Standards in English, mathematics, science, art and design, business education and design and technology are average. The strength of the teaching in Years 10 and 11 ensures that achievement in relation to attainment at the end of Year 9 is satisfactory in English, science and art and design; it is good in all other subjects except drama and music where it is very good. Learning in lessons is similarly good in most subjects and very good in modern foreign languages and music and satisfactory in science. Overall, therefore, pupils make good progress in lessons in Years 10 and 11.

8. Work seen in the sixth form shows standards that are well above average in music, above average in art and design, business education, design and technology, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, physical education and theatre studies and average in other subjects. Most teaching in the sixth form is very good with the result that achievement in relation to standards achieved by the end of Year 11 is good in all subjects except science where it is satisfactory and music where it is very good. Learning in lessons is also good in all subjects except English where learning is satisfactory and modern foreign languages and music where it is very good. Learning in lessons in the sixth form is, therefore, good overall and students make good progress.

9. Generally, pupils fulfil their potential. Higher-attaining pupils respond keenly to challenge and achieve well. Good results by nine out of every ten pupils gaining five or more subjects over the full range of GCSE grades A* to G indicate that middle and lower-attaining pupils are also achieving well. Pupils have positive attitudes and most stick to tasks, thereby achieving success in much of their work. They respond well to good teaching. They effectively gain in knowledge and understanding and, over time, increase the range of skills they use effectively.

10. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all subjects. They gain from the climate of the school in which all pupils are treated as equally important whatever their needs. Subject departments include pupils with special educational needs in their planning and teachers generally take account of the targets set out in their individual education plans. Some pupils follow specific programmes which help them make good progress in meeting their particular needs. Pupils who have low reading skills improve by

following the corrective reading or toe-by-toe schemes, while others improve in numeracy by following the SuccessMaker computer program. Some pupils in Years 10 and 11 gain skills which will be of direct use to them when they have left school by following courses in Skillpower or the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Learning support assistants help to raise the standards of pupils with special educational needs by giving them effective help in the classroom. However, there is not enough of such support and in some lessons, for example in design and technology and English, pupils would have made greater progress if there had been a learning support assistant present. The few pupils in the sixth form who have special educational needs make good progress because they are fully integrated with the other students and follow a suitable curriculum.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. Most pupils like school and value their learning experiences. Behaviour and personal development are good and relationships are very good. Attendance is currently in line with the average for secondary schools.

12. Pupils confirm the view of almost all parents, who say that their children enjoy school. Pupils' attitudes toward learning are positive and the participation of the majority in drama, music, physical education, modern foreign languages and design and technology is very enthusiastic. Many take part in the wide range of activities that are available at lunch-time and after school and substantial numbers of pupils participate in extra-curricular sport, music and drama. All students in the sixth form demonstrate a high level of commitment to their studies. All pupils and students value the teaching, support and guidance that they receive throughout their time in the school.

13. Behaviour is usually good and in some instances, particularly the sixth form, is excellent. The previously high number of external exclusions is approximately halved and is now more in keeping with what is usually found in secondary schools of similar size. Approximately the same number of pupils are internally excluded but this not only recognises more appropriately the nature of the offences but also minimises absence from school.

14. Pupils are polite and they conduct themselves in an orderly manner. Relationships between pupils and with adults are very good. Pupils work together well in lessons and other activities. Bullying is not an issue in the school.

15. Pupils make good progress in their personal development and become mature and responsible. Some have the opportunity to experience the life style of people in other countries. Some take part in forms of community service and a few are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Many develop their sense of care for others by their support for charitable causes. Those pupils involved in the school council benefit by their roles in representing others. Days of reflection, that are appreciated by pupils, develop awareness of spiritual and moral values as a result. Pupils' self-management and independence in learning are mostly good but would be improved by a broader approach within the programme for personal, social and health education.

16. Until the end of the last school year attendance was unsatisfactory. As a result of the school's efforts, attendance was above the average for secondary schools last term and, although it has fallen back slightly, is still above the average so far this term. Unauthorised absence is still significantly higher than the average but has steadily improved since contact was stepped up with parents of pupils who are absent. Punctuality is generally satisfactory. Of the small number of pupils arriving late for the start of school, older pupils account for the larger proportion. In some cases buses are late and do not arrive at the specified time.

17. Pupils with special educational needs play a full part in the life of the school and are fully involved in lessons. A few pupils who are emotionally vulnerable or have attendance problems gain greatly from the Cornerstone project, where they learn in an environment away from the mainstream of the school. They gain confidence from the environment of Cornerstone and a number of them are gradually returning to lessons with the rest of their year group. Pupils with physical disabilities are given very good support from teachers, support assistants and other pupils. They are fully included in all school activities.

18. In the sixth form teachers have prepared well for the introduction of advanced subsidiary (AS) subjects and the development of Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses, formerly the advanced GNVQ, is assured. An increasing feature of the teaching, especially in the new advanced AVCE courses, is the insistence that students should take some responsibility for their learning and become more independent of the teacher. Inadequate library facilities and the lack of a learning resource centre hamper this approach, although plans are in hand to remedy this shortly. Students do use computer suites for their independent work, much of which is good.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

19. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection. There are occasional examples of outstanding teaching in modern foreign languages and music and much of the teaching, in almost one in four lessons, is very good or excellent. In three out of four lessons the teaching is good or better. The consistently good quality of the teaching is a significant strength of the school. Taken all in all, including the achievement and progress in lessons made by pupils, the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are very well led, the variety of approaches used and the energy and commitment of almost all teachers, teaching is deemed to be very good. The teaching is notable for its planning to meet pupils' learning needs; it is energetic and challenging, especially in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. Pupils and sixth-form students are required to work hard and do their best. As a result the quality of learning is very good and pupils and sixth-form students achieve well. In around one in four lessons, notably in Years 7 to 9, where these standards are not as high and teaching is no better than satisfactory, the expectations of teachers and their methods of teaching are more limited; time is not used as effectively and learning occurs at a less demanding pace.

20. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught. Teachers and learning support assistants are aware of pupils' needs as stated on their individual education plans. Although teachers do not refer to the requirements of pupils with special educational needs in their written lesson plans, in practice they meet their needs well. This is sometimes because teachers provide work specifically to cater for their needs as in the case of geography and modern foreign languages. On other occasions it is because they pay them more attention during a lesson. Learning support assistants provide effective help to pupils. They keep pupils on task rather than just helping. However, the quality of assistance they can give is limited because they are not involved in planning lessons and do not usually know the content of a lesson in advance. They assist the special educational needs coordinator in monitoring the progress of pupils on the special educational needs register.

21. Teaching is good on the various programmes for pupils with special educational needs where they are withdrawn from mainstream lessons. Pupils benefit from the very structured reading lessons in both the corrective reading and toe-by-toe programmes. Teachers succeed by giving the pupils constant encouragement, conducting the lessons at a good pace, and building and maintaining good relationships with the pupils. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and are clearly pleased by their improvement. The same is true on the life-skill courses for pupils in Years 10 and 11 although in just one lesson seen there was an unsatisfactory response from pupils.

22. Good support to teachers of pupils with special educational needs is given by the special educational needs coordinator. She has ensured that most teachers have received in-service training on teaching pupils with special educational needs but it is now time for a new cycle of training to begin. The policy of placing the responsibility for teaching pupils with special educational needs largely on to the subject departments is successful. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that all staff are kept up-to-date on pupils' individual needs.

23. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is basically sound and good in the sixth form. Efforts to improve levels of literacy are beginning to take have an impact, although the policy for numeracy is too recent for much impact yet to be discernible. Teachers know and enjoy their subjects. Their enthusiasm is captured by pupils in the best lessons. What is to be learned in a lesson is usually clear and pupils have opportunities to confirm their learning during and at the end of the best lessons. They maintain their interest and concentrate well. For example, in a theatre studies lesson with Year 13, students showed a clear understanding of the strands that inter-weave in Durrenmatt's 'The Visit' and discussed interpretations fluently. They had the confidence to express opinions and showed sharp analytical skills. The range of methods used in most teaching is wide and motivates pupils and sixth-form students. Discussion with pupils of all ages indicates their appreciation of this and how they especially enjoy frequent opportunities for learning actively by engaging in a number of activities over which they have some control. For example, in a German lesson with Year 11, a well-paced lesson moved from some quick-fire questions to noting main points and key words and phrases on the board, pupils and teachers always speaking in German. Discussion in the language had a clear focus, pupils with special educational needs worked well within their range of learning needs and the teacher used well-planned resources effectively. Pupils volunteered their contributions willingly and, by the end of the lesson, showed an increased understanding and competence in using past and present tenses. In this and many other lessons, pupils worked well in pairs and small groups. They collaborate and concentrate well, maintaining the focus of set tasks. As a result, pupils make progress in lessons by increasing what they know, understand and can do.

24. The best teaching occurs most consistently in modern languages throughout the school and is very good in music in years 10, 11 and the sixth form. Teaching is good overall in art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT and physical education throughout the school. It is good in business studies, drama and English in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. Teaching is good in mathematics throughout the school and in science in Years 7 to 9. At other times teaching in English and science is satisfactory. Teaching was unsatisfactory in only two lessons.

25. Time is used effectively in the best teaching. In a music lesson with Year 9, for example, the lesson had a number of clear tasks and pupils' interest was maintained as they moved progressively from one to the next. The lesson concentrated on improvising on keyboards within the blues scale. They began in pairs working at a chord sequence; they identified songs where this is used. Having become secure in the sequence they worked at a blues sequence within the blues scale that was well represented on a worksheet prepared by the teacher, gradually accumulating a range of notes in varying rhythmic sequences typical of the blues. Pupils alternated playing the melody and the chords. In evaluating their work at the end of the lessons, pupils were articulate and used technical terms correctly. This closely-structured lesson was fast-moving and confident and effective learning occurred.

26. In a science lesson in Year 11 with an above-average set of pupils, the objectives of the lesson were clearly discussed and noted by pupils. The lesson was concerned with the food chain and pupils related their work on the ecosystem to previous learning about photosynthesis. The pupils were challenged effectively to create food chains and webs showing their understanding of processes. The teacher had high expectations of this class and the pupils responded accordingly. Similarly in a Year 7 dance lesson, teaching moved the lesson along at a good pace and made demands on pupils' artistic discipline, fluency and control as they learned a chorus routine. In a design and technology lesson with Year 9, the teacher had similar high expectations for the class working at making boxes in wood. The teacher knew the subject and its techniques well and insisted on accurate preliminary drawings that were accurately labelled. The teacher used the over-head projector well to explain how joints were to be used and pupils were encouraged to use planes accurately and with due care. The teacher knew his pupils well and made appropriate demands of them; all worked hard in the lesson.

27. Teachers' use of questioning is usually very good and leads to effective learning. In an English lesson with the sixth form, some well-informed teaching helped students understand technical approaches and terminology when analysing a text. Students gave examples of previous learning with confidence, for example explaining the use of the imperative in answer to a question from the teacher. Discussion in the lesson was lively and purposeful, question and answer being rapid yet thoughtful. The classroom was arranged in such a way that interaction between students and with the teacher was encouraged. In a very good GNVQ leisure and tourism class in the sixth form, the demanding questioning of the teacher took place within some well managed role-play, for example as a second-hand car salesperson. The humour involved helped to create a positive and well-paced learning environment in which the students' awareness of customer relations was raised. In a lesson in art and design with Year 13, the teacher used questioning at a rapid pace through the use of brainstorming. This raised an understanding in one student of how to combine materials to develop her work in representing the disgusting aspects of dead animals as well as the beauty and complexity of muscle and bone. In addition to skilful questioning, this teaching provided an excellent example of successful intervention by a teacher in order to extend a student's learning. In an effective business education lesson with Year 11, questioning involved pupils in learning how investments might make money. Questioning elicited from pupils the relationship between shareholders and employees and their linked interests in a company. Through lively and provocative questioning the teacher promoted a realisation of the issues of 'interest' held by parties in an enterprise.

28. In an excellent German lesson with Year 11, the teacher conducted the entire lesson in German and yet reinforced effectively previous learning and the pupils' listening skills. By the end of some clearly defined tasks in pairs, pupils had increased confidence in manipulating language and using their skills in speaking. Using appropriate tenses and the third person singular, pupils reported back findings from conversations and asked for and gave opinions. A feature of this excellent teaching was the way in which the teacher

supported and met the learning needs of lower-attaining pupils whilst challenging the average attainers. Pupils gained enjoyment and satisfaction in sustaining the whole lesson in German. Pupils were constantly challenged and expectations of them were high. The pupils responded accordingly.

29. Teaching in the sixth form has many good features. Teachers have prepared well for the introduction of the new AS subjects and AVCE courses. A significant aspect of the teaching is the insistence that students should take some responsibility for their learning and work more independently. This approach is hampered through the poor library facilities and the lack of a learning resource centre, although this shortcoming is to be remedied in the near future. Teaching on these courses is often very good and students value them; they are challenged to achieve and improve on their previous best.

30. Teaching during tutor-group sessions is less consistent and more variable in quality. As a result, the short time available for personal, social and health education is not always effectively used; some teachers show little commitment to it.

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

31. The curricular provision is very good. It is broad, balanced and relevant and provides equally for boys and girls and pupils of all abilities. In Years 7 to 11 the curriculum includes all the National Curriculum subjects as well as religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE).

32. The teaching time has increased since the previous inspection and is now equal to that found in many secondary schools. The change to a fortnightly cycle of fifty periods has created more flexibility to meet the demands of the National Curriculum. As a result the time allocation given to modern foreign languages and expressive and performing arts in Years 7 to 9 has increased. All pupils now take a second modern language in Year 9 and this is a considerable improvement. The time-tabling arrangement, which provides seven lessons per class in each of these years for drama, is unsatisfactory. It does not provide sufficient time for the subject to meet its requirements and the discontinuous nature of the course makes progress difficult. In Year 9 specialist teachers teach the three separate sciences and achieve average standards of work from pupils.

33. The provision of ICT has improved significantly. In the sixth form it is used extensively to enhance students' learning. The opportunity to take GNVQ Intermediate ICT in Years 10 and 11 in extra-curricular time is a recent innovation. It is taken by over half of the pupils in Year 10 and enriches their education.

34. In the present Year 11 pupils take up to ten GCSE subjects. This range has been extended in Year 10 with the introduction of ICT. All pupils take double award science and about three-quarters are entered for English literature. In Year 10 English has less time than that provided in many schools and this is having an adverse effect on standards. A small number of lower-attaining pupils are now disapplied from modern foreign languages and take appropriate programmes in Life-skills and Skillpower courses, which are accredited by national awards. Cornerstone is very successful at arranging individual curricular programmes for a few pupils who might otherwise not attend school regularly. These include work-related education, day release and teaching in out-of-school hours. Vocational courses have yet to be introduced to the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 to provide progression into those offered in the sixth form.

35. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good overall. They are very good in

music, modern foreign languages and drama in Years 10 and 11. They are good in geography, history, ICT and physical education. The quality of the curriculum in art and design is unsatisfactory because it is not enriched with visits to galleries outside Hull and there is little use made of artists in residence.

36. The quality and range of the curriculum provision is very good in the sixth form. The school has successfully introduced the new post 16 curriculum. It consists of a range of 20 AS level subjects and five courses in the new AVCE taken as half, single and double awards. Re-sits are provided in English and mathematics. In addition there are five GNVQ Intermediate courses and these encourage progression into the AVCEs. All students in Year 12 take key skills and this course is very well organised. Most students in Year 13 take general studies AS level. All students take religious education and recreational activities are provided for two lessons each week. The curriculum is further broadened with the Liverpool Programme of Curriculum Enrichment. Class sizes are viable and the provision is cost-effective.

37. Pupils with special educational needs follow the same curriculum as all other pupils with some minor variation. Eight pupils in Years 10 and 11 are disapplied from National Curriculum modern foreign languages to follow the ASDAN course; and 11 pupils are disapplied from technology to follow the Skillspower course. These are sensible variations as they allow pupils with significant needs to follow an appropriate course to help them cope more adequately with life after school. The management of the withdrawal system for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is efficient in ensuring that no pupils suffer significant harm to their learning in other subjects while improving their basic skills. Many pupils with special educational needs have access to appropriate accreditation other than GCSE. Certificates of Achievement are offered in a range of subjects. Skillspower and ASDAN carry their own certification, and for the few students in the sixth form who have special educational needs GNVQ accreditation is offered.

38. The Cornerstone initiative, although only in its second term, is already proving very successful in helping to include some pupils with specific needs into all aspects of school life. In addition to helping poor attendees to readjust to school it also provides support for those pupils who need it at break and lunch times.

39. The school's strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory overall. The extra-curricular provision of basic skills for a small number of Year 7 pupils is well organised and effective.

40. The provision of extra-curricular activities is outstanding. Many members of staff make a contribution to the wealth of these activities and this work does much to enrich the learning experiences of many pupils. The school has the Sportsmark Award and there are teams in 11 sports in addition to inter-house competitions. A number of pupils achieve local, regional and national distinction in a range of sports. The Sports College status from September 2001 is appropriate and justifiable. Many subjects provide extra support for coursework and the GNVQ ICT provision is exceptional. There is a tradition of drama productions and musical performances, for example, the forthcoming production of 'Annie'. At the present time there are eight musical activities involving almost 300 pupils and the standards are very high. Many pupils have instrumental tuition of a high standard. There is a wide range of clubs and trips are arranged locally, nationally and abroad for educational and recreational purposes. Some pupils and sixth-form students are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. A summer school of excellence for modern languages was very successful last year.

41. The school provides a satisfactory programme of PSHE. It is well planned and

supported with adequate resources but lacks sufficient time to realise its potential. It is taught by all tutors in form period time and involves visiting speakers and drama groups. It was not possible to observe this session during the inspection. However, a scrutiny of materials and discussions with staff indicate that the resources do not always contain sufficient advice on how to use them and that some teachers are not fully committed. These are likely to have an adverse effect on the quality of teaching. The teaching of sex education is not fully coordinated across religious education, science and PSHE. This limits opportunities for comprehensive discussion of topics as the teaching is fragmented.

42. The careers education and guidance programme is satisfactory. It is taught within the programme of PSHE and although very well planned has the same weaknesses. The programme has a practical focus on the selection and application for further education, training and employment. The programme of work experience for all pupils in Year 10 is very good.

43. The community makes a very good contribution to pupils' learning through the provision of the Chaplaincy, work experience and work-related placements. Mock interviews are provided for all pupils with the help of the local rotary club and parents. Community service, for example, with disabled pupils at the Frederick Holmes School, is available for a number of pupils. Outside agencies supply visiting speakers in PSHE and there are very good links with local sports clubs who provide coaching for pupils. Retired professional people support pupils with reading difficulties and enable them to make good progress.

44. The relationships with partner institutions are good and promote the progression of pupils' learning. Curricular links with the 10 primary feeder schools have improved since the previous inspection. Each term there are joint subject meetings with the purpose of sharing curricular developments to aid transition. The mathematics department has particularly good links that make the transition of pupils more effective. The design and technology staff teaches some lessons in the primary schools to share their expertise. Induction days are held when pupils visit the school for lessons and the school hosts a sports day for each of its feeder schools. Academic and personal records are transferred effectively. Students visit open days in further and higher education and the school has good links with local universities through its highly successful role in the Advanced Initial Teacher Training Programme. Work by the school's mentors in this area has had a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching generally in the school.

45. The school has an agreed policy on equal opportunities that illustrates its commitment to providing equal opportunities for its pupils, teaching and non-teaching staff. The buildings have access for disabled pupils. Equality of opportunity and inclusion are very positive features of the school.

46. The high quality of the school's provision for pupils' personal development, which was noted at the time of the previous inspection, has been successfully maintained. The school lives out its distinctly Catholic view of the inclusive nature of education in the value it ascribes to all members of the school community and the opportunities it provides to make fresh starts. This is exemplified in the way in which the effective Cornerstone provision caters well for the emotional and behavioural needs of its pupils.

47. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is very good. Daily collective worship is provided for all pupils and opportunities for prayer and meaningful reflection are provided in some lessons throughout the day. In addition, pupils have the opportunity to take part in regular liturgical and retreat experiences. Pupils and students in the school appreciate opportunities to use the chapel, and the work of the chaplaincy team. The importance that the school attaches to pupils' spiritual development is recognised in its appearance in the school

development plan. Most subjects also contribute to pupils' spiritual development to some degree. For example, there is a spiritual dimension in the sense of achievement gained by pupils engaged in music and physical activity, or through the opportunities in drama or poetry for pupils to reflect on aspects of life.

48. Teachers are generally good role models, have good relationships with their pupils and set high expectations of behaviour based on a behaviour policy which is aimed at fostering self-discipline whilst recognising that not all pupils will easily achieve this. This underpins the very good provision for pupils' moral development. Themes, such as sex education and drugs awareness, dealt with as part of the personal and social education programme also contribute to pupils' moral development. The programme is well organised but requires more effective means of monitoring the provision. Most subjects also provide well for pupils' moral development. Science and geography deal with environmental issues and moral dilemmas are explored in drama and in texts which are studied in English. History deals with a range of moral and social issues such as the development of women's rights and the results of industrial and religious changes.

49. The provision for pupils' social development is very good. The school's attitude is well exemplified by the inclusive and redemptive philosophy, which is at the heart of Cornerstone's provision. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good, and the pupils appreciate this. Pupils and students are provided with extensive opportunities to exercise responsibility and demonstrate their initiative, for example, as members of the school council, heads of house, members of the chaplaincy team, and as mentors to younger pupils. Concern for others is demonstrated through extensive fund-raising for a variety of charities. Opportunities for pupils to work cooperatively and collaboratively are widespread in the curriculum, for example, in art and design, drama, ICT and design and technology. In physical education, pupils are encouraged to appreciate each other's contributions to lessons. The music provision in lessons and the different musical ensembles create a feeling of shared successful experience. The languages summer school, together with educational visits, school productions, field trips and residential retreat experiences also support pupils' social development in the opportunities they provide to live and work with other pupils and adults

50. The provision for pupils' cultural development is good. A good variety of dramatic and musical experiences is offered and there is extensive extra-curricular sporting activity. Regular school productions involve many pupils and drama offers good opportunities to see the professional theatre, both locally and further afield. The languages summer school provided opportunities for the pupils involved to experience as tasters, a wide variety of languages, in addition to immersing themselves in the culture of the languages taught in school. Experiences of a variety of cultures from around the world are provided in geography, music, art and design, food technology and textiles. There are fewer opportunities to appreciate the variety of cultural traditions, which forms part of modern British society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

51. Arrangements to ensure awareness of child protection procedures are inadequate. Arrangements for health and safety are mostly good. All pupils are valued and the quality of care is very good. The monitoring and promotion of pupils' academic and personal development are good. Parents are generally pleased with the care and support provided.

52. The teacher designated as responsible for managing child protection matters is suitably qualified and experienced and is fully aware of and able to carry out the required procedures. The staff handbook does not include reference to or guidance about child protection matters and there is not a reliable system that ensures temporary teachers and all non-teaching staff are fully aware of the requirements of them for child protection purposes.

53. The arrangements for health and safety are generally effective with only a few lapses in vigilance. The school should correct, as quickly as possible, the few matters of concern that were brought to its attention by inspectors. First aid arrangements are adequate.

54. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good and are characterised by mutual trust, respect and openness. Teachers consistently offer good advice and guidance on a personal level and are very sensitive and sympathetic to the needs of every pupil. Consequently, the school environment is conducive to learning and a sense of security and personal value prevails.

55. Arrangements to monitor and promote attendance have improved since the previous inspection although they only appear to have been effectively applied since last year. The computerised system, the efforts of the educational welfare service, recognition and rewards for sustained high attendance and the introduction of first day telephone contact with parents of pupils who are absent, have all played their part in achieving improvement. Cornerstone provides a special kind of service and support to pupils who have poor records of attendance and has enabled all of them to achieve considerable improvement and has almost eliminated prolonged absence.

56. Pupils' behaviour is very closely monitored, especially when modification or support are required. Good behaviour is recognised and rewarded. The good standard of behaviour is mostly the result of the quality of relationships and well planned teaching. Initiatives such as Excellence in Cities and the ASDAN scheme provide other forms of support, such as mentoring, that also positively contribute to the promotion of good behaviour.

57. The school's anti-bullying policy is well known to pupils. The school successfully minimises bullying by effectively establishing and maintaining very good relationships all round. Instances of even low-level bullying are almost always reported and effectively managed.

58. Personal, social and health education contributes satisfactorily to pupils' personal development. Extending some aspects to form registration periods as well as tutor periods could enhance PSHE effectively. At present some registration periods are not always used constructively.

59. Aspects of personal management and independent learning skills are not formally assessed or developed in depth in order to support more constructively pupils' personal and academic independence across the curriculum. Opportunities for responsibility, such as the school council, and various extra-curricular and out-of-school experiences contribute to many pupils' development. Reflection days offer a most meaningful dimension to all pupils' experiences whilst only a limited number of pupils engage in forms of community service.

Whilst more encouragement could be given to extend pupils' involvement in some experiences, generally the range of opportunities is good.

60. Pupils with special educational needs have their progress monitored in line with all other pupils. All are entered for National Curriculum tests at the age of 14 and those who require it are allowed suitable arrangements such as extra time or the use of an amanuensis. The individual education programmes of those pupils who are at Stage 2 or higher of the Code of Practice follow the local authority guidance and are of good quality, containing a manageable number of relevant targets. They are reviewed regularly and all relevant staff are made aware of the new targets. The annual reviews of statements of educational need contain good targets that are made use of by all relevant staff. The requirements of all statements sampled during the inspection are fully met with one exception, where the school has made a justifiable decision to reduce the number of hours of support required in order to help increase the independence of the pupil. The results of external examinations at the ages of both 14 and 16 show that the provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Most pupils gain one National Curriculum level between the ages of 11 and 14; at 16 only three per cent of pupils fail to gain any GCSE grades, which compares very favourably with the national figure of six per cent.

61. The overall arrangements for assessing and supporting the attainment and progress of all pupils are good. Satisfactory use is made of assessment data to inform teachers' planning. Good target-setting in Years 10 and 11 has raised pupils' awareness of the links that exist between regular attendance, focused ongoing effort and the achievement of high standards at GCSE. Rigorous monitoring of marking, by the leadership group, combined with sensitive yet diagnostic reporting of perceived departmental strengths and weaknesses, have provided a focus for self reflection within departments as well as an opportunity to communicate subject concerns at whole school level. Good progress has been made in tackling the key issue regarding assessment raised in the previous inspection report, although variations still occur between departments with no assessment in place in ICT for Years 7-9.

62. The use of assessment data to inform planning is satisfactory overall. The most successful use of assessment information for planning purposes is in history where syllabus changes have resulted in better results for boys. In physical education baseline assessment data is used well by teachers of girls in order to provide suitable activities, although the same provision has not been extended to boys. Although a target-setting culture permeates the upper part of the school and pupils are mentored regularly and know their predicted grades, the quality of day-to-day assessment varies both within and between departments. It is very good in modern foreign languages where all teachers work to an agreed policy and staff and pupils share a clear understanding of the targets aimed for, although even here assessment is not used to plan activities for different ability groups. The quality of assessment for informing learning is particularly good in drama and music where pupils are fully involved and self-reflection by pupils is strong. Conversations with Year 11 and sixth-form students, with the intention of clarifying understanding and leading to more independent learning are good in art and design, theatre studies and design and technology are good examples of purposeful assessment. Variations in marking practice are identified in mathematics, science and English. Existing procedures in geography have resulted in teachers assessing pupils too generously against National Curriculum levels. The assessment of ICT in discrete subject areas has yet to be implemented.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

63. Inspectors agree with the positive and supportive views of parents. The school's relationships with parents are generally good. Parents are pleased with the school and the quality of education provided. The concerns expressed by parents were not significantly high in number and were mainly about communications and homework.

64. The quality of information that parents receive is satisfactory overall. The prospectus is attractively presented and it, and the governors' annual report, comply with requirements. The main regular means of communication is the half-termly student-produced news publication that gives a very good view of the life of the school, mainly from the students' perspective. It includes a brief contribution from the headteacher but does not provide extensive information about whole school aims and developments that might keep parents better informed. Some parents say that they would like to be better informed about what is to be taught in school. Not all parents of pupils with special educational needs at Stages 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice are consulted or informed of their child being on the register. This is a serious breach of the Code of Practice. Annual school reports are not produced in a similar format for each year group and the amount of space available for commentary is, for example, very limited in Year 7 reports. Teachers' comments in reports in Years 7 and 8 do not adequately describe what pupils know, understand and can do and targets are not consistently specific to the subject. Reports to parents of pupils in Years 10 and 11 and sixth-form students are good.

65. Interim reports are not produced but pupils' journals are well used not only to support pupils' personal organisation but, as a means of communication with parents. Parents can, if they refer to them, see what targets pupils have and how they are progressing.

66. Communication with parents on a day-to-day basis about behaviour, attendance, underachievement and pastoral matters is good and relationships and mutual cooperation between all parties are clearly positive and constructive.

67. The school encourages parents to support their children and parents respond positively. Many cheer the school teams from the touch line and attendance at musical and dramatic performances is very high. Parents' evenings and other special events are well attended. A few parents help in school in practical ways. Only a very few parents are involved from time to time in the curriculum and the previously active parents, staff and friends association no longer operates.

68. Parents' views of the school are not frequently formally invited although pupils and parents of Year 7 were asked to complete a questionnaire and the same respondents were consulted again when in Year 10. The school acted in a positive manner about some of the matters raised.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

69. The leadership of the headteacher and leadership team is very good. There is a clear vision for the future development of the school that is founded on its Catholic mission statement. The headteacher has a radical view of the school's development within the Catholic community of Hull and as part of educational provision for the wider community served by the school. He is successful in communicating and sharing his commitment to leading a reviewing, self-evaluating, improving and effective school with governors, staff, parents and pupils. Whilst the deputy headteachers effectively contribute to this process through major areas of responsibility, the team of assistant headteachers has a vibrant understanding of the shared, inclusive vision of education that drives and permeates much of

what this very good school is about. Shared aims, very good relationships, the leadership team's presence about the school, make a major contribution to the very positive ethos that exists. The popularity of this over-subscribed school reflects the pivotal success of establishing its aims and purposes through an open style of leadership and management. Its recognition by the Department for Education and Employment is seen in an invitation to become a Beacon School; this is entirely appropriate for a school with such a firm and generous commitment to acknowledge and support its neighbouring schools, many of which work in demanding circumstances. St Mary's College has a good reputation in the community. Its perceived role as a school in and for the community, and one enriched by the community, is central to its being. The headteacher has high expectations of pupils, sixth-form students and staff. His leadership style is down to earth and rooted in the fundamental needs and aspirations of pupils.

70. The governing body is well informed by the senior management team. It is supportive of the school but asks demanding questions that play a part in holding the school to account. The governing body combines wisdom and flair. Meetings are well attended even by those with very heavy commitments at home and abroad. Governors give the school collaborative support through the informed judgements of many of its members. As well as holding the school to account the governing body is prepared to fill a role of advocacy with outside agencies. A good example of this is the support it gave to the headteacher in achieving major improvement to the accommodation in the immediate past, and the further support for the development of sports provision and the creation of a new learning resource centre in the near future. Governing body committees meet regularly and provide the full governing body with useful, detailed guidance and recommendations. Governors function well as critical friends of the school.

71. The headteacher is supported by two hard-working deputies who share his vision and sense of purpose. They manage the school well and their skills lie in providing all members of the school community with the framework needed to give of their best. This is largely successful, but there are a few who do not feel as valued as most in the school. The headteacher and deputies need to strive even more to celebrate the strengths of all teachers and departments whilst not neglecting the application of strategies that will encourage improvement and expansion where it is needed. This is a day-to-day management issue that must be kept alive, especially with those departments capable of higher standards.

72. Assistant headteachers, as well as fulfilling specific responsibilities, work together well as an inspirational team that promotes in the school the ethos that "everybody counts". The commitment to educational and social inclusion of all pupils, and the recognition of the support to which teaching and non-teaching staff are entitled, is an example of the school mission of its five pillars – encouragement, concern, mutual respect, reconciliation, forgiveness – lived in day-to-day belief and action. Their work provides the foundation upon which the headteacher's vision can prosper. It gives pastoral support to teachers and departments who sometimes feel stretched and unable to find energy and space for 'that little bit extra' to apply to teaching and learning. In such a context, the very good approach of most heads of department to monitoring and self-evaluation might be seen as a pattern to which all might be encouraged to aspire.

73. Heads of department are generally effective. Most see their role as evaluative and developmental. The success of teaching and learning in ensuring the achievement of pupils over periods of time is a result of the strong and purposeful leadership of the majority. There is scope for more vision and energy and a stronger focus on teaching and learning development in English, mathematics, science and art and design. In history, teachers are not consistent in following the range of approaches to teaching and learning identified by the department. In keeping with its philosophy of inclusion, senior management should more consistently meet its responsibility to manage such improvement through direct, observational support and monitoring of the quality of learning in lessons.

74. Heads of year play an important and successful role in furthering the school's aims and purposes. They and tutors provide good role models for pupils and sixth-form students. The values that the school promotes are at the forefront of their dealings with pupils. There is a good emphasis by most, but not all, tutors in tutorial sessions on issues of personal, social and health education, although insufficient time is allocated for the fullest development and there is some overlap with the curriculum for religious education.

75. Management of special educational needs is effective. The special educational needs policy document states the school's arrangements adequately but omits to give a brief account of the various stages of the Code of Practice and is too vague in describing the role of the coordinator. In places the language used is too specialised for the average reader. The policy is carried out efficiently in practice. The governors have good awareness of matters relating to special educational needs and enthusiastically support the work that is being done. They ensure that matters relating to special educational needs figure prominently in the school development plan. Records and pupils' files are well-kept and annual reviews are efficiently managed. However, not enough time is allocated for the management of all matters relating to special educational needs.

76. Clerical, administrative and site staff give good support to the school. It is attractively maintained and presents well to visitors. Daily routines are efficient.

77. Financial planning and controls are good. Planned expenditure is linked to the school's effective development plan. However, this could be improved further if known costings were included within it rather than in a separate document. Aspects of funding would then be transparently clear to all members of staff. Considerable success has been achieved in attracting additional funding to improve and extend the accommodation and learning resources. All special funding is used for its designated purposes. Long-term resource-development planning is not yet in place to enable the school to anticipate more effectively replacement or upgrading of more expensive equipment.

78. The principles of securing best value are well established and many cost saving initiatives have been successfully undertaken, for example regarding catering arrangements. However, as reported following the previous inspection, governors do not sufficiently hold the school to account by calling for an evaluation of significant financial investment against pre-determined criteria.

79. Effective systems are in place and used to monitor expenditure. The quality and efficiency of day-to-day administration are good. ICT is well used throughout the school.

80. The good progress that pupils make and the quality of education and care that pupils receive are achieved at a cost per pupil that is similar to the average for all secondary schools. Therefore the school gives good value for money

81. The school has a sufficient number of appropriately qualified teachers to meet the needs of the curriculum. There is a good match between teachers' initial qualifications and the subjects they teach. Many teachers have a long record of service to the school. The number of younger and new teachers on the staff, including those who have joined the school as a promotion, balances this experience. Similarly, there is a reasonable gender balance, which is reflected in the proportion of female and male teachers holding posts of responsibility. The school's complement of educational support staff is low for the size of school. This results in pupils with special educational needs and lower attainers not making the fullest progress possible in some lessons.

82. The governors and headteacher have achieved their aim to provide facilities that support learning in an enjoyable and safe environment. The quality of accommodation is good overall. Special features include access for disabled pupils and social areas for each year group. All teaching areas are either satisfactory or good. Central library facilities are poor but improved arrangements are planned. The hall is too small for whole school events. Playing fields are good but covered facilities for physical education are barely adequate and there are no all weather facilities. Dining facilities and accommodation for drama, music and the sixth form have been improved since the previous inspection. The premises are well maintained.

83. Resources for learning are good overall. In the majority of subjects resources for learning are good and in drama and music they are very good. However in art and design they are unsatisfactory; there is no scanner, television or video and there is no funding for printing in colour. The department does not make full use of the community as a resource for learning. The provision for using ICT in English is inadequate and in modern languages there are not enough textbooks for all pupils, resources available for the sixth form are inadequate to support A-level Spanish and the language laboratory is in poor repair.

84. At the time of the previous inspection, whilst commending the then new headteacher's energy and positive approach to his role, nonetheless a number of issues for development were raised. These have all been realised and the current effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school, perhaps more through structured evolution than in response to issues raised, bears witness to the school's overall improvement since 1995.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

85. In order to build on its current success, the governors head teacher and staff should focus on:

- (1) raising the standards achieved by pupils in English, mathematics and science in Years 10 and 11 by:
 - extending existing initiatives to improve reading, writing and numeracy skills,
 - ensuring that planning and teaching match the learning needs of all pupils,
 - ensuring that all lessons have clear learning objectives that are shared with pupils,
 - seeking ways of sharing good practice,
 - building more effective partnerships for improvement between departments and senior management;See paragraphs: 2, 4, 6, 7, 34, 62, 71-73, 86, 87, 89, 91, 92, 94, 103, 107, 108, 110, 113, 124-128, 132, 133, 135

- (2) ensuring the speedy implementation of a library and learning resources centre to increase opportunities for independent study and research by:
 - putting in place the agreed proposals.See paragraphs: 18, 29, 70, 82, 88, 95, 129

In addition to the key issues above, the governors should consider the following minor points for inclusion in their action plan:

- The school should improve the time allocation for drama in Years 7 to 9. (Paragraphs: 6, 32)
- The school should improve its provision for personal, social and health education. (Paragraphs: 15, 30, 41, 48, 58, 74)
- The school should ensure that all members of staff know the procedures in relation to child protection. (Paragraphs: 51, 52)
- As required by the Code of Practice, school should ensure that all parents are made aware if their child is entered on the register of special educational needs (Paragraph: 60).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	187
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	66

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1.0	22.0	53.0	23.0	0.5	0.5	0.0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1202	230
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	228	19

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	17	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	222	19

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	9

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	17

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.62
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.54
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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	115	125	240

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	83	83	78
	Girls	102	91	78
	Total	185	174	156
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (54)	72 (62)	65 (60)
	National	63 (64)	65 (62)	59 (54)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	38 (21)	48 (37)	29 (21)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	78	77	75
	Girls	99	89	76
	Total	177	166	151
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (60)	69 (59)	62 (52)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (24)	38 (35)	28 (19)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	115	119	234

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	45	106	113
	Girls	65	109	113
	Total	110	215	226
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	47 (46)	92 (91)	97 (97)
	National	49.2 (47.9)	88.8 (88.5)	94.4 (94.0)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	40.3 (40.5)
	National	38.6 (38.0)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	31	30	61

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	19.6	18.8	19.2 (18.0)	6.0	1.5	2.3 (3.3)
National	17.6	18.4	18.0 (19.3)	2.6	2.8	2.7 (3.3)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	37	74
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	9
Black – other	4
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1417
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	126	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	79.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.12

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	293

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.5
Key Stage 4	22.5

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3 197 293
Total expenditure	3 257 590
Expenditure per pupil	2 313
Balance brought forward from previous year	28 530
Balance carried forward to next year	(31 767)

Figures in parentheses indicate negative values

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1432
Number of questionnaires returned	557

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	58	37	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	62	35	2	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	51	42	4	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	42	11	3	2
The teaching is good.	53	43	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	42	12	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	65	31	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	79	20	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	39	45	12	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	61	35	0	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	59	36	3	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	37	6	2	9

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

ENGLISH

86. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average. These standards reflect good teaching in Years 7 to 11 and satisfactory teaching in the sixth form. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 9 is good in relation to standards of attainment on entry to the school. In relation to standards of attainment at the beginning of Year 10 achievement at the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. Students' achievement at the end of the sixth form is satisfactory in relation to standards of attainment at the start of the course. Pupils' positive attitudes contribute to their good learning in Years 7 to 9 and their satisfactory learning in Years 10, 11 and in the sixth form. Pupils make good progress in their first three years at the school and thereafter they make satisfactory progress as they move through the school. This lower rate of achievement in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form was also noted at the previous inspection.

87. National Curriculum test results in 2000 for pupils at the end of Year 9 were above the national average for all schools and well above those achieved by pupils at similar schools. Girls performed a little better than boys, in line with the national picture. Over the last four years the National Curriculum results in English have been inconsistent but the overall trend is up and there was a marked improvement in 2000 on the results of the previous year. Results in 2000 were better than those seen currently towards the end of Year 9; this is due to the skilful revision processes that occur prior to the tests at 14 and which have not yet taken place for 2001. GCSE results for 2000 in English and English literature were also a little better than in 1999. Of the pupils entered the numbers achieving grades A*-C were above national averages. However, fewer pupils take the English GCSE examinations than in most other schools. Pupils entered for the Certificate of Achievement attained well, showing that those with special educational needs make steady progress in Years 10 and 11. Results are similar to those in mathematics and higher than those in science. GCE A-level results for 2000 in English literature were in line with national averages but those in English language were well below. Literature results showed marked improvement on the previous year's and the language results were also a little better.

88. Teaching and learning in English are generally good in Years 7 to 11. Teaching in ninety-five per cent of lessons is satisfactory or better and in almost seventy-five per cent it is good or very good. In ten per cent of lessons teaching is very good. Teachers are often enthusiastic about their subject and pupils generally behave well and are keen to succeed. Progress is good when teachers give pupils opportunities to take responsibility and participate fully in all parts of the lesson. Teaching is now more varied and stimulating than it was at the time of the previous inspection but there are still occasional lessons where slow pace, unimaginative presentation or lack of variation in activities causes pupils to lose interest. In classes where there is a wide ability range lower-attaining pupils are sometimes unable to make good progress because the lesson materials are too difficult or there is insufficient support for them to move forward with confidence. Only in the lessons where teachers make clear to pupils what learning steps they are taking and where they are heading do they make good progress. The absence of an adequate library resource centre severely restricts opportunities for pupils and students to develop independent study skills.

89. Teaching in the sixth form is less successful than it is lower down the school and this has been reflected in some lower than average A-level results in recent years, especially in English language. In some cases teachers are using approaches more appropriate for younger pupils. The most successful lessons observed were those where students sat around a table and were fully involved in note-making, discussion, analysing texts in groups

or feeding back their findings to the rest of the class. In one good example Year 12 students in small groups considered linguistic aspects of different prose passages ready to feed back their findings. Although they were encouraged to work at a brisk pace, the discussions were lively and thorough and students made very good progress. Progress is less good when the teacher is standing at the front of the class talking or writing notes on a white-board and students are doing little more than listen.

90. Pupils and students are usually confident when speaking. By the end of Year 9 pupils of all attainment levels express themselves clearly when working in groups, listen to each other attentively and are happy to read aloud. By the end of Year 11 they can talk more formally for assessment in presentations, interviews and discussions but standards are no better than average and pupils would benefit from more opportunities to develop these oral skills. Sixth-form students vary widely in their speaking skills. Some students are very engaging and mature communicators, capable of speaking at length to the class, as seen in the impressive contributions of several Year 12 students when they were asked to talk about links between acts one and two of Tom Stoppard's 'Arcadia'. However, about a third of students in A-level classes seem reluctant to participate and teachers sometimes make their participation more difficult by allowing confident talkers to dominate oral work.

91. Pupils read well by the end of Year 9 and meet the challenge of demanding literature, such as Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night', without any problems. The high quality of their understanding of such texts is demonstrated, for example, in their empathetic writing as the character, Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Higher-attaining pupils read Ted Hughes difficult poem, 'Roarers in a Ring' and show clear understanding of the underlying themes. Lower-attaining pupils follow structured spelling and reading programmes and by the end of Year 9 their reading is at satisfactory levels. The reading of sixth-form students is generally satisfactory. Real enthusiasm is evident for the literature texts, although analytical reading for the English language A-level syllabus presents many students with difficulties.

92. Written work is always well presented in exercise books but in all years the use of ICT is less widespread than in many schools. By the end of Year 9 pupils have learnt to plan and draft their writing to produce sustained pieces that are focused and soundly structured. Pupils with special educational needs have increased the range of their vocabulary and gained confidence in their writing. Across all attainment levels pupils' writing shows accuracy of spelling, grammar and punctuation. By the end of Year 11 pupils write with a clear sense of purpose but the non-literary writing of all but the highest attaining pupils, for example in some work on advertising, lacks sparkle. Responses to literature are usually better, as seen in pupils' essays on the parallels to be seen in the situations of Jane in 'Jane Eyre' and Billy Casper in 'A Kestrel for a Knave'. Imaginative writing is good at all attainment levels and higher-attaining pupils show particularly good control in their use of language and sentence structures.

93. The overall standard of sixth-form students' notes is average. There are excellent examples of carefully researched and thoughtfully organised notes that form a valuable basis for revision. In other instances students lack whole-hearted commitment and make only sparse notes, especially on the English language course, which do not serve them well for examination preparation. Essays are also of a varied standard but work on Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra' showed detailed analysis and thoughtful responses. Essays on Brian Friel's play 'Translations' indicated that students had really thought about the issues that the playwright raises.

94. The department operates well but the lack of clearly designated areas of responsibility means that teachers' efforts are not always most effectively organised. Teachers are well qualified and have a very strong sense of loyalty to one another. They are very conscientious about marking pupils' work. The departmental development plan has a clear focus with criteria for measuring success and detailed costings. Schemes of work for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are being revised and have improved since the previous inspection. They do not yet, however, constitute an adequate pool of learning strategies and materials, appealing to pupils at different attainment levels, which can offer all pupils a balanced and progressive programme of study in each year. Although the monitoring of pupils' progress is now satisfactory more could be done to develop self-evaluation and individual target-setting for pupils. The planning of sixth-form courses does not focus sufficiently on how best to provide an exciting and varied programme to challenge and involve all students. The below-average allocation of teaching time to Year 10 pupils is adversely affecting standards. Accommodation is rather unappealing, despite very good display of pupils' work to enhance corridors and teaching areas. Rooms are together but the central departmental area and the store cupboard are on a different floor, which is not ideal.

Key skills: the use of the skills of literacy to support learning across the curriculum

95. Across the curriculum there is limited evidence of the recently agreed literacy policy having an impact on teaching and learning. However, in most subjects there is good practice by class teachers in supporting pupils' writing. Good examples of this are to be found in science and geography, where writing frames help lower-attaining pupils to write with confidence. In subjects such as ICT, mathematics, drama and modern foreign languages teachers offer pupils a range of writing opportunities, use marking to raise literacy standards or focus on the use of technical language and accurate spelling. In general pupils' writing is well organised, appropriate and usually accurate. Reading is competent and effective in most subjects but there are limited opportunities for pupils to read in science, art and design and geography. In mathematics, and occasionally in history, written material given to lower-attaining pupils is at times too difficult for them. ICT teachers are good reading role-models and work sheets in design and technology are well written. In physical education girls are better supported in their learning of technical words and phrases than boys. The absence of a school library and resource centre is seriously restricting opportunities for pupils and students to develop supported self-study skills.

Drama

96. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are not as high as they might be owing to insufficient time being allocated to drama in these years; as a consequence, pupils' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry to the school is unsatisfactory. Standards throughout the rest of the school are above average owing to teaching that is very good. Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9 is very good, whilst that in the sixth form is good. The attitudes of pupils and sixth-form students are excellent and contribute to successful learning. From Year 10 onwards pupils and sixth-form students make good progress as they move through the school.

97. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are not learning effectively in drama or at a fast enough rate. Compared with standards achieved in art and design and music by the end of Year 9, achievement in drama is unsatisfactory. This is due to the time allocated over three years in drama being equivalent to only a term and a half in most schools. It is, therefore, a major achievement that standards in Years 10 and 11 are as good as they are, although with a better foundation of experience of the significant dramatic conventions earlier, standards could be higher and reflected in consistently better results in the GCSE examination. In 2000, results in drama, usually more or less in line with the national average, dipped below

it. The quality of teaching of drama and pupils' attitudes to the subject indicate that results should be comfortably above average year after year. If time did not have to be spent in catching up on basic drama skills and understanding, this would be more likely.

98. A key strength of the drama teaching in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form, and evidence of the achievement of pupils, is seen in the increasing responsibility pupils and sixth-form students take for fashioning their own drama and interpreting the texts of established playwrights. For example, pupils in their second term of the GCSE course in Year 10 entered the drama studio and began working before the official start of the lesson. There was a buzz of anticipation and commitment as they began in groups to prepare for the performance of set pieces that they had been working on in recent weeks. Two groups showed work on John Godber's 'Teechers' and David Calcutt's 'Detention'. In both cases pupils had developed characterisation effectively and most of their action was believable. They had made their own decisions about the staging of the extracts, chosen music and instructed a couple of boys working on lights about their requirements to enhance the scenes. In both groups, boys and girls worked well together and achieved similar standards that, generally, were above average. They responded well to advice as the teacher intervened effectively at the end of each scene to raise points with them for improvement and development. The attitudes of the pupils, both participants and observers, were excellent and contributed significantly to the quality of the work. They were sensitive, respectful and supportive of each other's efforts. Another Year 10 group worked on Willy Russell's 'Our Day Out'. The teacher began the session by checking that pupils understood key technical terms and could locate their drama in its historical context. This emphasis on language and learning in basic skills is a good feature of drama lessons. Pupils began to show a good understanding of the characters in the play and their dramatic purpose. In this introductory exploration of the text, the teacher effectively used questioning techniques to extend learning, leading to an approach to the character-study approaches of Stanislavski as she helped pupils build their own character in readiness for an initial performance. In this group the girls worked more effectively than the boys, showed better levels of concentration and were quickly into the task of bringing the extract to life. Boys were soon caught up in this, however, and eventually, taking full responsibility for their own development of their scenes, groups of pupils began to fashion dramatic extracts successfully. A feature of the lesson was the effective way the teacher moved from group to group, spending sufficient time to teach them and move them towards a deeper representation of the text in action.

99. In Year 11, after a further twelve months of the GCSE course, pupils' readiness to take responsibility is even more marked in work that was more demanding yet successfully presented. Much of the work seen during the inspection was of prepared scenes in readiness for internal or external examinations. This provided clear evidence of standards being achieved by pupils. In one Year 11 class, a group very successfully managed the interpretation of a demanding scene from Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible'. Two of the three students in this group were working at a level suggesting good higher grade passes in the eventual examination. They had good presence on stage and their characterisations were deep and well-rounded; their eyes showed an appropriate level of depth and suspension of disbelief, maintaining the tension of the witchcraft accusations. A boy playing Proctor was very clear about the dramatic motivation of the scene and handled it well. Two other groups worked on more modern pieces and although standards achieved were not as high, the attitudes to the work and the effort put into it ensured that effective learning took place. At the end of each extract the teacher gave groups helpful pointers for further development. Another Year 11 class worked on Mary O'Malley's 'Once a Catholic', with a focus on their own self-assessment of their achievement. They had learned lines well and showed a controlled use of the text with applied energy and a sense of plot and character. They were also aware of the underlying themes of the play. The group showed an understanding of basic stagecraft and timing, were vocally secure and aware of the dramatic tension and mood of the scene.

Most of these pupils worked at a level that would probably be converted to the higher grade passes in the GCSE examination. In this and other groups in the class, pupils worked well together as performers. They were supportive when assessing each other's work. There was evidence of their previous learning, for they knew the criteria to apply when assessing performance. During this process the teacher effectively stretched the assessment to more demanding levels, adding ideas of her own. It was effective, self-evaluating learning following promising performance. Attitudes were excellent and the learning secure. Successful, consistent teaching had developed a confidence in pupils that allowed them to contribute to their own learning in significant ways.

100. Sixth-form AS drama students bring even more maturity to their work on demanding texts, emotionally or intellectually. One small group of three students in Year 12 made telling demands of themselves in practical work around Shelagh Delaney's 'A Taste of Honey'. They knew the play well and could articulate a debate about dramatic motives and the circumstances of the plot. For example, they understood how people need to be loved and to give love, especially in stressful circumstances. If that love is not constant, like that of Jo's mum compared to the unconditional love of Geoffrey, it can be an intrusion in a relationship. This complex notion was well understood and informed some subtle acting of a scene that achieved effective dramatic tension. The teacher's contribution to pupils' learning during the working of this scene was skilful. She moved the scene to a clearer focus which in itself allowed the pupils to make more demands of themselves emotionally as actors, improving the intensity of their eye contact. The teacher made the pupils cope with their characters being given unexpected motives. She communicated well with them, using gentle humour to help them over difficult sections of text and asked probing questions designed to link dramatic motive to a realisation in performance. This attention to detail is a key to the successful work at AS and A-level. In a Year 13 A-level class, students undertook textual analysis in a seminar session with the teacher prior to eventual performance of extracts from 'The Visit', a complex play of betrayal and revenge. The students also considered how scenes within the play might be staged. They showed good previous learning, having an understanding of the main strands of the play. Their reading of the text was fluent and expressive. They were confident in expressing opinions and very committed to their work. The teacher probed and prompted to elicit deeper responses when necessary. She was very secure in the subject and her knowledge of the play and was therefore very effective in extending students' learning through challenging questions that teased out more subtle interpretations beyond the obvious.

101. This was an example of the good and sometimes very good teaching within the drama department. In Years 10, 11 and the sixth form the teaching of drama overall is good; two-thirds of lessons being good and one third very good. In Years 7 to 9 the small amount of teaching seen was satisfactory but teachers had to cope with pupils who had too little and too irregular experience of drama; there was a constant need to return to basics rather than move on to further development of skills and understanding.

102. The drama department is well led and the two key teachers work well together and share each other's good practice. It is also responsible for a full programme of school productions. Governors and staff still talk of a successful production of Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' presented a couple of years ago. In the current school year they have produced 'Stepping Out' and 'The Jungle Book' and during the inspection were just beginning rehearsals for 'Annie' to be presented in the summer term. These productions play an important part in the cultural life of the school and are highly spoken of by parents. The quality of teaching in drama means that the subject is popular with pupils. Pupils and sixth-form students of all ages testified to this in formal discussions with inspectors.

MATHEMATICS

103. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average. Although there is scope for improvement these standards are the result of teaching that is always satisfactory and is good in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. Pupils' achievement in relation to standards on entry to the school is good during Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory during Years 10 and 11. Achievement in the sixth form is good. The department is well managed and pupils' attitudes and behaviour also cause the quality of learning to be generally good. Pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons as they move through the school.

104. In Years 7 to 11 pupils are taught in groups determined by their ability in mathematics. Teachers have developed good procedures for assessing what pupils have achieved in the subject. This information allows regular reviews to be made to ensure that each pupil is taught in the most appropriate group. These assessments are accurate. They are far more developed than was the case at the time of the previous inspection.

105. Up to the age of 16, pupils follow a course that meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Recently, the school has been participating in a pilot programme to develop the teaching of mathematics in conjunction with a university.

106. The teaching of Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall, with some good teaching. No teaching is unsatisfactory. In lessons where teaching is good, pupils learn well; for example, very good learning occurs when teachers give special attention to the precise needs of pupils. One outstanding example is the work being done with the most talented pupils in Year 9 by a student from Hull University who was a pupil at the school and who is now preparing for a doctorate in Mathematics. The very demanding work prepared for this group not only offers the pupils a most stimulating challenge but also prepares them for learning styles they will encounter in the future. These pupils are already achieving standards above the average for pupils two years older. They enjoy this work and respond enthusiastically.

107. In some lessons teachers do not give sufficient attention to ensure that the work is appropriate to the needs of the pupils. In some cases the work for pupils is too difficult, for example, a Year 8 class was asked to draw pie charts when they did not understand how to calculate the angle for each segment and some still had difficulties measuring angles. Pupils are not always told of how much time they have available for the work. In consequence, they are unable to identify appropriate strategies to approach the task.

108. In most lessons, pupils display a positive attitude to their work and this contributes to their learning. In lessons where work is inappropriate to their needs, learning is less good because pupils drift off task. In one example a considerable number of pupils were talking socially whilst waiting for the teacher to answer their questions, so disturbing other pupils.

109. In the best lessons, teachers are fully aware of the needs of pupils in the group. A good example was in a Year 7 class when the teacher had set a very demanding but appropriate task. Realising that the pupils might quickly lose motivation, the teacher made timely interventions to renew pupils' enthusiasm, showing the way to answer one question and so encouraging the pupils to try that approach with the next task.

110. In tests taken at the end of Year 9 pupils achieve results that are above the national average and are well above the average for similar schools. However, results would be higher still if teachers were more consistent in identification of appropriate work for classes. In recent years, improvements in the achievements by girls in these tests have led to there now being no difference in the level of attainment between the sexes at the age of 14.

111. In Years 10 and 11, learning is good because the teaching is generally good, occasionally very good and never less than satisfactory. In the best lessons, pupils make rapid progress because they respond positively to the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject. A good example was seen when a Year 10 class was excited by the challenge of exploring the pattern of angles in regular polygons. Pupils display a good attitude to their work and their behaviour in lessons is at least good. Pupils take a clear pride in their achievements as evidenced by boys in Year 10 who were rightly proud of the high standards they had achieved in an extended investigation.

112. During Years 10 and 11, pupils are regularly provided with accurate and challenging information of the GCSE grade for which they should be aiming. Pupils value and respond positively to this information. They also appreciate the high quality revision materials available to them. In consequence, they are well prepared for public examinations, not only in their mathematical knowledge but also in their examination skills. The good teaching makes full use of a wide range of materials, including the reports from examiners, so that pupils are fully aware of the demands of GCSE as well as the most frequent sources of error.

113. Whilst standards of work from Years 10 and 11 seen during the inspection were at the national average, they are higher in Year 10 because this year group entered the school with higher levels of attainment than did the pupils in Year 11. Consequently, the school should expect the results of GCSE examinations in the subject to rise above the national average. In both Years 10 and 11 pupils make satisfactory progress as witnessed by the fact that a high proportion of pupils who were at level 5 in tests taken at the age of 14 achieve at least a grade C at GCSE. There is no difference between the GCSE results of boys and girls. However, in 2000, results in mathematics, whilst better than those in science, were not as good as those in English when compared with results in other subjects in the school.

114. Throughout Years 7 to 11 mathematical investigation makes an important contribution to the development of skills in the subject. This aspect is securely integrated into the programme of study so that pupils develop well as mathematical thinkers. In consequence pupils have greater confidence to attempt more demanding challenges and those who wish to continue study of the subject beyond the age of 16 are well prepared.

115. Standards in the sixth form are above average as a result of consistently good teaching; they indicate that all students should pass the relevant examination. In 2000, A-level results were at the national average. Students make good progress in the sixth form and their achievements are good in relation to the results they achieved at GCSE. The higher-attaining students achieve at the highest levels and students enter appropriate universities including Oxbridge.

116. Students enjoy mathematics lessons. One girl in the sixth form described the subject simply, but delightfully, as 'fun'. They participate freely in lessons and have the confidence to volunteer conjectures willingly. They enjoy good and proper relations with their teachers and work constructively with their peers. Provision is made for those students who wish to take a second examination in mathematics at A-level by offering further mathematics at both A and AS levels.

117. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all years. Teachers of

mathematics draw up individual educational plans to ensure that their needs are met. Especially good use is made of the SuccessMaker integrated learning package to allow these pupils to develop their basic skills at a rate appropriate to their needs. Pupils using this package are especially encouraged by the clear indication of their progress the computer program regularly provides. The best teaching of these pupils skilfully integrates work from SuccessMaker into the lesson. For example, in a Year 10 class, the teacher taught very specific skills to small groups of pupils whilst the rest of the class worked on computers. This allowed weaknesses identified by testing to be efficiently addressed. Additionally, as the pupils presented their work to a very small group with identical needs, their confidence in their developing standards increased.

118. In other lessons for pupils with special educational needs, good teaching recognises the learning difficulties faced. Lessons are very well planned to provide an appropriate variety of tasks to sustain motivation. A very small number of pupils who would not pass GCSE gain recognition of their success in mathematics through a certificate of achievement.

119. In Year 7, pupils with low levels of achievement in mathematics voluntarily attend weekly numeracy target groups run after school. These very good sessions provide extra tuition and practice and so increase the learning of these pupils.

120. The department has introduced effective target-setting and prepares pupils, especially the lower attainers, effectively for examinations. Investigations in mathematics are a strength of its teaching. The department also offers opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills; for example, the best coursework assignments demonstrate that pupils can precisely describe mathematical processes using appropriate terminology. Whilst some opportunities are taken to help pupils appreciate the aesthetics of the subject, such as in work on integration in the sixth form, a systematic and visionary review to identify such opportunities further would allow the subject to make a greater contribution to the spiritual development of pupils and to their fuller appreciation of the nature of the subject.

Key skills: the use of the skills of numeracy to support learning across the curriculum

121. The school has recently adopted a policy for the development of numeracy in all areas of the curriculum. Whilst it is, as yet, too early to evaluate the effect of this policy, the numerical skills of pupils are sufficiently well developed for their learning in other subjects not to be hindered. Many subjects already make a contribution to the development of numeracy. For example, pupils use climate graphs in geography, use measuring skills in an experiment on wavelength in science and in designing circuits in electronics. The numeracy policy should ensure that such provision is fully integrated.

122. Since September 2000, all sixth-form students follow a key skills course in numeracy. This good provision has been coordinated by a dedicated teacher who has assembled work that is now being used by other schools. The project work of this course makes a major contribution to the development of students as independent learners. It is very well resourced and features excellent assessment of students' needs and achievement. This course is well integrated into the curriculum of the sixth form and students do not undertake unnecessary repetition of tasks. It is also well linked into the work being undertaken in conjunction with a university to encourage students to enter higher education.

SCIENCE

123. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average throughout the school. These standards are achieved through satisfactory teaching in both Years 7 to 11 and good teaching in the sixth form. Pupils' achievement in relation to standards on entry to the school is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9; in relation to standards at the start of Year 10 achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form achievement is good. Pupils' positive attitudes also cause the quality of learning in science in Years 7 to 11 to be satisfactory and good in the sixth form. Pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through Years 7 to 11 and good progress in the sixth form.

124. In 2000, the pupils' results in national tests for 14 year olds was average compared with all schools. They were above the national average overall when compared with schools of similar backgrounds although middle-attaining pupils performed relatively better in these tests. Results have improved since the previous inspection at a rate, which quite closely follows the national trend. Attainment in science as measured by these tests is inferior to that in both mathematics and English by the time the pupils are 14. At the end of their compulsory schooling all pupils are entered for the GCSE double-award science examination. On-going assessment is used by the department to decide in which tier of examination pupils are entered. Practically all pupils entered for the GCSE examination in 2000 achieved at least a grade G in their examination. However in 2000 there was a marked deterioration in the proportion of pupils who achieved grades A*-C in their science examination. Over the previous four years the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C was broadly in line with the national average. Results in 2000 appear to be a one-off dip due in part to unavoidable staffing difficulties. However these results represent a considerable under-achievement for middle-attaining pupils. Results in the sixth form have fluctuated depending on the calibre of students opting to do A-level sciences. For example, in 1999 results for all three sciences were above the national average in terms of A-E grades and well above the national average in physics and chemistry for higher A/B grades. However, in 2000, results were below the national average in all three sciences although small group sizes make national comparisons somewhat dubious. In the present Year 12 the department has been more successful in attracting students to the sciences and group sizes are now more appropriate.

125. The range of inspection evidence, including lesson observation, analysis of pupils' and sixth-form students' work and discussion with them indicates that overall standards of work are average. In the sixth form, students have a satisfactory understanding of physics, chemistry and biology. They are improving their capability to understand and analyse quite complex scientific theories and concepts. For example, Year 13 physics students understand the relationship of quarks to neutrons. Good teaching in this lesson, with clear succinct explanations, enabled the students to understand how 'strangeness' is conserved during strong particle decay.

126. By the end of Year 11 higher-attaining pupils produce above average standards of work. For example, a Year 11 higher-attaining biology group achieved above- average standards in their understanding of feeding relationships in food webs. Participation by pupils in their own learning, coupled with sensitive support from the class teacher, enabled pupils to make rapid progress in their understanding of this topic. Middle and lower-attaining pupils achieve relatively lower standards overall. For example, middle-attaining Year 10 pupils have some understanding of wave theory and how it relates to sound and light. They measured the number of standing waves in a string under tension but made some errors in their measurements that led to difficulties when they drew graphs of their results. Evaluation of their results was therefore only partially successful. Lower-attaining pupils have a limited understanding of the refraction of white light although recall the colours present in the

spectrum produced.

127. By the end of Year 9 pupils have built on their previous scientific knowledge and produce standards of work that are average. Pupils generally have positive attitudes to their work and this improves their learning. An upper-attaining group of Year 9 pupils had good practical skills and successfully tested a leaf for the presence of starch. A good variety of activities in this lesson, due to good planning, enabled pupils to make gains in their understanding of why plants need carbon dioxide and light in order to photosynthesise. Middle-attaining Year 7 pupils measured the resistance of a wire although they needed considerable support in order to set up the apparatus required. Lower-attaining Year 9 pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of microbes and disease. They know that colds and flu are caused by viruses and sores by bacteria. In some groups standards are much lower. For example, a lower-attaining Year 7 class had minimal understanding of how coal and oil are formed. This was due to a combination of poor attitudes coupled with poor teaching that was inappropriate to the attainment profile of the class.

128. Overall, rates of achievement are satisfactory although better in the sixth form. Pupils enter the school with attainment that is average for their age. By the age of 14 the most recent test results indicate that on average pupils are at the same level as pupils in other schools. In this age range teachers have produced new schemes of work that are more effective for teaching science than previous schemes. These schemes of work clearly focus on pupils' activities and what they learn. There are more opportunities for practical investigations. Sound teaching ensures that steady progress is made in the majority of lessons. Most pupils are keen and well motivated and this aids their learning. However, scientific enquiry skills are underdeveloped owing to teaching that is too prescriptive and does not allow pupils a significant contribution to their own learning. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is also satisfactory. Here teachers concentrate more on coursework requirements so that scientific enquiry skills are better developed. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are at least satisfactory and often good.

129. Students in the sixth form achieve well. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject specialism and convey theories and concepts to students with a good degree of clarity. Teachers have produced detailed course guides that enable students to be more independent in their learning, but the school lacks the library resources to support independence. Specialist teaching is good and this, combined with very positive students' attitudes, results in students learning well in all three sciences.

130. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them. Teachers use writing frames and keywords to enable them to access the curriculum better. As a result most of these pupils achieve at least grade G in their double award science examination. The department makes a good contribution to the pupils' numeracy skills by emphasising graphical skills, data handling and algebra when they are needed in the science courses. Pupils are improving their ICT skills because of the increased priority the department now places on this key skill.

131. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is good in the sixth form. Here teachers have established good working relationships with their students that enhance their learning. Lessons and practical activities are well planned. For example, in a Year 12 chemistry lesson students were given tasks designed to meet their differing learning needs as they determined the enthalpy of combustion of different alcohols. This careful planning enabled all students in the group to make good progress in this topic. They were enhancing their practical skills and were able to interpret their data to identify the alcohol they were given.

132. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is satisfactory. In some middle and lower-attaining

groups teachers employ teaching methods that are not well suited to the capabilities of the pupils. An over-reliance on teaching from the front by the teacher, with little involvement of the pupils in their own learning, led to a loss of interest and concentration as the lesson progressed.

133. In Years 7, 8 and 9 teaching is also satisfactory. Pupils in this age range are generally enthusiastic about their work and display satisfactory attitudes. However occasionally poor teaching leads to unacceptable behaviour that limits the pupils' learning and the standards they achieve. In both these age ranges there is too limited a range of teaching methods. Lessons are often prescriptive especially in investigative work. The lack of involvement in their own learning leads to a lowering of standards with middle and lower-attaining pupils. Some day-to-day assessment and marking of pupils' work are not giving pupils help for improving their work. It does not highlight their strengths and weaknesses or show them how to improve. In Years 7, 8 and 9 there is no indication of the National Curriculum level at which the pupils are working.

134. The proportion of good and better teaching in these age ranges is less than that seen nationally. This is due to factors such as the use of a limited number of teaching strategies that are often not well geared to the pupils' capabilities.

135. The department benefits from a team of well-experienced and committed teachers. However, they do not always press sufficiently for the highest standards in Years 7 to 11. The department functions smoothly on a day-to-day basis due in part to the hard-working team of technicians. Health and safety requirements are met. For example, teachers make risk assessments of the experiments that they do. Accommodation is adequate for the teaching of the science curriculum although some laboratories do not present an attractive environment in which to learn science. However in some rooms displays of pupils work increase interest and motivation in the subject.

136. Since the previous inspection the provision and use of ICT has improved. Assessment of pupils for curricular planning is better. The schemes of work produced by the staff are more appropriate for the teaching of science. However in order to progress further the department needs to improve the quality of its day-to-day assessment. It should strive to improve the quality of teaching by implementing observation of teaching and learning in order to share the good and very good teaching already present in the department.

ART AND DESIGN

137. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average in Years 7-11 and above average in the sixth form. These standards are the result of teaching that is generally good. Pupils' levels of achievement in relation to standards identified on entry are satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour including the quality of their learning in art and design are judged to be good. The majority of pupils make good progress in skill development as they move through the school.

138. By the age of 14, in 2000, pupils' overall level of attainment in teacher assessment is average: almost all achieve what might be expected for their age and a minority achieve more. From the evidence of drawing, ceramics, painting and sketchbook work, attainment is average and confirms teachers' assessments. The best work seen is in the pop art studies for a T-shirt design where pupils surprise themselves at the quality of their own drawings as they follow the framework offered by the teacher in developing comic book imagery. Much of the work seen in the lower years is based on books or magazine imagery with too little opportunity to observe real objects, make visits to galleries or meet practising artists.

139. By the age of 16, pupils' standards are generally average. Too few Year 11 pupils are working independently of their teacher for higher grades to be attained and this particularly applies to boys who expect resources to be provided for them even at this stage in the examination process. Pencil, pastel, charcoal and chalk drawing are more strongly developed than the research studies that accompany them. Few annotated explanations are found on research sheets and little use is made of ICT except for gaining information.

140. By the age of 18, sixth-form students draw well from the human figure and produce some well considered three-dimensional 'assemblages' using such unusual materials as a rubber glove to represent an animal form. Numbers taking the subject are small and in Year 13 this often limits discussion. Students are constrained by the accommodation available and generally work on a smaller scale than might be expected at this age. Their personal studies are concerned with the past and have little reference to what is currently happening in the art world. They do not have any planned opportunity to visit galleries beyond the locality.

141. Over the period 1998-2000 the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-C in GCSE was well below the national average and compared unfavourably with similar schools. Work seen during the inspection was better than this owing to the clear objectives teachers had set for the lessons observed. Preparation and support for examination work appears to be less effective. However, those gaining grades in the range A*-G were close to the national average. Girls perform better than boys. In 2000 pupils' performance in the subject is significantly below what they achieve in most of their other school subjects. At A-level throughout the period 1998-2000 whilst all pupils passed the subject the proportion of pupils gaining the higher (A-B) grades was well below average, except in 1999 when it was close to the national average. This is another example of lessons sometimes being better planned than preparation and support for examinations appears to have been.

142. Pupils in the lower years make satisfactory progress in developing skills. Many start with poor painting skills but with some knowledge of artists such as Van Gogh. They are taught in large groups by teachers with knowledge and understanding particularly of graphics, photography and sculpture who are, however, constrained by the lack of resources and space available. Pupils use of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills is currently more limited than is consistent with best practice. Computers and printers are old and there is no scanner available or CD-ROM for art and design use. Television and video facilities have to be shared with another department and the darkroom is no longer in use. The teachers are unused to single periods of one-hour duration and find it difficult to adjust their planning to take account of this constraint. As a result time is spent on developing skills with little time for reflection, setting of homework and the active discussion of art-related ideas. In three-quarters of lessons seen the teaching and learning of drawing, painting and craft skills are good or occasionally very good and satisfactory in the remainder. Teachers, however, rarely allow time for pupils to pause and consider either themselves as artists or the wider world of creativity beyond their classroom. This limits their spiritual, moral, social and cultural growth. Work such as that in Year 7 with ceramic tiles, whilst of a good standard, is on a small scale. Year 8 poster studies of fishes are pale reflections of the real world because pupils only have

access to photocopies or books. These pupils' drawings reflect their lack of engagement with and sensory understanding of the fish's watery habitat. Pupils in Year 10, who have previously produced below-average pencil studies of seated figures, benefited from a clear demonstration by the teacher and went on to draw more freely and expressively using charcoal and chalk. This represented good learning and progress for this group during the lesson. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because teachers make a special effort to accommodate their problems and provide suitable resources. The gifted and talented do not get the same treatment in the lower school and make only satisfactory progress. In Year 11 and the sixth form those who take the subject benefit from good assessment opportunities, which raise their awareness and develop their artistic understanding. Whilst this is commendable these pupils would have benefited from similar experiences from the age of eleven. The majority of pupils, nevertheless, enjoy art and design and their attitudes and behaviour are generally good.

143. The quality and range of learning opportunities is unsatisfactory across the school. Limited resources, lack of storage and few visits adversely affect the richness of pupils' experience in art and design. This has a negative impact on standards pupils aspire to achieve. The subject does not have the profile it deserves within the school or the resources to improve standards. There are missed opportunities for using the time available more constructively and for developing the sketchbook as a tool for solving problems and for assessing achievement over time. Satisfactory improvement has been made in tackling issues raised by the previous inspection. Standards have not improved, however, and this is a cause for concern. Statutory requirements are met.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

144. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average in the main school and above average in the sixth form. These standards are the result of teaching that is generally good. Pupils' achievements in relation to standards on entry are good in the main school and the sixth form. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour including the quality of their learning in design and technology are good throughout the school and excellent in the sixth form. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school in most aspects of the subject and very good progress in electronics and graphic products in the upper years.

145. By the age of 14, in 2000, pupils' overall level of attainment by teacher assessment is average for their age: almost all achieve suitable levels and a minority achieve more. The best attainment seen in lessons is in resistant materials and food technology where above-average knowledge, skills and understanding are evident. In a Year 9 lesson pupils demonstrate their skills in using hand tools, which include the use of a plane to accurately cut a groove, as part of a box making exercise. In a parallel group pupils demonstrate good understanding of pasta dishes and how to modify recipes for particular needs. Pupils have at least average skills in verbal and written communication: they measure accurately and use ICT confidently for research, graphics and control purposes. Pupils with special literacy needs do not always have sufficient support either from the teacher or from learning support assistants to be able to attain as well as they might in written work: they are held back by poor spelling.

146. By the age of 16, standards are generally average, in the work seen. However, above average standards were evident in a graphic products lesson where pupils had designed, marketed and manufactured perfume packaging, a model for a theme park entrance and a design for a student flat. In this work pupils used questionnaires and the Internet well for research purposes as well as presenting their work attractively. Their knowledge and understanding were good.

147. By the age of 18, sixth-form students' standards are above average in design, product development and manufacture. They draw well on information and skills gained in earlier courses to inform present studies as for example, the use of electronics or textiles when designing interiors of buildings, or on interests developed outside the school such as steam-engine construction.

148. Over the period 1998-2000 the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-C and A*-G at GCSE was close to the national average and in line with similar schools. Girls perform better than boys. In 2000 pupils' performance in the subject is significantly below what they achieve in most of their other subjects due to the low standards gained by boys. At A-level the proportion of students gaining the higher (A-B) grades over the period 1998-2000 was well above average whilst all students passed the subject.

149. The majority of pupils learn well in design and technology in all aspects of the subject. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding, plan well and use good resources. They work well as a team and pupils appreciate their approachability and their generosity, particularly as GCSE approaches, in allowing extra time to complete course work after school hours. In three-quarters of lessons teaching is good and in a third very good. No teaching is unsatisfactory but strengths and weaknesses are evident. Pupils in Year 7 learn how to use a pair of compasses accurately as part of their graphics course and they are expected to estimate as well as measure accurately. In the two lessons seen pupils made good progress as they moved from bisecting a line to being able to create an accurate six-point star. Pupils' literacy development is less well considered. For example, sheets of key words are too small to see and are sometimes displayed in inaccessible places. Where learning assistants are present, as in Year 7, pupils with special needs benefit from the extra attention but this help is thinly spread across the department. In Year 8 textiles, pupils are provided with good resources when studying other cultures. In a graphics lesson the teacher acts as a role model for the pupils; a mistake at the white board is used well as a learning experience. Interest levels rise as a result of greater involvement of pupils. In Year 10, lower-attaining pupils, many with special educational needs, learn to model a café interior and make sensible decisions about colour schemes. They work purposefully, with most pupils able to maintain concentration. Their self esteem is considerably enhanced by the way the teacher takes care to display their finished work so that it looks well on the workshop wall. Whilst pupils studying resistant materials have not achieved the standards achieved in other strands of the subject, there are signs that this is changing as Year 10 pupils use a variety of materials to produce new ideas. The pace of lessons is generally good and time and resources are used well. Exceptions do occur as for example where extension tasks are not available for the gifted and talented when using computers in electronics. Teachers of Year 11 have very different expectations as to how to organise groups. Whilst one group is given the responsibility to support and learn from one another, a different group is encouraged to remain dependent on the teacher and this leads to a lack of rigour in their approach to their work.

150. The school has made good progress in tackling issues raised by the previous inspection. Assessment, including marking, is consistent and the pace of lessons is good. Statutory requirements are met. The department is well managed and sound plans are in place to modify schemes of work in order to raise standards in the main school. Design and technology contributes well to pupils' knowledge and understanding of ICT and also to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The department is well supported by technician help.

GEOGRAPHY

151. Standards of work seen in geography during the inspection are above average overall.

They are above average in Years 7 to 11 and average in the sixth form. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Pupils' achievements in relation to their standards on entry to the school are good. Students' achievements in relation to their attainment on entry to the sixth form are good. Good attitudes and the improved provision of textbooks also cause the quality of learning to be good. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school and students achieve satisfactorily as they move through the sixth form.

152. Standards in geography on entry to the school are slightly below average. Standards by the end of Year 9, judged on an analysis of pupils' work and that seen in lessons, are above average. The achievement and progress of pupils are, therefore, good. The quality of teaching and learning observed was good or better in all lessons in Years 7 to 9. It was very good in 20 per cent of lessons.

153. Teachers know their subject well and are competent in teaching literacy and numeracy. As a result, pupils in Years 7 to 9 gradually extend their use of technical language. They increase their geographical knowledge, skills and understanding of places, patterns and processes. Higher-attaining pupils make good progress learning about the processes of glacial erosion and deposition. They describe and begin to explain the physical features of the landscape in the Lake District and they identify these on ordnance survey maps. Lower-attaining pupils cover the same work in less depth and are not challenged to explain the processes. After a good introduction to ordnance survey mapwork in Year 7 there is little evidence of its extension and consolidation in Years 8 and 9. A good feature of the teaching is the preparation and use of different resources and this is a significant improvement. These together with the effective use of support staff enable pupils with special educational needs to make good progress. In a very good lesson pupils used different writing frames, carefully matched to their needs, to produce extended and illustrated accounts of the physical and human geography of the river Tees basin. Additional support focused on helping pupils with very weak writing skills. This ensured that they gained confidence and made progress. The control of pupils, the setting of purposeful homework and the marking of pupils' work are consistently good features of the teaching.

154. The use of ICT has improved since the previous inspection. A good lesson was seen where the teacher risked using an unfamiliar website. This captured the pupils' interest. They sustained concentration and worked at a good pace consolidating their learning of the factors that affect population change. Overall the use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning is limited and the statutory requirements are not fully met for all pupils. In work on the ecosystem of a tropical rainforest pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of the culture of the indigenous people. They consider the moral issues of the development of these regions including the effect of deforestation on the greenhouse effect and global warming. At this stage of their education pupils do not pose geographical questions and investigate these through fieldwork other than in Year 7 in work on microclimate. Although the procedures for assessment in geography have improved the interpretation of levels are too generous and the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are inflated. There is scope to slim down the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 and increase the depth and challenge of some topics.

155. Pupils who choose the GCSE course have achieved standards previously that are average. At the end of Year 11 standards are above average and progress of pupils is, therefore, good. The quality of teaching varies from satisfactory to good. Overall it is good.

156. Pupils continue to increase their knowledge and understanding of human and physical geography. Higher-attaining pupils produce detailed accounts on the exploitation and conservation of fragile environments such as the Norfolk Broads. Lower-attaining pupils write in less detail. For example, they describe the effects of natural hazards but there is much less explanation of their cause. Where teaching was good it provided a framework and additional resources. These enabled the pupils to achieve the challenge of independent research on, for example the Kobe earthquake. Satisfactory teaching set challenging homework on the pollution of rivers but did not provide enough guidance and the pupils made slower progress. In a lesson collating the information obtained from a survey exploring the hierarchy of shopping centres the teacher gave too much explanation. As a consequence these lower-attaining pupils, particularly the boys, lost interest and concentration and a few made unsatisfactory progress.

157. The GCSE examination results have improved steadily since the previous inspection and in 2000 were above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest A* and A grades was above average. The girls' results were higher than those of the boys.

158. The A-level results have improved since the previous inspection and in 2000 were in line with the national average. All five of the students passed the examination. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is consistently good. The standards of work seen in the sixth form are average. Overall students achieve well given this small group's below to average attainment on entry to the course.

159. Individual fieldwork investigations illustrate a knowledge and understanding of patterns and processes in physical and human geography and use statistical techniques to analyse data. Numeracy skills are progressively developed in geography. In the sixth form students are competent at drawing, reading and interpreting a variety of data. The use of good resources in a well planned and timed lesson enabled students to make good progress learning about the impact of tourism on the environment, people and the economies of counties at different stages of economic development.

160. The department is well managed and led. Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in lessons to extend the very best practice takes place. Consequently, teaching and learning have improved considerably since the time of the previous inspection. The development plan is good and has a clear priority to improve standards. It does not include strategies to maintain and further improve the quality of teaching and although examination results are reviewed, targets are not set for future success.

HISTORY

161. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average by the end of Year 9 and above average by the end of Year 11, and by the time that students leave the sixth form. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good overall. The pupils' positive attitudes also contribute towards the quality of their learning and they make good progress as they move through the school.

162. Pupils' achievements in history, in relation to standards on entry to the school, are good. Basic historical skills are well established in Year 7. Pupils are helped to place the periods and events which they study, in a chronological framework. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, the teacher skilfully encouraged pupils to use a family tree of medieval kings to locate the reign of King John. Pupils understand the difference between primary and secondary sources of information and by Year 8 are confidently selecting information to use in their investigations, from a range of sources, that go beyond those found in their text books. In investigating the causes and events of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, pupils used appropriate source material from educational websites which the teacher had provided to supplement those found in the text book, and which had the effect of increasing the challenge and interest in the lesson. Pupils' understanding of why there are different historical interpretations is weak because they are not given sufficient opportunity to develop this skill. By Year 9, pupils can describe the reasons for and results of changes such as those brought about by the industrial revolution. Higher attainers analyse sources of information, for example, in order to detect bias and can support their conclusions with well-chosen evidence. Many pupils present the results of their investigations in a variety of ways. For example, higher-attaining pupils in Year 7 write in character and at length about the Peasants' Revolt and lower attainers receive good support from word frames in organising their ideas. By the end of Year 9 pupils' attainment in history is average which represents satisfactory achievement compared with their levels of attainment on entry to the school. However, despite some improvement since the previous inspection, there remains some inconsistency between teachers in the extent to which they provide a broad range of writing experiences. Pupils also have insufficient opportunities to use computers to assist their learning.

163. The organisation of pupils into groups of broadly similar attainment in Years 8 to 11 means that teachers adapt their lessons to provide the appropriate challenge for each group of pupils. In the majority of lessons this works well. Teachers are aware of the needs of pupils who have special educational needs through their individual educational plans and also provide sensitive individual support. In the case of higher attainers, for example in a good lesson on women's rights in the nineteenth century, the teacher adapted the tasks so that pupils were challenged to reach the higher levels of the National Curriculum for history. Occasionally, in sets where there is a wide range of prior attainment, the teacher relies on a single printed resource and the progress pupils make, though satisfactory, could be better. Teachers pay good attention to literacy skills by encouraging accuracy in spelling and the use of appropriate technical vocabulary, for example "aqueduct" and "puddling" when learning about the development of the canal system. Homework is regular and both extends and consolidates learning. Marking is thorough and is particularly good in the sixth form with the use of a framework which is closely matched to examination criteria and, together with a commentary on the work, gives students a very clear idea of their strengths and weaknesses.

164. The above average GCSE and A-level results reported at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained overall but there are differences in the recent performance of boys and girls. The department has been successful in improving boys' results in the GCSE examination. In 1999 they were similar to those achieved by girls and improved substantially in 2000. Boys' achievements in history were better than in their other subjects. Conversely, girls' results were below average when compared with girls nationally and girls' achievements in history were not as good as in most of their other subjects. The reasons for this have been analysed and the inspection evidence does not reveal any significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls currently in Year 11. Standards in Year 11 are above average. Pupils have very good attitudes to their learning and the teaching in Years 10 and 11 is consistently good. Pupils made good progress in lessons where they were involved in both challenging questioning and written tasks. Teachers used their own detailed knowledge of topics in sharp questioning which made pupils think for themselves.

Higher-attaining pupils were kept on their toes in learning about the significance of the Potsdam Conference by a mixture of written and oral activities. Their interest was well maintained by the teacher's good use of his own detailed knowledge of the topic in support of the text book and printed resources.

165. There has been some variation in A-level results since the previous inspection. Results were average in 1999 and girls' results were better than boys, whose average points score was below the national average. In 2000 results were above average and boys outperformed girls. Students currently in Year 13 work well together in group discussion and support their conclusions effectively when challenged by the teacher. In essays, they use evidence well in developing coherent arguments, for example in writing about the quality of the monarchy in seventeenth century Sweden. Students are being well prepared for the new AS level history course. When analysing source material, higher attainers write at length and use well selected quotations from the evidence in support of their conclusions. Standards overall in the sixth form are above average and represent good rates of achievement over the two years by sustaining the good standards achieved at the end of Year 11.

166. The strengths in the subject, which were identified at the time of the previous inspection, have been maintained. For example, teaching is good in around 80 per cent of lessons and is consistently good in Year 10 and 11. However, the evidence from an analysis of pupils' work indicates some inconsistency between teachers in the variety of methods that they employ, which was an issue raised at the previous inspection. Even better teaching would be encouraged if the arrangements for planned programmes of observation of teaching were improved. Response to recent curricular changes has been good though more use needs to be made of computers to assist learning and the schemes of work do not offer enough opportunities to study local history.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

167. Standards of work seen during the inspection are good overall. These standards are achieved because the teaching of ICT is good. At the start of Year 7 pupils enter with different experiences and average skills in ICT. Pupils' achievements are good although there is insufficient recorded assessment of standards achieved. By the end of Year 11 pupils' achievement in the different strands of ICT is good. In the sixth form students achieve good standards in the key skills of ICT as they do in GNVQ course requirements for the information technology vocational examination. Pupils' and sixth-form students' very positive attitudes, as well as the open access to facilities, cause the quality of learning to be good. Pupils and students make good progress as they move through the school and in the sixth form.

168. In Year 7 for example, in religious education pupils are successful in finding out about Mary, Peter and Paul by searching computer files and working systematically through instructions. In science, Year 7 pupils show how to correctly add information and amend it as they build up a spreadsheet for displaying class data. In Year 9, pupils in mathematics are confident in using a formula and presenting results in a variety of forms. All pupils show satisfactory skill in entering the network and with the support of good teaching save and retrieve work satisfactorily. In Year 9 for example, higher-attaining pupils extend their knowledge of ICT as they use the information they have gathered from various sources to consolidate their understanding of mathematics. Lower-attaining pupils achieve similar standards to that of the majority of pupils. This is due to their motivation, their positive attitudes and good teaching resulting from the knowledge that teachers have of the subject. Teachers know their pupils well. They use this knowledge skilfully to ensure that the planned work matches the needs of all pupils.

169. Open access to the GCSE/GNVQ Intermediate Information Technology Thomas

Telford Project in Year 10 provides pupils with the opportunity to successfully extend their knowledge and skills of ICT. Pupils are confident in handling software programs as they complete tasks in handling information. They achieve good standards as they appropriately apply the techniques of ICT, for example in the production and use of databases and spreadsheets. Similarly Year 10 pupils in GCSE electronics show a good level of knowledge. They use specific software programs with some accuracy as they investigate a stable circuit designs. Successes are gained as a result of the good balance of individual support and whole class teaching. Pupils know what is expected of them and rise to the challenges set them by teachers. Lower-attaining Year 11 pupils achieve average standards in their use of ICT when using a commercial package to reinforce their literacy skills in English. The variety in teaching methods and the good working relationships between adults in the classroom have a direct impact on the achievements of these pupils.

170. Standards in the sixth form are above average. The high levels of motivation and the secure knowledge and expertise of teachers have a strong impact on the standards that students achieve. The results for GNVQ IT in comparison to national statistics are above average. Students in Year 13 in the advanced course maintain a brisk pace. They work individually and at a high level of competence in applying their knowledge successfully to a range of projects. Students with special educational needs in Year 12 Intermediate GNVQ achieve pass level standards. The very carefully planned work programme matched to the students needs along with focused support by the teacher enables the students to understand what they are doing and why.

171. In 85 per cent of lessons teaching is good. In Years 7 to 9 teaching is good in 66 per cent of lessons. All teaching in Years 10 to 11 and in the sixth form is good. Pupils make good progress in their learning as they move through Year 7 to 9. In geography in Year 8 for example, pupils access information from the Internet as a way of reinforcing their knowledge of factors influencing population changes. By the end of the lesson higher-attaining pupils pose more 'what if' questions. They use their developing understanding of the variety of ways of obtaining different information from web sites successfully. The skilful and well thought-out help sheets enable lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs to make good progress in accessing and obtaining research information. Similar steady progress is being made by Year 8 lower-attaining pupils in mathematics where ICT resources are used to good effect. Pupils use a commercial package to support the development of numeracy skills. Teachers make lesson objectives clear in the best lessons. Planning is effective and preparation to match the needs of pupils is carefully carried out. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. The respect that pupils have for each other and their teachers has a significant impact on the quality of learning taking place.

172. A similar picture emerges in Years 10, 11 and in the sixth form. The learning taking place in lessons, for example in a Year 1 electronics class is sustained throughout the lesson. By the end of the session pupils understand the implications of different circuit arrangements through their investigative approach using ICT. Demands are made of pupils' understanding and application of ICT to course work. In the teaching of the Thomas Telford Project, good gains are made in learning as pupils work through compulsory and optional units. In these lessons pupils' motivation makes a significant contribution to the quality of learning taking place for both boys and girls. Pupils make good progress in handling information and have good skills in computer management.

173. In the sixth form there is a buzz of excitement in all lessons. Motivation is maintained over long periods of time and the teaching sessions are mostly highly productive. In the GNVQ Year 13 course, Year 12 AVCE and Year 12 Intermediate GNVQ course students are working at a good pace. Rooms are full to capacity but learning continues to be good. Students are clear in their understanding of what is expected of them in terms of quality and

application. The excellent relationships and the respect students have for their teachers make a positive contribution to learning. Students listen carefully and respect the high levels of expertise in ICT shown by teachers. Students on the Year 12 ICT vocational course make good progress in applying these basic skills to a wide range of topics and subjects. The low-key intervention by teachers and their high levels of expertise and sound knowledge of student capabilities have a direct impact on the quality of learning taking place in the sixth form.

174. The coordinator has moved the development of ICT forward in the school and identified appropriate priorities and targets. There is a clear vision of what still has to be done to widen access across the curriculum and improve performance. There is a strong commitment to open access for all. However accommodation is very tight in terms of the demands placed upon it by the sixth form work, and requests for subject access. In Years 7, 8 and 9 where ICT basic skills are taught and applied for example in science, mathematics, design and technology, modern foreign languages and music, progress is good. ICT requires further development in other subjects before statutory requirements are fully met.

175. Since the previous inspection access to facilities has increased. The network has been extended. Subject departments' software is now networked. Effective staff training is in place. However an audit of ICT capability across the curriculum has not been undertaken. This would highlight areas for further development.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

176. Standards of work seen during the inspection in French, German and Spanish are above national averages. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good. Pupils' achievements in relation to standards on entry to school at the start of Year 7 are good. Pupils' attitudes towards language learning are very positive and also cause the quality of their learning to be very good in modern languages. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school.

177. The quality of teaching in all languages and through all stages is very good. All lessons observed were good or better. Almost two thirds of lessons seen were very good or excellent. Examples of excellent teaching were seen in Year 8 in French and in Year 11 German. There is a marked consistency in teaching quality and teaching styles across all languages and key stages.

178. Teachers have very good, often excellent, subject knowledge; their enthusiasm for the subject is contagious and this, coupled with excellent relationships results in pupils wanting to learn and believing in themselves as competent linguists. Lessons are usually conducted in the language being learned. The language used is delivered at normal speed but is very well matched to pupils' previous experience and capabilities and teachers use effective mechanisms to make sure all pupils understand. As a result pupils have extensive exposure to excellent role models and this is very effective in reinforcing learning and in developing their listening skills. Teachers make very good use of resources such as flashcards, the overhead projector, the whiteboard and Power Point to ensure their presentations are clear. They use these facilities to help to clarify the meaning of new language, enable pupils to identify and apply patterns in the languages and encourage pupils to take part in oral work. These presentations are reinforced by pupils being given frequent opportunities to practise informally in pairs and small groups and, where progress is most rapid in both confidence and competence in using the languages, to use the language being learned in realistic situations to gather and give information.

179. In all lessons objectives are clear and shared with pupils, as a result pupils are very well motivated and are able to track their own progress. Teachers expectations are high. They expect pupils to remain in the language being learned to complete routine tasks and give explanations and set strict deadlines for completion of tasks; pupils rise to this challenge. Brisk pace and strict deadlines ensure students in the sixth form increase in expertise in examination requirements for example, in skimming and scanning texts and reporting back swiftly. Resources are well matched to pupils' capabilities and teachers monitor progress closely and intervene sensitively to ensure all pupils achieve successfully tasks set. Teachers make very effective use of the whiteboard to organise students' ideas and note key words and phrases which remain as support for lower-attaining pupils while they attempt tasks. In the most effective lessons teachers organise a very good range and variety of activities, making very effective use of resources such as the language laboratory and computer programs. As a result pupils develop skills at their own pace and progress through the levels of attainment. In these circumstances pupils organise themselves well and take responsibility for their own learning. However in a minority of lessons some activities are dominated by the teacher, decreasing students' opportunities to use the language for themselves. This sometimes results in too brief responses to questioning. The department should consider how to increase opportunities for pupils to work independently of the teacher, particularly in the sixth form. Pupils could be encouraged to use the languages to gather and give information. Teachers should develop further the use of assessment to plan, in more detail, for the outcomes of groups of differing levels of attainment. Overall teachers have a very good understanding of how children learn and of the needs of individuals within teaching groups. They tailor activities, steps in learning and resources to cater for these. They make very good use of songs and games and pupils are given frequent opportunities to try out new language for themselves and as a result pupils are confident linguists.

180. By the end of Year 9 all pupils take part in short dialogues to discuss for example their leisure activities and their home and describe events in the past, present and future. They express opinions and higher attainers justify their views. They write at length and in detail obeying rules in the languages accurately. Higher-attainers operate from memory and lower-attaining pupils and pupils with special needs follow a model. They have a very good understanding of the way the languages work and explain patterns clearly in the language being learned and apply them successfully in speech and writing. They identify the main points from extracts of speech at normal speed and respond to instructions and questions in the language being learned. In French pronunciation is sometimes adversely affected by reference to written prompts especially amongst lower and average-attaining pupils. Higher-attaining pupils identify more detail and interpret more complex language containing some unfamiliar vocabulary for others. Lower attainers and pupils with special needs require more guidance and repetition. Pupils match print with meaning and higher attainers identify detail from short texts. Listening and writing skills are very well developed. Speaking skills are less secure. All pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment and are confident and competent linguists.

181. In 2000 GCSE results for French are broadly in line with national averages for A*-C grades. Girls achieve better than boys. Boys' results in Spanish are well below national averages. A*-G grades in both languages are near to the national average and improving steadily and there has been a significant improvement in A*-G grades. During the inspection no significant difference in standards achieved either between languages or between boys and girls was observed.

182. In lessons pupils achieve standards above national averages. They build on knowledge and skills learned in previous years. They have a good understanding of patterns in the languages and respond with little hesitation to questions and instructions. Listening and writing skills are very well developed. Average and higher- attaining pupils take part in longer

dialogues using a good range of vocabulary and structures. They describe events in a fair amount of detail in the past, present and future, give their views on a number of topics and adapt the languages successfully to suit their own needs. They take part in discussions about their school, their interests and environmental issues. They write for a variety of purposes at length and in detail. Writing is usually accurate. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special needs communicate more briefly, write following a model, adapting set phrases and responding simply and briefly to questions. All pupils achieve well in relation to prior attainment.

183. Results at A-level are above national averages In lessons the majority of students are confident in responding to the language being learned and spoken at normal speed. They respond at length and in detail, debating contemporary issues, giving presentations and explanations of grammar to others. They skim and scan texts from a variety of sources including the press and literature for the main points and specific detail. They identify detail from longer extracts of speech delivered at normal speed, make inferences and deduce the meaning of some unfamiliar language from context. They have a very good understanding of grammar and apply patterns accurately in writing. Higher attainers use language creatively and with flair. They have a good understanding of register and style and apply this knowledge in their own writing. Students achieve well in relation to prior attainment.

184. Management of the department is very good. Teachers work well as a team and have therefore achieved a high degree of consistency in the quality of teaching across all languages. Their enthusiasm for learning languages spills over into the opportunities offered to pupils beyond the taught curriculum, for example the summer school and classes in lunchtime and after school where pupils are offered the chance to learn other languages including Portuguese and Italian and where teachers learn alongside their pupils. Action taken since the last report has resulted in a significant improvement in standards achieved at all stages but particularly in the number of pupils achieving a grade at GCSE. Procedures and the use of assessment are now very good and a major factor in improving standards. The quality of teaching has improved significantly and the use of ICT developed. However, there are insufficient textbooks and resources available to support the coursework of students studying Spanish at A-level. There is a clear vision of the way forward, the department shares a commitment towards raising standards and has a secure capacity to improve further.

MUSIC

185. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in Years 7 to 9 and well above average in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 to 12. Pupils' achievements in relation to standards at the beginning of Year 7 and Year 10 are good. Pupils' attitudes, which are good in Years 7 to 9, also cause the quality of pupils learning in music to be good. Pupils' attitudes in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form are excellent, motivating the pupils to learn well. Pupils make good progress through the school. Pupils' achievements in relation to standards in music technology at the beginning of Year 12 are good. Their excellent attitudes and the very good range of technological equipment also cause the quality of pupils' learning in music technology to be good. They are making good progress in this new subject.

186. Pupils come to the school with a mixed experience of music. By Year 9 they have developed above average performing, composing and appraising skills. Using very well designed projects and good instruments pupils learn to read staff notation, and also use graphic notation to compose and perform pieces of music. The projects throughout Years 7 to 9 make up a very imaginative curriculum which pupils find interesting and relevant. Through these activities they also develop good listening and appraising skills. This was particularly evident in a Year 7 lesson when pupils were composing music in the shape of a palindrome, using percussion instruments and keyboards. Through very good and increasingly focused questioning, the teacher elicited very perceptive comments about what pupils had heard. Not only did this increase pupils' assessment and evaluation skills, it enabled them to answer questions on the imitative techniques and the effective use of silence in the music for the film 'American Beauty'. In a Year 8 lesson on minimalism, pupils working in pairs built tension through the music they composed at the keyboard by introducing subtle changes into the music. Also in Year 8 pupils develop their use of graphic scores to compose a piece of music which tells a story. In one lesson there were very good examples of pupils leading their group when performing, by giving very clear signals where to enter the texture and also indicating how expressively the music should be played. In a recorded example of variations, using Pachelbel's 'Canon', one pupil produced a complex piece of music through sequencing his ideas on the computer. This, as a piece of extension work to challenge a high achiever, is an example of the careful and expert thought by the teachers that has gone into making increasing demands on pupils of all abilities at all stages. This was also evident in a Year 9 lesson using the blues sequence and scale. Here, the teacher built confidence by demonstrating simple improvisations using one, two then three notes. During this demonstration he used a variety of well known rhythmic sequences which the pupils naturally assimilated and used easily. As the teacher then monitored them individually, he encouraged them to add more notes as they gained confidence. Pupils in Year 9 learned to play drum kit and guitars and to sing using microphones as part of a pop band. Materials were clearly presented in workbooks and on cards and are also available on the departments excellent web- site for pupils and their parents to consult. Pupils are encouraged to assess themselves and most pupils have a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and how these are evaluated. Teachers should ensure that this is understood by all pupils.

187. Pupils opting to do music for GCSE do so in good numbers. They achieve very high standards by the end of Year 11. Throughout their course they make good progress at all levels, including those whose experience and skills have been acquired only through class music. This success is reflected in the examination results at this level which were well above the national average for all schools in 2000 for grades A*-C and above average for grades A*-G. In Year 10 in a very good lesson on composition, pupils worked intelligently and responsibly at their own compositions, making considerable mental and creative effort. The

lower attainers were given confidence to build their work through having limited musical elements to deal with. Using small segments of a North African scale and a drone they developed the piece on the keyboard. In a recorded example using the same stimulus, a high-attaining pupil constructed an excellent piece of music using acoustic instruments and excellent vocal improvisation in a North African style. Pupils also researched information about the instruments, scales and styles of African music during the lesson, using CD-ROMs. During this lesson they made very good use of all resources and every corner of space in the much improved accommodation. In Year 11, many compositions are sophisticated, some through using computers, showing the progress that pupils make in this component of the examination. It is a pity that the limited number of computer work-stations hinders pupils' progress through having to wait for one to become available. Performances heard during the inspection were of high quality. Three pupils sang a pupil's arrangement from 'Phantom of the Opera', with the arranger accompanying from memory and singing one of the parts. Concentration, as in most performances, was quite intense. This was an assured and stylish performance with a sense of occasion and drama. Lower attainers prepare well, most of them using their voices confidently. Most pupils at this stage find further challenge in the very good range of bands and choirs, particularly the very fine swing band. Pupils throughout the school are well motivated and enthusiastic about music. Their attitudes at GCSE level are excellent, fostered by very good teaching and through very good relationships.

188. Students in the sixth form have the opportunity to follow both the AS and A-level course in music and in music technology. Numbers opting to do the latter are growing. In a very interactive lesson on setting up the microphones for drum kit and using the multi-channel desk to record a rock band, good progress was made. With the help and guidance of the experienced teacher, students discussed appropriate levels for the amplification and effects and adjusted them to suit the sound of the players. Those doing AS level music compose effectively for their own instruments. Very few students take the A-level examination but those that do are successful, achieving the highest grades. Teachers' very good understanding of their subject is particularly evident at this stage. Their expertise as practising musicians provides the pupils with good role-models, and pupils throughout the school learn quickly and with motivation when they hear and see their teachers demonstrating examples of their work.

189. Much of the success of music in the school is due to the energy and vision of the head of department and the teachers. It is very well organised and managed, and ways of making improvements are constantly sought. Since the last inspection all the issues have been tackled well, although shared classes between classes because of the two-week timetable has a negative impact on learning in some instances. Standards are improving particularly in Years 7 to 9 and the high standards achieved at GCSE and A-level are being maintained. Good instrumental lessons are enjoyed by about 150 pupils, and nearly 300 pupils take part in extra-curricular activities. Music enlivens and enriches the life of the school and the development of its pupils.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

190. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. These standards are achieved because the overall quality of the teaching is good and pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils' achievements in relation to standards on entry to the school are good. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school. The very good range of extra-curricular activities, which involves high numbers of pupils, also helps to raise standards. Teams achieve a good measure of success at local level and some individuals do so at county and national level.

191. Teachers capitalise effectively on the positive attitudes which the vast majority of pupils have towards physical education from Year 7 onwards, exemplified, for example, by generally high participation rates and a good take up for the recently introduced examination course in the sixth form. In Year 7, pupils listen carefully to teachers as basic skills and thoughtful approaches to learning are well established. In a very good hockey lesson, the teacher used a modified version of the game to make pupils think carefully about using the width of the pitch to outwit their opponents. In another very good lesson, girls talked about each other's performance in dance and were able to suggest improvements. Progress in Year 8 continues to be good. In a good badminton lesson, the pupils could be relied upon to continue to practise and improve their shots when not directly supervised. They knew what to do to improve because the teacher's explanations were clear, reinforced by well-designed printed work cards. By the end of Year 9, pupils have achieved well. Girls' standards in hockey are above average and they can talk confidently to each other about performance. In basketball, boys show good control and accuracy in passing and shooting, and have good tactical awareness. Boys are less confident in talking to each other about performance because opportunities to do so are infrequent. All pupils know how to warm up and cool down and can take responsibility for this part of the lesson. Girls' understanding of how exercise contributes to fitness is better than that of boys because, in lessons, they are given more opportunities to talk about the effects of exercise on the body.

192. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning continue in Years 10 and 11 in compulsory physical education lessons and GCSE classes. This, taken with generally good teaching, results in good progress and pupils achieve well. In compulsory physical education, girls reach above-average standards in dance and trampolining. They build on the good standards they have already achieved in dance and work purposefully and confidently with each other in choreographing and rehearsing complex routines. Progress in trampolining, where pupils have little previous experience is rapid. Pupils analyse video recordings of their sequences of movements in order to improve performance. Boys' standards of play in basketball are above average but opportunities to officiate in games tend to be restricted to pupils who are also following the GCSE course. Opportunities for pupils to develop and evaluate their own exercise programmes are limited. The 1999 GCSE results were average. Girls' results were better than boys' results by a similar margin to that found nationally. This contrasts with 1998 when boys' results were better than those of girls. Results in 2000 were above average. This was largely due to the excellent performance of girls, all 13 of whom achieved the higher A* to C grades. Boys results were average compared with boys' results nationally. Pupils currently in Year 11 achieve high standards in practical work. Their theory work is around average and there is no significant difference in the standards of boys and girls. Learning is well consolidated through revision lessons and teachers use a good range of learning activities including the graphical representation and interpretation of the data which pupils collect in their investigations. Homework is set regularly and the teachers' comments on pupils' work clearly indicate what needs to be done to improve. Standards in the newly established AS level course in physical education are above average. Students in Year 12 are well motivated, mature and diligent in their work. For example, boys preparing, unsupervised, for a practical test in badminton, used their good understanding of technique to help each

other demonstrate a range of shots.

193. Lessons are characterised by the good relationships, which exist between teachers and pupils. Standards of sporting behaviour are high and pupils, taking a lead from their teachers, are quick to recognise each other's achievements in lessons. Teachers have a good knowledge of the activities that they teach and provide a variety of interesting learning activities that ensure that pupils are suitably challenged to improve their skills and understanding. Learning is particularly effective where pupils are also taught in groups of similar attainment. For example, in a good hockey lesson in Year 9, higher attainers were able to develop attacking strategies in an adapted game, while lower attainers continued to consolidate their basic skills in practices and small-sided games. In some otherwise satisfactory basketball lessons, boys' capacity to evaluate their performance is not as good as it could be because they are not given sufficient opportunity to talk about their work. Teachers ensure that pupils learn the appropriate subject vocabulary. For example, in Year 7, girls are acquiring technical language such as "crescendo" as well as the vocabulary of movement. Non-participating pupils are provided with useful learning activities. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching is very good in 17 per cent of lessons and is never less than satisfactory. Teaching is good or better in around 80 per cent of the lessons in Years 7 to 9 and 75 per cent of the lessons in Years 10 and 11. In the sixth form, teaching is consistently good.

194. Effective management has ensured that good progress has been made with most of the issues raised at the time of the previous inspection and standards have consequently improved. There remains some inconsistency in the extent to which boys are given the opportunity to talk to each other about ways of improving their performance. The quality of teaching could be even further improved by using a systematic programme of monitoring lessons in order to identify and share the good practice that exists. The storage of a balance beam in the gymnasium restricts the available teaching space and is potentially hazardous. This was pointed out at the time of the previous inspection. The overall quality of the accommodation for physical education is satisfactory, but the condition of the gymnasium and hard surface outdoor teaching areas are restricting the range of activities which can be taught. An AS course has been successfully introduced into the sixth form and high standards in the extra-curricular programme have been maintained. The school's provision and achievement in physical education have been recognised by the Sports Mark Award and the granting of Sports College status.

BUSINESS STUDIES

195. Standards of work seen in business education are average in Years 10 and 11 and above average in the sixth form. Students' achievement in the sixth form is good in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. This is mainly due to consistently good teaching and the effective support given to students. Teachers know students well and have a concern that they achieve the highest possible standards. Students' attitudes and their willingness to learn are contributory factors to their achievement. The good relationships they enjoy with their teachers ensures that they are receptive to challenge and willing to apply their knowledge and understanding in 'real world' situations. However, there is scope for pupils and sixth-form students to experience more real situations, for example from 'big business', in a more enriched curriculum that raises aspirations and a sense of value in the subject.

196. Standards have improved in each of the last two years. All teaching in the department is good or better and a range of effective methods is used that promotes good progress in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers provide good support and guidance to individual pupils although during the early part of Year 10 the weighting is as much on developing computer skills as it is on the coursework itself because pupils learning and skills

in ICT are insufficiently developed when they start the course. Nevertheless, computers are very well used to supplement teaching and learning.

197. Students in Year 12 are studying for the new AS level in business studies, in Year 13 A-level. In the 2000 A-level examination two-thirds of students achieved the higher A-C grades. The school also offers an advanced GNVQ course in business studies in the sixth form. In this examination in 2000, all students passed with merit or distinction. Business studies is also a popular choice at GCSE level for pupils in Years 10 and 11. In a large entry in 2000, 52.5 per cent achieved the higher A* to C grades compared to the national average of 53 per cent and 100 per cent achieved a grade in the full range A* to G.

198. Teaching is good overall occasionally very good and, rarely, satisfactory. As a result, pupils achieve well and make good progress in lessons. For example, in a very good lesson with Year 11, pupils showed that they know that investments are intended to make money. They had prior knowledge of profit and loss accounts and how they are used for business planning. Through good questioning, pupils become involved and interested and through skilful use of real examples pupils' learning is enhanced. Pupils learn the roles of stakeholders and shareholders and how employees have interest in a company's performance.

199. However, the quality and range of work varies, from above average to sparse and below national average levels. Some pupils could produce a wider range of styles of presentation, especially when sharing work with others on the same course. However, pupils and sixth-form students have very positive attitudes and these contribute much to their success. In the GNVQ course, the verifier commented on the quality of the course programme. There are positive links between financial forecasting and the creation of business plans.

200. In a sixth form AS lesson with a large group of keen students, the topic of the lesson was added value. The teaching was secure and effective in leading students to an understanding of how the sum can be greater than the individual parts, the importance of branding and unique selling points. The teaching moved from explanation and questioning to small group discussions and responding to well-produced worksheets. The lesson was effective in maintaining a good pace, the interest and understanding of students and the good use of real-life examples.

201. Teachers are well versed in the content of the courses and their confident teaching brings matching confidence in pupils' and students' learning, especially in the acquisition of understanding of principles of business and the effective development of skills of ICT to support this learning. They are less assured at analysing marketing data. Students are helped to understand the nature of competitive business and the importance of marketing. Teachers ensure that theoretical knowledge is supplemented by real-life practices, often referring to what pupils and students have learned during work experience. Discussions in lessons are purposeful and most pupils and sixth-form students contribute confidently.

202. Pupils' and sixth-form students' attitudes are generally good or better as a result of their own commitment and the well planned lessons and appropriate range of activities. The department has been disappointed with the quality of contributions to the curriculum that have been made by businesses in the past, and currently this form of curricular enrichment is not available to pupils.

OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

203. In addition to business studies, the school offers AVCE courses in ICT, covered earlier in the report, health and social care, travel and tourism and leisure and recreation. Two lessons in tourism and recreation were observed during the inspection in which teaching was very good and led to effective learning by students. A class following the GNVQ Intermediate course studied a unit about customer services. Good resources were used to consider ways of dealing with customers and taking care to use appropriate language through well managed role-play. Later in the lesson a very good exercise required students to evaluate customers' possible responses to a hotel's web-site. In another lesson Year 12 and 13 students covered the same topic following the new AVCE travel and tourism and leisure and recreation courses. Learning was ensured in this lesson through the teacher's skilful management of role-plays between a customer and a receptionist that was about raising customer awareness moving through the sale to offering after sales service. The teacher used probing questions to elicit thoughtful responses from students about establishing customer rapport, investigating their needs, presenting the product and closing the sale. As a result their learning was purposeful and secure. Very good teaching ensured that learning matched the needs of the students and the requirements of both courses. This efficient use of time and resources is possible because some of the units of study are common to both courses. In the units that are different the students work independently, though with guidance, at producing their portfolio work.