

INSPECTION REPORT

Ponteland Community High School

Ponteland

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122358

Head teacher: John Foster

Reporting inspector: Graeme Clarke
(OFSTED No: 1547)

Dates of inspection: 30th October- 3rd November 2000

Inspection number: 223754

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	13 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Callerton Lane Ponteland Newcastle-upon-Tyne
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Clive Ringrose
Date of previous inspection:	25 September 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Graeme Clarke (OFSTED No: 1547)	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it?
			How high are standards
			How well are pupils taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
			What should the school do to improve further?
			The sixth form
David Ashby (OFSTED No: 9868)	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Colin Short (OFSTED No: 25071)	Team inspector	English	
Colin Noble-Nesbitt (OFSTED No: 1177)	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Stuart Rawcliffe (OFSTED No: 20420)	Team Inspector	Science	
Janet Simms (OFSTED No: 10053)	Team inspector	Art	
		Business education	
Allan Steele (OFSTED No: 2761)	Team inspector	Design and technology	
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Valerie Banks (OFSTED No: 4677)	Team inspector	Geography	
		Equal opportunities	
Valerie Bridges (OFSTED No: 23918)	Team inspector	History	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Marie Blewitt (OFSTED No: 23550)	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages: (French, German, Spanish)	
Elizabeth Charlesworth (OFSTED No: 19532)	Team inspector	Music	

Jacqueline Pentlow (OFSTED No: 30563)	Team inspector	Physical education	
Maureen Potter (OFSTED No: 1590)	Team inspector	Religious education	
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		English as an additional language	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is situated in Ponteland and Darras Hall, a large dormitory village, some 9 miles north west of Newcastle upon Tyne. It takes students with the full range of ability from the locality, an extensive rural area in Northumberland and the western part of the City of Newcastle. The school is oversubscribed with 1220 students aged 13 - 18 on roll. In general, standards of attainment are above average on entry into Year 9. The proportion on the special educational needs register is very low in comparison with the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Ponteland Community High School is a good school that promotes very good behaviour, positive attitudes and relationships. It provides a rich curriculum and very good teaching through which students learn and achieve results that are well above national averages and those of similar schools. Governors have a high level of commitment and awareness. The head teacher leads purposefully, and has developed an effective team ethos within senior and middle management. The school is seeking to improve itself, it has improved and has a clear potential to be better. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Provides very good quality teaching
- Has a positive ethos and a good climate for learning which encourages positive attitudes and very good behaviour in students
- Offers a rich sixth form experience
- Fosters good social, moral and cultural development
- Offers a broad curriculum with good academic and vocational opportunities and careers education
- Provides very successful teaching in modern foreign languages

What could be improved

- Underachievement of boys, particularly in English;
- Spiritual development throughout the curriculum;
- Statutory curriculum requirements:
 - Information and communications technology in Key Stage 4;
 - a daily act of collective worship;
 - religious education in the sixth form;
- Further development of the tutors' role and consistency of the personal, social and health education programme;
- A systematic approach to identifying and making provision for gifted and talented students;
- The quality of accommodation and resources.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION (25th September 1995)

The quality of teaching has improved substantially. Now 35% is excellent or very good, and virtually none is unsatisfactory. Learning is excellent or very good in 30% of lessons. The attitude of students towards their work is excellent or very good in 60% of lessons. The emphasis on adding variety to teaching methods and concentrating attention on how students learn has made a clear contribution to the rise in standards. The school has made outstanding progress on this key issue.

A weekly tutorial period for all tutor groups takes place but there are clear differences in coverage and approach in both registration and tutorial time. Tutors and year heads generally remain with their groups from year to year so getting to know students well. The tutor group has an important focus on new approaches to academic and personal support through a target setting agenda. Significant progress has been made on this issue but the school recognises the need to improve the consistency of this provision.

The intensive analyses of examination performance to help set targets and a determination to address issues that contribute to boys' underachievement have helped close the gap. Boys' achievements have improved overall: the difference between boys' and girls' attainment, especially on the key indicator of 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE has steadily narrowed in recent years. However, the proportion of boys gaining A*-C grades in several individual subjects, especially in languages, remains below that of girls. The school is alert to this issue and has made progress generally but the need now is to focus attention on the situation, and in English particularly.

The new corporate approach to development planning is a clear advance that deserves success. The school has a detailed improvement plan that brings together contributions from the subject faculties and school-wide issues. It usefully includes timescales, criteria for success and details of costs that should help an evaluation of its effectiveness and impact. The school has made good progress on this issue

Planning for improving the curriculum is evident but there are matters of imbalance to address. Information and communications technology in Key Stage 4, collective worship and religious education in the sixth form are still not in place. The school is still making headway but has to make further progress to resolve these dilemmas, and to meet statutory requirements.

Arrangements for a daily act of collective worship still do not meet statutory obligations. The school has made no progress on addressing this issue.

Afternoon registration now fully meets the regulations. The school has addressed this issue entirely.

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	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The proportion of students attaining level 5 or better at the end of Key Stage 3 in the national tests in 1999 was well above national averages in all core subjects. The steady trend of improvement has followed the national pattern. Attainment is close to the average of similar schools. Information to make comparisons using the 2000 results is not yet available.

The proportion gaining 5 or more A*-C grades in the 2000 GCSE examinations has risen to 70% and is well above the national average. The school has met its overall target. The average points score of 50.1 has improved significantly and now places it amongst the best 5% of similar schools in the country. Girls continue to do better in English and foreign languages especially. The proportion of candidates gaining grade A* in individual subjects is not as high as anticipated.

In the 2000 A Level GCE examinations the average points score for students is 22.2 - well above the national average of 18.5 - continuing a slight downward trend since 1998. There was a very small entry to AS level in 3 subjects, and as in 1999, results at higher grades A and B were poor. In the advanced GNVQ courses, 29 students of 31 were accredited in 4 areas, a small improvement on 1999.

In lessons and work, overall attainment in English is well above national expectations and in line in science. Mathematics attainment is close to expectation in Key Stage 3 and above in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Standards of literacy and numeracy throughout the school are well above average. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is in line with or above expectations in most subjects and well above in above in history and all modern languages. In Key Stage 4 attainment is above expectations in most subjects and well above in art, history and modern languages. Attainment in the sixth form is below expectation

in economics, in line or above expectation in most subjects, and well above in art, history, French and German and music.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students have very good attitudes to the school and to their work in lessons. There is very good interest and involvement in their work, very good co-operation and enthusiasm, which very positively helps their learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good.
Personal development and relationships	Students have excellent relationships with staff, adults and with their peers without aggression or racism. They are very good at accepting opportunities that extend their personal development.
Attendance	Attendance is good and consistently higher than schools nationally.

There is a very positive ethos established. Students are eager to come to school, participate with enthusiasm, value each other's work, enjoy and make a very good contribution to lessons. Behaviour is very responsible and has a very positive impact on their work and concentration. The few exclusions that occur do so only in appropriate circumstances and are only for fixed terms. Attendance is good. Most students are punctual which has a good impact on the start of lessons. There is a low level of unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged 13-14 years	aged 14-16 years	Aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very Good	Very Good

Teaching is now a strength of the school. Virtually all lessons are satisfactory or better with over a quarter in Key Stages 3 and 4 and nearly half in the sixth form of excellent or very good standard. Literacy is taught well throughout the school. Work to develop teaching numeracy is progressing well. The programme of personal, social and health education lacks consistency of approach. Support for students with special educational needs is very good or excellent. Gifted and talented students often achieve high levels of knowledge and skills but the present provision is not systematic and lacks co-ordination.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Provision is good. There is a broad range of subjects especially in the sixth form. A wide variety of extra-curricular opportunities is available.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Progress is good in Key Stages 3 and 4, and very good in the sixth form. Students learn well through a variety of effective approaches. Monitoring progress is well used to inform targets for improvement.

Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	All students are fully integrated into the school and have complete access to the curriculum without difficulty.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There is a strong ethos and clear sense of purpose that supports moral, social and cultural development. Students have many opportunities to develop initiative, to take responsibility and to broaden their cultural awareness. The spiritual dimension is significantly underdeveloped but there are examples of good practice.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides good all-round care and support for its students through the very good monitoring and promotion of behaviour, attendance and punctuality. The school has good practice of care and health and safety. Child protection procedures are securely in place.

All students have equal access to the curriculum. Statutory requirements are met in all respects except for information and communications technology in Key Stage 4, religious education for all in the sixth form and collective worship.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	The head teacher leads purposefully and with the support of senior staff creates an effective team ethos. Middle management is efficient and productive.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a high level of commitment and awareness. They are becoming better involved in planning and decision taking. They fulfil most of their statutory obligations.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Examination statistics are thoroughly analysed to help set students targets for improvement. New performance management arrangements are securely in place. Review linked to support has improved the quality of teaching and students' progress.
The strategic use of resources	Financial control is efficient. The strategic use of money, staff and equipment is based on a good analysis of educational priorities and is cost-effective but much of the accommodation is overcrowded.

The school's aims and values give a clear purpose for its work and are practised through careful planning, purposeful leadership and participation amongst all staff. There is a noticeably strong commitment amongst all the staff to improvement and the capacity to succeed. The high quality of education provided and the recent significant improvement in GCSE results indicates that the school gives very good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students like coming to school. Students make good progress. Behaviour is good. They feel comfortable in approaching school. School expects students to work hard. School helps students to become mature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homework. Extra-curricular activities. Information to parents The school works closely with parents.

Evidence gathered during the inspection fully supports the parents' positive comments about the school. Generally homework is used to promote learning and only rarely is its quality below that expected. The school has a good variety of arrangements for extra-curricular activities. Evidence from parents in school indicates a strong accord that the school is approachable and satisfaction with information and access to staff. However, a significant proportion of parents replying to the questionnaires did express concern that further partnership could be developed and the school is working to resolve this matter.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The school takes students with the full range of ability. Information from assessments made by partner middle schools indicates that in general standards of attainment are above average on entry into Year 9.
2. The proportion of students attaining level 5 and level 6 in the Key Stage 3 tests in 1999 was well above national averages in all core subjects. There was a small difference between girls over boys in English but no difference in science and mathematics. The steady trend of improvement over time has followed the national pattern. In comparison with similar schools, attainment at the national standard of level 5 in English was above average whereas mathematics and science were close to average. English and mathematics results at the higher level 6 were close to the 1999 average but science was below. In 2000, the proportion of students gaining higher grades is above 1999, but continues to be lower in science than English and mathematics. Information to make comparisons with other schools using the 2000 results is not yet available.
3. The proportion of students gaining 5 or more A*-C and A*-G grades in the 1999 GCSE examinations was well above national averages as was their average points score. Compared to similar schools, the proportion gaining 5 or more A*-C grades was in line with, and those gaining the wider A*-G grades was well above, the national averages. At the highest grade, the proportion of students gaining A* was above average in German and English language, well above in French, history, geography and physical education, but below in mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, science, art, design and technology, and English literature. Nine candidates obtained grades A* or A in 9 or more subjects, but none gained 9 or more at the highest A* grade.
4. Significantly better results than nationally were achieved in 1999 in art, biology, chemistry, science (combined), English language and literature, French, German, geography, history, mathematics, physical education, physics, and religious education. In communication studies, design and technology, drama and home economics results were close to but never below national averages. The proportion of boys gaining A*-C grades is noticeably lower than of girls, especially in English language and literature, French and German, but they did better than girls in physics.
5. In the 2000 GCSE examinations the trend of improvement has been maintained in line with the national figure. The proportion gaining 5 or more A*-C grades has risen to 70% (girls 73%, boys 66%) and is well above the national average. An early analysis indicates that these results are also well above those of schools with similar entitlement to free school meals. In relation to the Key Stage 3 tests taken in 1998, the school's average points score of 50.1 places it amongst the best 5% of similar schools in the country. Both comparisons indicate that the school has made a significant improvement since last year. The school has met its challenging targets set for 2000: it aimed for 70% of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades and an average points score of 50. The Technology Colleges' Trust analysis indicates that overall the school achieved as expected in 1999 and exceeded expectation in 2000. The difference between boys' and girls' attainments at A*-C has continued in 2000, with girls doing better in English and foreign languages especially, but boys do better than girls in business studies. The proportion of candidates gaining grade A* in individual subjects is not as high as anticipated. Worthy of note is one candidate who outstandingly achieved A* in 11 subjects and 21 candidates gained A* or A grades in 9 or more subjects – a clear increase over the 1999 results.
6. In the A Level GCE examinations the average points score for students entering 2 or more subjects in 2000 was 22.2. This is well above the national average of 18.5 (18.2 in 1999). However, it reveals a downward trend from 23.9 points in 1998 and 23.0 in 1999. In the highest category, 24% of students achieved 30+ points compared with 31% in 1999 (30% of girls and 17% of boys - 38% and 21% respectively in 1999). Students made 502 entries from eighteen subjects. The success of the high number of candidates in general studies substantially enhances the average points score for the overall examination.

7. There was a very small entry to AS level in 3 subjects, and as in 1999, results at higher grades A and B, were poor except in mathematics.
8. In 2000 advanced GNVQ, 29 students of 31 were accredited in 4 areas – business, leisure and tourism, manufacturing, and performing arts. They gained an average points score of 10.8 (boys 11.1, girls 10.6). This is a small improvement on 1999 when the average was 10.3, close to the national average of 10.2.

Standards seen during the inspection

9. In lessons, written and other work overall attainment in English is well above national expectations. In mathematics attainment is close to expectation in Key Stage 3 and above expectations in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Throughout the school attainment in science is in line with expectations. Attainment in Key Stage 3 design and technology, information and communications technology, physical education, music and religious education is in line with expectations and above in art and geography. It is well above in history and all modern languages – French, German and Spanish. In many subjects attainment in Key Stage 4 is above expectations – business studies, design and technology, geography, physical education and music – and well above in art, history, and all modern languages but it remains in line in information and communications technology and religious education. Attainment in the sixth form is below expectation in economics, in line or above expectation in most subjects, and well above in art, history, French and German, and music.
10. Standards of work in English are well above expectation. In Year 9 students understand parts of speech such as metaphors, similes and alliteration. Those identified as below average ability in the school produced written work of a standard above expectations. Students often use good word processing skills for final drafts of their work. Through Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form students have very well developed skills of drafting and re-drafting work; they emphasise accuracy, reflecting on ways to improve structure and content. Students have strongly developed speaking and listening skills evident in work in drama and in media studies where the vocabulary of both disciplines is used fluently and widely in other English work. They are very confident and orally assertive whilst mutually respecting the opinions of others. Their reading comprehension is good - students are able to analyse and interpret text successfully commensurate with high demands made of them.
11. Standards of literacy throughout the school are well above average. In art, geography, history, modern foreign languages, science and physical education, as well as in English students demonstrate good drafting and re-drafting skills and show examples of good continuous writing. Students are accomplished readers with very high skill levels of comprehension, analysis and annotation. Many speak clearly and cogently. They can discuss and make a point of argument with confidence, both in English and in a foreign language. There are good notices around the school and keywords posted in classrooms that assist learning. Well presented displays in classrooms and corridors also usefully support and relate learning; for example, the Year 11 poetry about science topics displayed in the laboratory.
12. The quality of mathematics work reflects the good standards achieved in tests and examinations at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. In Year 9, high attaining students understand π and confidently use it in calculations. Lower set students are able to plot positive and negative points accurately on graphs. In Year 10, upper set students know how to estimate of probability and by the end of Key Stage 4 they undertake investigational coursework involving advanced probability formulae exceptionally well. Year 10 middle set pupils successfully develop their understanding of geometry appropriately and in Year 11 they extend their graphing capability. Lower set students in Year 10 are able to investigate the area of circles and by Year 11 they are able to measure angles but find difficulty in recalling the angle sum of a triangle.
13. The standards of work in post-16 Advanced Level and further mathematics classes are high. In Year 12, students are extremely skilful in investigation and in Year 13 they have improved their ability to manipulate formulae. In further mathematics, Year 12 students show a growing appreciation of vectors in mechanics and Year 13 they show skill in using calculus.
14. The mathematics department provides advice to other departments about numeracy in their subjects: specifically for design and technology and geography so far. In Year 9 design and technology, project work is challenging and students' understanding of costing supports the

development of their numeracy skills. Most students use numeracy skills well for data handling in geography. Students cope well in science with a whole range of aspects of calculation, although they have difficulty; for example, in estimating and judging the reasonableness of their solutions. There are other aspects of numeracy being developed through the curriculum, such as lower attaining students' successful involvement in working out, in German, the total cost of buying stamps in various currencies.

15. Standards in science are in line with expectations. In Key Stage 3, students are building a body of knowledge and although they can explain some phenomena they have difficulty with relating principles but they are able to identify variables and their effect when investigating. In Key Stage 4 students' recall of facts and skills of explanation are better. They are more confident and some can transfer their understanding to practical situations showing a secure understanding of scientific principles and numerical skills. Others have a weak understanding of practical work - either failing to realise that the method used would not obtain meaningful results or lacking sufficient background understanding. In the sixth form, students can clearly relate form, function and underlying principles in all sciences. They use numerical skills competently to calculate, to sketch field graphs, to use formulae and to apply them to spreadsheets. Practical skills are secure - students show competence in assembling unfamiliar apparatus and are able to apply earlier work when selecting sensing devices, but there are some weaknesses in the recording of raw data.
16. Gifted and talented students often achieve high levels of skill, whenever opportunities to develop them are offered, in art and music for example. In mathematics they rise to meet challenging demands made of them and demonstrate impressive ability.
17. The attainments of students with special educational needs are good in relation to their abilities, particularly their speaking and listening skills. They are very good in the sixth form. The school's differentiated approaches ensure that the progress the majority of students with special educational needs make is good in Key Stages 3 and 4, where the gains are extensive, and very good in the sixth form. Although there is a small number of students for whom English is an additional language they make good progress so that their levels of literacy and oracy are such that they have full access to the school's curriculum without difficulty.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

18. Since the last inspection students have consistently adopted the school rules and conventions and there is a very positive ethos established in their attitudes and behaviour. Students of all ages and abilities have very good attitudes to their school work. They are eager to come to school and participate with enthusiasm and enjoy their lessons. They respond very well to adults and to each other. Students are very well motivated and they work with enthusiasm. They are very good at co-operating with each other, they value each other's work and make a very good contribution to the lessons. The majority of pupils sustain very good levels of concentration and work well individually when actively engaged in lesson. Students listen well to each other when interacting in the lessons and encourage one another. In a very small minority of lessons some students did not have such positive attitudes and this resulted in them losing their enthusiasm and concentration.
19. Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good and has a positive impact on their work and concentration. Students respond well to the expectations of teachers, support staff and adults for their behaviour. The result is a positive climate for learning with no evidence of aggressive or racist behaviour. Sometimes in the very small minority of lessons when students are not effectively challenged some behave unsatisfactorily. However, misbehaviour is infrequent and when it occurs it is dealt with promptly and effectively. The decision to exclude is taken only on few occasions, in appropriate circumstances, and only for fixed terms.
20. From the time students join the school they establish very good relationships with staff, with adults and with each other. Students of all abilities including those with special educational needs or with English as a second language are positively included as part of a well cared for community that copes confidently with their daily work activities. Students have some good opportunities for personal development through their roles as prefects, year or school councillors. They organise the French sweet shop and are involved in charity and community projects. There is a good range of sports activities, music and drama productions. Students have a good variety

of opportunities to go on residential visits, such as to China and to Disney Land, as part of their course activities. Students take part in these activities with enthusiasm and show a sense of pride in their achievements. The additional curriculum activities, trips and visits have a positive impact on students' personal development.

21. Attendance is good and has been consistently above national levels since the last inspection. There is a very low level of unauthorised absence because of the school's active and persistent efforts to get parents to provide acceptable reasons for absence. Students clearly like coming to school. Most students are punctual to school and between lessons, which has a good impact on the start of lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. Teaching is now a strength of the school. Virtually all (99.5%) lessons are satisfactory or better. In Key Stage 3 27% of lessons and in Key Stage 4 32% are of a very good standard or excellent with a majority of the others being good. In the sixth form 46% of lessons are very good or excellent and 40% good. This is an outstanding improvement. Since the last inspection the greater emphasis on adding variety to teaching methods and concentrating attention on how students learn is making a clear contribution to the rise in standards that has been achieved. Key Stage 3 and 4 students made very good or good progress in 70% of their lessons. Learning in the sixth form is very good in 40% and good in another 40% of lessons. Students' progress is not as it should be only very rarely.
23. Many features contribute to good teaching. Classroom management and control are very good: all teachers establish a good rapport with students and use praise and encouragement to motivate them. Teachers have a very high level of specialist knowledge. They use it well to set high expectations. They employ a broad variety of suitable methods that maintain students' interest; for example, in French, German and Spanish the teachers' expertise in the target language results in very creditable pronunciation, accent and intonation. Teachers' enthusiasm promotes a positive climate for learning in which students' attitudes to work and good interpersonal relationships are well developed. Teachers effectively manage the work of learning support assistants to help students with special educational needs. Teaching is developing literacy skills effectively in most curriculum areas. In subjects such as design and technology, geography and science, teaching is enhancing numeracy but there is scope for wider contribution. Teachers' knowledge and skills in the use of information technology to promote learning in their subject is developing but insufficient attention is given to its inclusion in many lessons. There are no general weaknesses in the teaching. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching stems from a loss of focus resulting in slow pace and learning.
24. There is very good planning through effective schemes of work in almost all subjects which helpfully support non-specialist teaching. Detailed planning is a feature of most lessons and provides a clear structure for activities and, as in physical education, the progressive development of skills. Only in a few situations does the effectiveness of planning lag a little; for example with some lower mathematics sets. The high quality of planning leads to some exciting and adventurous lessons; for example language learning that is made to be fun where in a Spanish lesson on adjectives describing school subjects the class were agog as the teacher illustrated meaning using mime. Generally the effectiveness of planning ensures the good development of ideas and sustained improvement in students' understanding.
25. Teachers have high expectations of the students in their lessons. The degree to which work is matched to students' levels of attainment through; for example setting in mathematics is generally enhanced by attention to individual students at some stage during each lesson and through the marking of students' work in class and effective use of homework. Collaborative learning in English and science is of a very high calibre and is best when teachers arrange the distribution of able and less able working in groups on different activities, and provide reserve supportive information, allowing all to participate effectively. Teachers set demanding tasks and support students in a wide range of activities so ensuring good productivity and promoting the right amount of intellectual effort. Target setting plays an increasing part in this process and is becoming well established. For example, as in history and modern languages, teachers share marking criteria with students to help set targets and give constructive criticism to promote improvement.

26. The active involvement of students helps sustain their interest and motivation. Most teachers make good use of questioning techniques to develop essential skills; for example in practical science demonstrations of the diffusion of hydrochloric acid gas and ammonia, where students were encouraged to predict results using their knowledge of science, and in modern languages to develop students' critical skills. The pace of teaching is generally high within a diverse range of teaching methods. For example in mathematics these include direct teaching, quick mental tests, practical activities and extended investigations in coursework. Occasionally teachers have encouraged too much dependence on themselves as in some sixth form history where students only take limited initiative in discussion, and some physical education where students over-dependence inhibits them taking responsibility for peer evaluation of their work.
27. Teachers encourage positive attitudes and relationships which create a very good learning environment in nearly all lessons. In over half the lessons in Key Stage 3, nearly 60% in Key Stage 4 and nearly 70% in the sixth form the students' attitudes and responsiveness are very good or excellent. This outstanding rapport is a strength of the school and contributes most significantly to the ethos of co-operation apparent in its day-to-day activities.
28. The day-to-day assessment of students' work is very good in most subjects, especially in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Progress is assessed well. The marking of work is up-to-date and written praise is often given to promote learning and understanding. Oral praise in lessons is used frequently and motivates and sustains students' interest. Teachers regularly set homework, which is well selected and used to promote and support learning. Only on rare occasions; for example in English, was the quality of homework lower than expected or the homework-planning schedule not followed.
29. In-class support for students with special educational needs provided by the learning support assistants is very good or excellent. Teachers and auxiliary staff work professionally and collaboratively to create an effective learning environment in each supported class. The school has a secure approach to the identification and assessment of special needs. Statements of special educational needs are well maintained and reviewed. Teachers make appropriate use of students' individual education plans within their lesson planning and in English, art, humanities subjects and modern foreign languages approaches such as direct support, modified tasks, and individual targets are used effectively to promote learning.
30. At present the school does not have a systematic procedure for identifying its gifted and talented students. In several subject areas, such as in English, mathematics, art, humanities and music, the differentiated approaches teachers take in their lessons challenge and support the most able students. However, because the school does not have a strategy to ensure that all teachers contribute to the level of support needed, or that will allow it to make use of outside sources that will enhance the intellect and further develop the skills and attributes of its most talented students, the present provision lacks co-ordination and is incomplete.

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

Curriculum

31. The breadth and balance of the curriculum provided by the school is good for students in Key Stages 3 and 4. For students in the sixth form it is very good and provides a rich learning experience. Students in Year 9 have full access to the National Curriculum for Key Stage 3 where a discrete course in information and communications technology is provided to equip all students with basic skills. As members of a Language College, all students in Year 9 have the additional opportunity of a second modern foreign language. All study French and half of the year group study German while the other half study Spanish. The academic provision is organised by eight faculties which have considerable freedom to use setting, broad banding or mixed ability grouping according to subject need. Arrangements for grouping students to take account of their attainment levels work well.
32. In Key Stage 4 most students take ten or eleven subjects. All subject courses lead to GCSE except for one subject option in information and communications technology at GNVQ level. The

breadth of the subject curriculum is well designed to avoid early specialisation and to provide a balanced range of experience. At the last inspection the school was asked investigate the impact of up to eleven subjects on the time for depth of study in subjects. After review, the school's decision to maintain its broad curriculum is not significantly challenged by parents. However, the arrangement for students taking three separate sciences to have one hour less of English is the only instance of inequality of access. The school is again undertaking a major review of its Key Stage 4 curriculum provision in order to take account of the need to introduce citizenship next year and to meet its requirement as a Language College to increase from 25% to 50% of students studying two modern foreign languages. At present the school is not meeting its obligation to provide information and communications technology for all students at Key Stage 4 because other than in an optional course there are few opportunities to develop information and communications technology through other subjects.

33. At sixth form level the quality and range of the curriculum, nineteen subjects at AS and Advanced level and four courses at GNVQ Advanced and two at GNVQ Intermediate, offered to students is very good. Most students also take advantage of the opportunity to take general studies examinations. All students continue to study a modern foreign language. Students are expected to undertake either work experience or community service, and the high proportion taking up community service is impressive. Overall the curriculum is rich and varied but the school is not providing statutory religious education for all.
34. The range of extra-curricular activities is good, with particular strengths in sports activities. There are regular activities for music groups and a recent musical production involved 150 students. The school provides a base for a good programme of community education that includes outdoor pursuits, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and activities in outreach centres such as village youth clubs. There is also a wide variety of non-vocational and leisure activities for older people arranged after school. The school also has an outstanding programme of international exchanges. Since the last inspection the school has broadened the provision of extra-curricular activities - much has resulted from its establishment as a Language College.
35. Careers and vocational education is of very good quality and is a strength of the school. This represents good progress since the last inspection. Work experience is well integrated into all the vocational courses. Year 10 students have a fortnight's work experience, and a special feature of the sixth form provision is the opportunity to undertake work experience in France. Effective use is made of the specialist Careers Service and guidance is provided through the personal, social and health education programme at decision making stages. The careers library is staffed by its own library assistant. The school has links with over 300 firms through the work experience programme. The use of community contributions to the personal, social and health education programme is growing - a new feature is support from school governors to give sixth form students practice in interview skills.
36. The school has improved considerably since the time of the last inspection in its provision of personal, social and health education. The programme, delivered weekly by form tutors, is planned to cover a range of aspects that prepare the students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences that might confront them now and as adults in society. The programme appropriately deals with relationships and health related issues, including sex education and education about the mis-use of drugs. However, clear differences in coverage and approach are evident within both daily registration time and the dedicated tutorial period. The school recognises the need for further work, and in particular, that there is scope to improve the consistency of provision that should be addressed.
37. Curriculum liaison with partner middle schools is good at both pastoral and departmental levels. The school's development as a Language College has increased its partnership with first as well as middle schools through the programme of language support provided to partner schools and parents.
38. The curriculum review provides the school with the opportunity address inequality of access within its commitment to a broad and balanced curriculum for all and to meet statutory requirements for information and communications technology in Key Stage 4 and religious education in the sixth form.

Personal Development including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

39. There is a strong ethos and a clear set of aims and values to support the promotion of the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development throughout the curriculum. The provision made by the school is good with the exception of the spiritual dimension which is underdeveloped both at a whole school and subject level. The provision for students' personal development with regard to spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions is not supported by written policy and guidance. The school does not use guidance available on these aspects from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to support incorporation into the curriculum. Even so, there is some good practice on which to build. The humanities faculty; for example, ensures that the exploration of beliefs, values, feelings and wonder are woven into the teaching of history, geography and in particular religious education.
40. School assemblies are held twice weekly for all year groups. They are occasions when students celebrate school achievements and think about a theme such as Armistice Day introduced during the week of the inspection. Whilst some time is provided for students to reflect, assemblies are not planned or organised as a daily event with a specific focus for spiritual development. The school is not meeting its obligation to provide daily acts of collective worship.
41. The school provides a strong moral framework. The students respond positively and maturely to the Code of Conduct and to the good example set by teachers. They exemplify daily through good behaviour, mutual respect and co-operation that they are able to distinguish right from wrong. The students are asked to consider the moral issues; for example, in geography when exploring environmental exploitation; and in business studies when discussing marketing and work ethics. The students have the opportunity to question their own moral responses to such issues as racism and prejudice in religious education. As a body they are actively involved in charitable causes giving them opportunities to consider those less fortunate than themselves.
42. Provision for the students' social development is very good. Apart from rich opportunities for social interaction in team games, school performances in music and drama and residential excursions there are several structures that help develop the students' social and communication skills. Among these are year and school councils and an active charity committee run by sixth form students. They are encouraged to work collectively, be involved in decision making and to value working democratically. The school also offers a good basis for students to develop a strong understanding of citizenship but as yet it is not structured within the curriculum.
43. Similarly, the school's provision for the students' cultural development is very good. They gain insight into their own culture through frequent visits to local museums and art galleries, the theatre and sights of interest. Opportunities for travel abroad both within Europe and further a field are extensive. They have regular e-mail correspondence with schools in Germany and Spain. In 1999-2000 the school received the international award in recognition of their high level of cultural involvement. In its cultural development arrangements the school strongly reflects its Language College status. Several areas of the curriculum contribute effectively to the students' awareness of their country as a multicultural and multi-faith society through which the school promotes its aim to develop understanding and respect for the ways of life of others.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

44. The school has established good all-round care for its students. Staff and adults in the school are vigilant, sensitive and supportive of the students in their care. Monitoring, promotion and practice of its support, safety and security arrangements are shared by the heads of year, heads of faculty, teachers and staff.
45. Child protection arrangements are appropriate in the school. Staff are aware of the need to keep the co-ordinators informed of any concerns. Formal training for all staff has been provided and training is part of the induction programme for new staff - guidelines are usefully included in the staff handbook. Appropriate local agencies are effectively consulted.
46. Staff and students are aware of health and safety practice and there are clear guidelines and procedures being established. The head boy and girl attend the meetings of the staff health and safety committee. There are two committees for governors and staff that are usefully linked by joint attendance at both. Health and safety is reviewed regularly and checks are made of the buildings and grounds to ensure the learning environment is safe. There are good regular

arrangements for carrying out safety checks of the premises, and electrical, fire and physical education equipment. Staff are aware of the need to report any issues. The standard of care of the premises and grounds is good. A small team of cleaning staff work hard to maintain a clean environment in the large expansive premises and add positively to the atmosphere of the whole school.

47. Promoting and monitoring behaviour has become very well established with very good arrangements. Staff, students and parents are very clear about the school's expectations and practice. This underpins the caring atmosphere the school community enjoys and ensures aggressive or racist outbursts are unlikely to occur. The school has very good strategies and practice for dealing with any issues of inappropriate behaviour. Promotion and monitoring of attendance is also very well established with very good effective school systems and management. Students and parents are equally clear about what the school expects for attendance, punctuality and authorisation of absence. There are appropriate regular links with the educational social worker when required and urgent issues are dealt with on request. The school nurse provides good support to the school dealing with medical checks and supporting personal and health issues.
48. Heads of year work well as a team and with their respective form tutors to develop and implement strategies for both students' welfare and academic support. Form tutors work with students to support the processes of target setting and monitoring progress. However, over-wide differences of interpretation and approach are evident in the arrangements. The need now is to monitor the range and quality of provision to improve its consistency and effectiveness.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

49. The school is working to establish good links with parents. There is appropriate information communicated regularly. The school provides parents with good opportunities to have close links with staff, while parents can approach the school at any time. Parents working in partnership with the school's initiatives make good contributions to students' learning and are very supportive to the school. Parents and carers have a high level of interest in the school and the great majority are satisfied with most aspects of their children's education.
50. Parents indicate their clear view that this is a good school. Most parents have a high commitment to the school through the interest they take in their children's progress. They are very good at attending school reviews in open evenings with a specific focus on their children. The school parent teacher association activities do not have a high profile but they do raise a small amount of funds for the school.
51. The proportion of parents indicating that further partnership could be developed is significant. The school is aware of their concerns and is working to improve good communications and involvement with parents and to provide opportunities for parents to know that the school is open and welcoming. Heads of year and tutors, together with teaching staff, get to know and understand their students and their families very well. Parents respond positively to commitments to work with the school; for example, to maintain high standards of behaviour and to support of the home school agreement, which clearly sets out the respective responsibilities of the school, the family and the students. The *student planner* procedures are highly regarded by parents in relation to the help they give their children and as a means of maintaining contact with the school. Most parents take the opportunity to encourage their children to complete their homework through reviewing the content of student planners provided by the school.
52. The quality of information provided by the school is appropriate to inform parents of the work of the school and how their children are progressing. The prospectus is very informative but the content of the last annual governors' report to parents had some omissions. Governors and the school have the further development needed in hand so that the report for this year will be complete. There is information for parents and students about all aspects of the school's work and the achievements of the students. Annual school reports are informative and tell parents about the achievements of their children, and include areas for improvement. These reports are reviewed with parents at parent evenings and, if parents are not able to complete the review in these meetings, staff are willingly available to see parents at other times.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

53. The school's aims and values give a clear purpose for its work. The very effective manner in which these principles are practised is the result of careful planning, purposeful leadership and commitment amongst all staff. The school has a disciplined ethos and supportive climate for learning which is strongly valued by parents and the local community.
54. The governors have a high level of commitment to promoting the interests of the school and are becoming more directly and actively involved in its work. They have appropriate committees that allow them to become effectively involved in making decisions. Governors have a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school gained through both informal contacts and receiving reports from senior members of staff. For example, governors are helped to understand the contribution that the school makes to attainment through discussion of the value added analysis of examination results and how they are being used to set targets for students. There is a newly elected chair of governors who is seeking to develop the association between governors and subject faculties and, through improving the formality of contacts, increase the effectiveness of the governors' monitoring and evaluation roles. The governing body does not fulfil all its statutory obligations at present. Governors need to address the provision of appropriate information and communications technology in Key Stage 4 for all students, collective worship daily, religious education in the sixth form; and designating a governor to have oversight of special educational needs provision as well as ensuring that the annual report to parents includes all its mandatory components.
55. The school has a detailed improvement plan that incorporates contributions from the subject faculties with school-wide issues. It has been built up by following a published schedule and usefully includes timescales, criteria for success and details of costs that should help an evaluation of its effectiveness and impact.
56. The head teacher leads the school very effectively. His commitment, enthusiasm and clear sense of purpose have been significant factors in the school's continual improvement. He has a participative and collaborative style of management which, with support from other senior members of staff, promotes a good team ethos. As a result, other staff who have delegated responsibilities, heads of faculties, of departments and year teams, are enabled to make a very good quality contribution to the work of the school.
57. The senior management team is effective in monitoring the work of the school. Students' attainments in examinations are carefully analysed and predictions of results expected are shared with heads of faculty. In turn, teachers set targets for individual students in their subjects and pass back information about their progress, achievements, effort and behaviour. There is now a clear link with form tutors who are using this information to encourage and support further progress. The senior management also fosters professional development through representative groups of teachers that deal with in-service training and effective teaching. Although the old appraisal arrangements have fallen into disuse, the new performance management strategy is well developed with some components such as monitoring students' and teachers' work in most departments already in place. This has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and raising standards of attainment. There is a noticeably strong commitment amongst all the staff to improvement and the capacity to succeed.
58. Middle managers in academic and pastoral roles carry out their responsibilities efficiently and effectively. There are some especially good and productive working relationships established within subject faculties and year teams. The faculty structure generally works well in fostering communication and development. Of particular note is the work of the humanities faculty where examples of best practice are used to develop areas such as target setting, and the "*share nicely*" policy in mathematics used to spread good ideas. There are two particular areas of middle management requiring further improvement. First, the recent change in the leadership of the arts faculty presents an opportunity to develop a balance of arts education to which all component subject departments can contribute. Secondly, the school-wide co-ordination of provision for students with special education needs is underdeveloped in relation to the roles of consultancy and evaluation of quality; and co-ordination is non-existent for those who are gifted or talented.

59. The governors and senior management have responded in detail to the last inspection. Improvements in the quality of teaching are attributable to the successful implementation of ideas and approaches obtained through exploiting existing expertise and professional development. Structural rearrangements for registration meet regulations and those for the tutorial period and the personal, social and health education programme provide clear opportunities for significant improvements in the quality of students' personal and social development. The intensive analysis of examination performance to help set targets and a determination to address issues that contribute to boys' underachievement have helped close the gap, but the disparity with girls is still very apparent in the higher grades of English GCSE. The new corporate approach to school improvement planning is a clear advance that deserves success but the headway made by the ongoing curriculum review is insufficient in the time that has elapsed: for example information and communications technology, collective worship and religious education are still not fully in place throughout the school. Overall the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection.
60. The general ethos of the school is very good. Parents, at the meeting before the inspection with the registered inspector, and in written returns, shared and commented particularly on the strength of the school's expectations for high standards, its values and the approachability of school staff. Everyone works well together. As a result, the sense of shared objectives is a strength of the school. The commitment of the staff and the support they give to the school's provision in its curriculum and extra-curricular work, allied to effective management systems, provide a very good basis of sustaining improvement in future.
61. Financial planning is competent and efficient. The school improvement plan is effectively linked to budgetary decisions and financial commitments. The senior management and the governors' finance committee work together to produce a budget and monitor expenditure. They have prudently maintained the budget and have succeeded in holding a reasonable contingency despite a limited basic funding level. Staffing costs are below national averages. The allocation of money to faculties and departments is based upon a formula approach that is at odds with funding developments, particularly given the open corporate management arrangements that are working effectively upon the improvement agenda.
62. Financial control procedures are good and effective. All spending is sufficiently monitored and regular financial statements are available for governors. The school analyses its expenditure carefully and efficiently and there is clear evidence for senior management and governors to be well satisfied that they can justify their spending decisions. *Best value* principles are being carefully and systematically applied in relation to academic success and spending on services and resources. For example, contracts for maintaining the grounds have been let at a cost substantially lower than before; and the use of funding for students with special educational needs is closely monitored and evaluated, leading to more learning assistants being employed reflecting the effectiveness of this support. Specific grants, especially those relating to Language College status, are being used very appropriately and well.
63. There are sufficient appropriately qualified teaching staff and support staff to ensure that the curriculum is met, although there are some pressures on specialist coverage in the humanities, particularly to meet demands between geography and GNVQ leisure and tourism, and in history, mathematics and art. The quality of administrative and technical support staff is good. The school has recently increased its investment in learning support staff to help students with special educational needs in recognition of the value that is placed upon their work. The school has been closely involved in initial teacher training in the recent past, and building upon experience, its procedures for the induction of newly qualified teachers are secure and effective. The in-service training provided for staff is generally of good quality with clear central co-ordination. The procedures for professional development incorporate an evaluation of training shortly after the event but now should further explore the impact of training on teaching and learning over an extended period of time.
64. There is barely sufficient accommodation to allow the curriculum to be taught and several factors undermine the effectiveness of teaching. Overall the accommodation is unsatisfactory for the number of students and staff at the school. Although there is a range of accommodation that is variable in size and suitability there is too much that is unsuitable for the purposes of meeting the full needs of the curriculum and this has an adverse effect on the achievements of students.

65. The accommodation is very good for English and drama, humanities, information technology and in the extended library and new sixth form common room. Provision for physical education is satisfactory. For specialist geography, design and technology, mathematics and modern foreign languages it is mainly good, with some unsatisfactory provision where large classes of young adults are held in small rooms. Accommodation is unsatisfactory for art and particularly science where many laboratories are too small for the number of students in them. Where classes are cramped into small rooms, the opportunities for safe practical work are severely restricted. This clearly impacts on the nature of work undertaken and standards that students attain, and in science especially this is a significant factor. Very old outdated furniture and fittings in rooms in different parts of the school increases the risk assessment when using small laboratories. Staff have to be particularly vigilant in the use of critical resources such as gas, electricity and chemicals. The school does not have an assembly hall so two small dining halls are used for large assemblies. Because too many students are squeezed into the rooms this poses a difficult dilemma for the school to exploit assemblies for corporate activities and collective worship. Parents also feel they cannot be accommodated satisfactorily at meetings for reviewing students' work. The main corridor areas are narrow for the number of students using them when changing lessons or during breaks but, because students respond very sensibly to this situation and exhibit good behaviour, the present arrangements are able to cope. The lack of space in corridors significantly reduces the opportunities for displays to promote the work of the school.
66. The best accommodation is well furnished and is in good decorative condition. There are lively and informative displays showing that students' work is seen to be valued. Elsewhere, some furniture is inappropriate or in poor condition; the décor and fittings such as blinds are either missing or are not very well maintained, leading to discomfort when the sun shines; and there is a lack of appropriate storage.
67. The school recognises the need to improve the accommodation and has drawn up plans to extend the premises to provide facilities that will more effectively meet the requirements of the school, particularly for science and for the number of students on roll.
68. The resources for learning in languages are excellent and for music they are very good. Resources are generally satisfactory for work in English, physical education, science, mathematics, geography and business studies but there are shortages of suitable textbooks noted in mathematics, science, geography and history. Learning resources are inadequate for appropriate work in art and particularly for design and technology and GNVQ manufacturing where there is no suitable provision for computer aided design and manufacturing work. There is a shortage of suitable artefacts for religious education. The library, which is in a transitional period of refurbishment, will become a potentially very useful learning resource centre.
69. Faculties and departments are very efficient in making optimum use of their resources to guarantee effective learning although the use of school-wide facilities, especially computer suites and the library area, are under-exploited at present.
70. The school is well resourced to deliver the information technology curriculum. Appropriate levels of computer equipment, with a variety of in-class and dedicated facilities, are available but teachers and classes do not make sufficient use of them. A network to support the language, mathematics, science and English curriculum is effectively managed but the change to connect to the internet through the reduced-cost local education authority link has resulted in a much slower service because of technical restrictions. In turn this has a negative effect for all who want access to the system during lessons.
71. The school is part-way through establishing a wide network of new technology that provides a very effective basis for all departments to embrace academic work and administration. It will allow use of computer technology to effectively plan, monitor and review all aspects of the school's work. There are plans to ensure that access to facilities is easily available to all those that need it. The systems are based on a commercially available range of modules which handle information about admissions, attendance, examinations results and assessments, special educational needs, students' academic records and profiles, the timetable, personnel records and student teacher development. There is a management information display arrangement that allows relevant staff easy access to the systems.
72. The school has worked hard to improve the quality of its teaching – with a notable degree of success. Through clear educational leadership and management, given the constraints of

accommodation and financial resource available, the school effectively promotes students' attainment, good behaviour and positive attitudes and relationships. The high quality of education provided and the recent significant improvement in GCSE results indicates that the school gives very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

73. In order to raise standards further, the school should:

- continue its work to influence boys' underachievement, particularly in English.
(paragraphs 4; 5; 6; 59; 77; 79; 85; 96; 108; 162; 184)
- improve the opportunities for students to broaden their experience of the spiritual dimension throughout the curriculum.
(paragraphs 39; 40)
- Complete the curriculum review, ensuring statutory requirements are met, particularly that:
 - students in Key Stage 4 are systematically taught the essential components of information and communications technology, and information and communications technology is used to develop their knowledge and understanding in all other subjects of the curriculum;
 - there is a daily act of collective worship;
 - religious education is provided for all in the sixth form.
[paragraphs 32; 33; 38; 40; 42; 54; 59; 70; 75; 93; 124;130; 146; 148; 155; 156; 157; 161; 188]
- develop and support both the role of form tutors and the implementation of the personal, social and health education programme to ensure greater consistency throughout.
(paragraphs 36; 39; 48; 59)
- be much more systematic and methodical in providing challenging opportunities that stretch the intellect and develop the skills of gifted and talented students to help them reach their potential.
(paragraphs 16; 30; 58; 123; 124)
- examine alternatives, together with the LEA as appropriate, to implement improvement to the present pattern of:
 - managing and using accommodation and facilities;
 - deploying financial resources to pursue improvement.
[paragraphs 61; 64; 65; 66; 67; 68; 122; 123]

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

THE SIXTH FORM

74. The sixth form benefits greatly from a very broad curriculum that includes 19 subjects at A and AS level, and four GNVQ programmes at advanced and two at intermediate levels. The school has adopted the recommendations of *Curriculum 2000* well; for example, the new vocational certificate in education (VCE) in information and communications technology is available alongside GNVQ advanced manufacturing. The opportunities:
- lead to high standards of attainment;
 - are accessible to all learners;
 - allow community service and valuable work experience;
 - engender a strong and positive ethos and a clear sense of belonging and loyalty;
 - culminate in a rich sixth form experience.
75. However, within the curriculum the mandatory requirements for religious education are not met. Further improvement should consider this requirement and consideration of increasing opportunities for a core physical education programme
76. Students often make very good progress in the sixth form as a result of some excellent and very good teaching in 46% of lessons, and good teaching in a further 40%. Attainment is well above national expectations in many lessons.
77. In the A Level GCE examinations the average points score for students entering 2 or more subjects in 2000 was 22.2. This is well above the national average of 18.5 but is on a downward trend from 23.9 points in 1998 and 23.0 in 1999. The proportion of students achieving 20-24 points and 25-29 points rose in 2000. In the latter category it rose to 16% from 9% in 1999: boys noticeably improved in this band to 18% from 7% in 1999. In the highest category, 24% of students achieved 30+ points compared with 31% in 1999 (30% of girls and 17% of boys - 38% and 21% respectively in 1999). Students made 502 entries from eighteen subjects including general studies where the success of the high number of candidates substantially enhances the average points score for the overall examination. 100% pass rate was achieved in business studies, art and design, history, psychology, English literature, French, Urdu and music.
78. There was a very small entry to AS level in 3 subjects, and as in 1999, results at higher grades A and B, were poor except in mathematics.
79. In 2000 advanced GNVQ 29 students of 31 were accredited in 4 areas – business, leisure and tourism, manufacturing, and performing arts. They gained an average points score of 10.8 (boys 11.1, girls 10.6). This is a small improvement on 1999 when the average was 10.3, close to the national average of 10.2.
80. The high quality of teaching also promotes very positive attitudes and motivation in nearly 70% of lessons. Students listen attentively and can set out opinions and make arguments cogently and with confidence showing careful thought and respect for the views of others. The students set a very good example to younger students in their bearing, behaviour and smart appearance. They are excellent ambassadors.
81. Effective measures are in place for reviewing students' progress. Projected grades are measured during their course and used to identify any underachievement and target support. Management by the new head of sixth form is already very effective, well supported by a team of tutors. Prospective students have a booklet describing all the courses available, but Year 12 students would like improvements made to the induction process through consideration of bridging courses.
82. Overall the sixth form is a cost-effective provision that offers a valuable and an enriching experience.

SPANISH

83. Spanish has recently been introduced into the curriculum of Key Stage 4. The teaching throughout is very good leading to very good progress and high standards of attainment in the language.
84. To increase the value of language learning and speaking, non-linguists in Year 12 can choose to study Spanish using a language package. Sixth form students value the opportunity and exploit it well.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	182
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	36

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	30	44	23	1	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	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	833	387
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	22	0

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	12	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	85	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	40

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	7.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.0

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	153	135	291

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	122	121	118
	Girls	125	112	104
	Total	247	233	222
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85	80	76
	National	63	62	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43	55	35
	National	28	38	23

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	124	122	122
	Girls	125	117	115
	Total	249	239	237
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	86	82	82
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47	50	44
	National	31	37	28

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	139	137	276

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	87	138	138
	Girls	98	135	136
	Total	185	273	274
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	67	99	99
	National	46.6	90.9	95.8

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	49
	National	38

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
	1999	65	79	144

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	20.5	25.8	23.5	3.1	2.0	2.9
National	17.7	18.1	17.9	2.7	2.8	2.8

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	0
Indian	39
Pakistani	20
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	7
White	1151
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	2	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	8	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: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	67.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	333

Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.2
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Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y13

Key Stage 3	22.9
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Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2966041
Total expenditure	2974498
Expenditure per pupil	2443
Balance brought forward from previous year	89118
Balance carried forward to next year	80661

Key Stage 4	21.5
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Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1220

Number of questionnaires returned

230

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	57	6	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	34	53	5	0	8
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	54	9	1	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	53	12	3	6
The teaching is good.	29	54	7	0	10
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	45	19	2	13
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	34	52	8	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	43	52	2	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	16	44	24	5	10
The school is well led and managed.	19	53	9	5	14
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	24	55	6	1	14
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	23	48	11	1	17

Parents' views reflected in writing or at the parents' meeting

Most parents feel that overall standards are reasonable, particularly:

- English standards are considered satisfactory;
- mathematics standards are variable with achievement dependent on the quality of teaching;
- chemistry is clearly considered the weakest of the 3 science subjects. Pleased school offers 3 separate sciences;
- history is excellent.

Parents are concerned that they are under pressure to sign contract committing their child on entry into Year 9 to take 2 languages through to GCSE.

Parents feel teachers are willing to give extra time to support a child with concerns. Student planners are welcome. The lunchtime "course work clinic" for history is welcome, but many are unaware of such additional support was offered, and feel that this is to do with a low level of communication with parents.

Mixed views on homework are expressed, especially that the quantity is too low. However, homework is promptly marked and valued. Parents feel inconsistencies in homework should be explored.

A general satisfaction is expressed with the attitudes and values the school promotes. Parents value school uniform especially in the sixth form. They accept the high premium on punctuality and attendance and the onus on them to comply with procedures. Parents are in general agreement that concerns such as bullying are handled well and promptly. They feel students' behaviour out of school is good. Several say their children dislike using school toilets because of smoking and lack of privacy.

Most parents agree that the school is sometimes difficult to penetrate citing insufficient communication from school to home (the infrequent and irregular newsletter, school achievements not passed on). Some parents feel there is little privacy at the twice-yearly parents' evenings but feedback is generally good. They find heads of year to be highly responsive and helpful. They do agree that the school does respond to suggestions and concerns reasonably well once the initial contact has been achieved.

Parents pleased that geography has improved since last inspection and that a steady improvement to the present clean and orderly state of the premises is noticeable.

Parents are impressed with the range of extra-curricular opportunities and enriching experiences on offer. They say their children happy to come to school.

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

ENGLISH

85. In 1999, the most recent year where comparable figures are available, both boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 3 perform well above average with 85% gaining level 5 and more than half of those achieving level 6+ and above in the tests when compared to similar schools. The results of English language and English literature at Key Stage 4 are well above average compared to national averages with 65% A*-C in the former and 73% A* - C in the latter. In the 2000 results there was a marked improvement in the language results of 74% A* - C. However, there is still concern for a gap of almost 14% points difference in English language and 20% points in English literature between girls over boys achieving higher grade passes when at Key Stage 3 the difference is only 0.2 of one point. Both drama and media studies results are above average measured against national averages and in GCSE results for 2000 both show and further improvement in the percentage of higher grade passes. The 2000 advanced level results in English literature are high. 100% of candidates passed with nearly one third (all girls) gaining grade A. In English language the pass rate was 94% with one third achieving higher grades A and B.
86. All the teaching of all subjects is satisfactory or better: 95% is good or better and 50% is very good or better. In all the lessons there is evidence of good planning with good objectives with the best lessons, where these are explained, at the beginning. Without exception, there is good classroom and student management. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and this enhances the classroom activity throughout and makes a significant contribution to successful learning. All teachers provide good models for all ages and abilities of students. Reading aloud, legible writing in the boards and in the books sets an example for the student body. The quality of the teaching encourages good presentation skills, displays in classrooms and other examples of high order skills that produce some excellent examples from the less able students in Years 9 to 13.
87. Teachers have high expectations of the students in their lessons. The use of language in class even in Year 9 was often sophisticated and the students themselves often mirrored this. Texts and spelling tests contain words meant to challenge understanding but not interfere with progress. For example a poem containing difficult words was used almost as a cloze exercise in Year 9 and for the same year, *'Under Milk Wood'* was used for some searching activities that created challenge for students.
88. A good range of activities is provided in lessons. Some individual work was seen, as were students working in pairs and effective group work. The collaborative learning that was widely evident was of a very high calibre. It was best when teachers arranged the distribution of able and less able working in groups or where differentiated tasks were set. Examples of this were in a class looking at *Othello*, drama Year 10, media studies Year 11, and particularly the Year 9 class where the students were arranged sensitively and spelling tests prepared, so it was not realised the words were not the same. All teachers used questioning skills exceptionally well. The questions were both supportive and challenging, and substantially impacted on the progress and learning within the lessons.
89. Very good progress was seen in the skills of drafting and re-drafting work; emphasis on accuracy, reflecting on ways to improve structure and content. Students have a keen knowledge and understanding of what is expected of them. This is particularly evident in work in media units, in Drama and in Media Studies, where the vocabulary of both disciplines is used fluently and widely. Year 9 students understand parts of speech such as metaphors, similes and alliteration.
90. All students work hard and remain focused even under extreme pressure – such as ten students rehearsing play reading in the class while the remainder individually consider interpretation of text successfully. Pace of lessons is always good and never laboured. Students respond to the teachers with respect, courtesy and are enthusiastic. This is as much because of the quality of the teaching as about the general ethos of the school and the background of the students.
91. The management of time within lessons is often less than satisfactory. This does not affect the quality of the lessons because it has more to do with over planning. Good use of resources such

as books, worksheets, radio, television was evident in most lessons. The deployment of Learning Support Assistants is good and effectively helps students with special educational needs make good progress.

92. The use of homework as an extension of work done in class is universal and, with only one exception, the quality of homework given is good. Several homework planners seen throughout the key stage revealed, however, that in many there was no timetable and in the few that had timetables, the teachers ignored the it and students often felt overloaded with work set for homework.
93. Students' work is generally of a high standard. Those identified as students of below average ability produced written work of a standard above expectations. Students often use good word processing skills for final drafts of their work, using computers at home, because there is no evidence of any information and communications technology being used in lessons.
94. Standards of literacy throughout the school are well above average. Students demonstrate good drafting and re-drafting skills and show examples of good continuous writing in several subject areas, notably art, geography, history, modern foreign languages, science and physical education, as well as in English. Students are accomplished readers with very high skill levels of comprehension and use analysis well for succinct annotation. Many speak clearly and cogently. They have the confidence to be orally assertive whilst at the same time being mutually respectful of the opinion of others. This confidence emanates from the teachers being prepared to accept responses from students as something to celebrate and praise, whether the answer is right or not. They can discuss and make a point of argument with confidence, both in English and in a foreign language too. There are good notices around the school and keywords posted in classrooms that assist learning. Well-presented displays in classrooms and corridors are used support and relate learning; for example, the Year 11 poetry about their science work on display in the laboratory.
95. Since the last inspection the standards of teaching have improved quite significantly. There is a good system now in place for monitoring students' work. Students are involved in their own assessment, in target setting for units of work, and in teachers' assessments of National Curriculum levels in Year 9. This means that the students are aware of the results expected of them. The quality of assessment is good; constructive comments appended to the final draft and occasional helpful comments in the first draft. The new accommodation, refurbished library and increased level of resources are clear improvements since the last inspection.
96. Examination results are well above average, however, the difference between boys' and girls' success reflecting boys' underachievement at GCSE needs to be addressed urgently. Similarly, with such a good intake of students at Year 9, there are insufficient A* grades in drama, media studies, English literature and especially in English language.

MATHEMATICS

97. The mathematics department carries out its function very well. It is effectively focused on raising standards, having made the improvements called for in the last inspection report. It generally provides good to very good quality teaching. The result is that students of all ages and abilities characteristically make positive contributions to good standards in mathematics. These are above or well above national averages in Key Stages 3 and 4, and post-16.
98. The proportion of students reaching levels 5 and 6 by the end of Key Stage 3 in the 1999 mathematics tests was well above the national average and close to the average for similar schools. These proportions were also well above the national average in 2000. The 1999 GCSE mathematics results were well above national averages: 59% of students gained grades A* to C; 99% grades A to G. The proportion gaining grades A* to C rose to 67% in 2000. In 1999 and 2000, A level results were above average. In each of these years, over 50% of the students entered gained grades A or B and close to 100% achieved grades A to E. Over recent years, there are gentle upward trends in standards of achievement at the ends of Key Stages 3 and 4, similar to the national trends.
99. The work seen during the inspection in Key Stages 3 and 4 covers all the National Curriculum attainment targets equally well and reflects the good standards achieved in examinations. In Year

9, upper set students understand how the ratio π arises in a circle formula and confidently calculate using that formula. Lower set students are able to plot points with negative co-ordinates. In Year 10, upper set students understand relative frequency as an estimate of probability. Middle set students understand the tangent ratio and use it to carry out calculations of lengths in triangles. Lower set students are carrying out a practical investigation with circle areas to find a value for π . In Year 11, upper set students are dealing confidently with investigational coursework involving advanced probability formulae – indicative of exceptional student performance. Not quite so advanced students are able to understand the positioning of points according to a locus rule, in both two and three dimensions. Middle set students are able to draw accurate quadratic function graphs. Lower set students are able to measure angles using a protractor but find difficulty in recalling the angle sum of a triangle.

100. The standards of work seen in post-16 Advanced Level and further mathematics classes are impressive. In Year 12, advanced mathematics students show superb evidence of divergent thinking skills in investigating the maximum possible volume of an open box, including methods such as trial and error, decimal search, computer graphs and an algebraic approach. In further mathematics, students understand a wide range of ideas about vectors and show a growing appreciation of their application to mechanics. In Year 13, advanced mathematics students are able to apply accurately the first two of Newton's laws of motion and are working hard to improve their algebraic fraction manipulation skills. Further mathematics students are showing skill in differentiating implicit functions and are able to calculate volumes of solids of revolution, using calculus. In the Year 13 mathematics for science course, students are gaining a deeper knowledge of trigonometry by carrying out a practically based estimate of the height of a building.
101. Students' attitudes to mathematics are consistently very good to excellent. In all classes students are very attentive. They characteristically respond positively to clear well-established classroom routines, behave very well, show high interest in their work, are very well motivated and work hard.
102. The quality of teaching is characteristically very good or good. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. This consistency is a major strength of the subject. The potential for improvement is greatest in the lower sets. The quality of teaching combines very well with students' and students' very positive attitudes to give characteristically very good or good quality of learning. Students of all levels of prior attainment generally progress well with lesser gains most often evident in lower sets.
103. Teachers know their subject very well and plan effectively across all the age and ability range although the effectiveness of their planning lags a little with some lower sets. They are very well focused on increasing students' understanding, knowledge and skills, in parallel. As a result, the pace of teaching is generally high within a diverse range of teaching methods. Alongside direct teaching, these include the effective use of quick mental tests, practical activities and extended investigations in coursework, and the increasingly effective use of the newly acquired suite of computers. The degree to which work is matched to students' levels of attainment through the setting system is generally enhanced by teachers' attention to individual students at some stage during each lesson and through the marking of students' work in class and effectively used homework. Target setting plays an increasing part in this process and is well established for the relatively few students with special educational needs. They consequently make satisfactory to good progress. The recent introduction of classroom assistants into some of the lower set lessons is proving to be especially helpful for these students. A sufficient range of varied mathematical resources is used to enhance a proportion of lessons but some of the more expensive pieces of equipment, perhaps of greatest obvious use in post-16 teaching, are not available in the department.
104. The mathematics department provides advice to other departments about numeracy in their subjects: specifically for design and technology and geography so far. In Year 9 design and technology, project work is challenging and students' understanding of costing supports the development of their numeracy skills; for example in their work on high volume production of an electric torch. Practically all students acquire a secure foundation in all aspects of mathematics and their numerical skills develop well, so that they can generally use them confidently in other subjects. Most students use numeracy skills well for data handling in geography. Students cope well in science with a whole range of aspects of calculation and the use of correct mathematical vocabulary to explain their methods. Their use of decimals and percentages, substitution of numbers into formulae, and the use of calculators promote skills in numeracy but they have

difficulty in estimating and judging the reasonableness of their solutions. There are other aspects of numeracy being developed through the curriculum, such as work in German where lower attaining students are successfully involved in working out the total cost of buying stamps in various currencies in the foreign language.

105. The areas for improvement in the last report have all been addressed. The major area for development is the department's use of computers, now that a suite of fifteen new computers is available in one of the subject area's rooms. The strategy for developing numeracy needs to be extended to all subjects.

SCIENCE

106. By the end of Key Stage3, the percentage of students reaching level 5 or above is well above the national average in the 1999 tests. The performance of boys and girls is similar. Performance is below the average of similar schools.
107. In 1999, for boys and girls, the percentage of students gaining A* - C in GCSE double award science is above that nationally for all schools. The percentage gaining A* - C in each of the separate sciences is below national averages.
108. In the 2000 GCSE, double award science results were significantly better for girls than boys. Boys' achievement in biology and physics is only a little below girls' but noticeably below girls' in chemistry.
109. In the sixth form the average points score in 1999 Advanced Level biology and physics is above that nationally for all maintained schools. The advanced level chemistry average points score is below average.
110. At Key Stage 3 work seen of about two thirds of students is satisfactory and over one third is good. For example, students give a good account of breathing rate and activity but are unable to explain what oxygen is used for or where carbon dioxide comes from. Students are able to describe types of joint and their locations in the body but muscle action is not clear. Several students can explain solids, liquids and gases using particle theory, and correctly use the terms evaporation and condensation. When investigating dissolving, students are able to identify variables and their effect on solutions.
111. In Key Stage 4 attainment in seven out of ten lessons is satisfactory and good in three out of ten. Students can explain practical work on the role of the enzyme lipase yet recall of gut structure and location of gut enzymes is insecure. Students are confident with the terms exothermic and reactivity series and can use these correctly. Some, showing weak understanding of practical work in chemistry, have assembled apparatus yet fail to realise that the method used will not allow them to obtain meaningful results. Other students show good practical awareness but have insufficient background understanding of the chemistry involved to master the work.
112. Students clearly differentiate between mass and weight and can transfer their understanding of reflection of light rays to the reflection of water waves. Newtons as units of force and the causes of friction are recalled but there are some weaknesses in applying the principles of friction to a bicycle. Able students can discuss the terms longitudinal and transverse waves with confidence. Others can discuss the calculation of pressure in Pascals and apply this to practical situations showing a secure understanding of scientific principles and numerical skills.
113. In the sixth form, attainment in three out of ten lessons is satisfactory and in seven out of ten it is good. Students are clearly able to relate the structure of cell membranes to practical results and can discuss osmosis and turgor. Practical skills are secure but with some weaknesses in the recording of raw data. In work on acylation in chemistry, students confidently work out balanced equations and construct structural formulae of products. They can calculate theoretical and percentage yields. Students studying gravitational potential confidently sketch field graphs, use formulae and apply these to spreadsheets using Apollo 11 data. Also in physics, students show competence in assembling unfamiliar apparatus and are able to apply earlier work on potential dividers to sensing devices.

114. Students' progress is satisfactory through Key Stages 3, 4 and the sixth form but with some relative weakness in chemistry, particularly in applying earlier learning, in comparison with biology and physics.
115. In Key Stage 3, teaching in six out of ten lessons is satisfactory; two out of ten is good and two out of ten very good. In Key Stage 4, teaching in over four out of ten lessons is satisfactory and nearly six out of ten good. In the sixth form, teaching in about three out of ten lessons is satisfactory, four out of ten good and nearly three out of ten very good.
116. Where teaching is good, materials are provided for less able students and textbooks used to support learning. In work on the skeleton, students have examined a real joint allowing them to relate theory to concrete experiences. Lessons are delivered with pace and teachers use a range of teaching strategies such as poster work, personal information searching and presentations to enable students to learn. Time limits are set during lessons enabling students to manage time effectively. Reserve materials are available for those who have been unable to find information themselves. Student grouping is altered for different aspects of lessons allowing all to participate effectively. Teacher's knowledge is secure and specialist terms are used routinely. Effective use is made of demonstrations; for example the diffusion of hydrochloric acid gas and ammonia where students are encouraged to predict results using their knowledge of science. There is effective use of practical work where students are given significant responsibility to manage their work and show initiative. Practical activities are in context with recent learning and health and safety issues discussed. Teachers ensure students know how to set up apparatus and obtain accurate readings. There is good use of questions and answer to challenge students during practical work ensuring progression in learning. Lessons are consolidated by reviewing what has been learned. The atmosphere in the classroom is relaxed and friendly, students showing a mature approach and contributing to progress. Students are encouraged to develop literacy skills by scan reading text, reading aloud in class and answering questions orally.
117. Where teaching shows weakness, there is insufficient clarity of explanation and discussion of work to enable students to grasp instructions and concepts. There is a need for greater use of probing questions to ensure understanding and for greater consolidation of learning during the lesson. Whilst lessons had pace, students are unsure of how long they could spend on particular activities. Some lessons pay insufficient attention to conversion of units (cm to m) and there is a need to encourage students to be alert to checking answers by estimation. Occasionally mildly disruptive behaviour is ineffectively challenged. Despite reminders about health and safety the use of goggles is inconsistent and alertness to ventilation is weak.
118. The very positive and mature approach of students to teachers, each other and their work is a strong contributory factor to achievement in the school. Were it not for this feature of students, the overcrowding problems within the science department would be causing many more teaching and learning problems.
119. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is satisfactory but needs review. There is liaison about the curriculum with middle schools but, collectively, there is a need to ensure that there is an appropriate curricular balance between partners. Schemes of work for Key Stage 4 are in place but there is a need to ensure that schemes are more fully developed and resources, possible teaching strategies and risk assessments are clearly identified. Sixth form schemes of work are in place.
120. There is equal opportunity for all students in the science curriculum. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Ethnic minority students are totally integrated and make progress as well as any other student.
121. Assessment data on student progress is being used to determine value added by the school, to monitor progress and to set targets for individual students. This is helping to raise standards. Marking of work and the use of comments explaining how to improve is less well developed and the departmental marking policy is applied inconsistently. Science reports provide good information to parents.
122. Accommodation is unsatisfactory where many laboratories are too small for the number of students in them, particularly those designated for sixth form work. Where classes are cramped into small rooms, and the furniture is out of date, the opportunities for safe practical work are severely restricted and the level of risk assessment is raised. Staff have to be particularly vigilant

in the use of critical resources such as gas, electricity and chemicals. This clearly impacts on the nature of work undertaken and standards that students attain. This is a significant factor

123. Since the last inspection progress has been good but the task is not finished – there is inconsistent practice in all the identified areas. The department as a whole was seen to make use of questions to determine students' understanding, showing efforts have been made in this area; however, there is opportunity to develop further skills in the use of probing questions to determine student understanding. Able students show the ability to recall learning but there is a clear need to develop their learning skills further. The lack of current appropriate textbooks for Key Stage 3 and 4 does not help. Overall teaching has improved with no unsatisfactory teaching identified. Teachers were observed to be challenging and exploring student understanding but this was not evident in every class. There were incidences of unchallenging, un-stimulating material being used with some classes and some repetition of work. The head of department has observed the teaching of all colleagues and peer monitoring has also taken place. There is a need to broaden this, to use the findings and share good practice across the department. The department is monitoring students' work and performance, and taking effective action more thoroughly than was indicated in the last report but there is scope for further use of the information to be made.
124. To improve the department should ensure more effective curriculum liaison with middle schools and review Key Stage 3 schemes of work to take students on from where they are in their learning; monitor marking practices across the department and make better use of ongoing assessment information; develop further and use information from monitoring of teaching; identify strategies for further developing gifted and talented students; press for improvement of laboratory and preparation facilities.

ART

125. GCSE A*-C results in 1999 and in 2000, at almost 80%, were well above the national average, and good for students' abilities. Given such very good results, and the very high percentage of A grades in both years, the proportion of A*s, was low. A level results showed a high proportion of A/B grades in 2000, particularly for girls, and were average in 1999.
126. On entry to the school, students' spatial awareness is good. This, combined with good literacy, greatly helps their learning in art. By the end of Year 9, students' attainment in two-dimensional work is above average. In lessons seen in Year 9, students were very competent in the use of line and shape at the start of a distorted portraiture project, with many showing good observational skills as they drew what they saw of their own faces in distorting mirrors.
127. Students' greatest strengths lie in their GCSE work, where attainment is well above average. From an early stage of Year 10, they develop a very good level of individual interpretation of ideas, developing both technical and research skills to very high levels of competence, again, particularly in two-dimensional media. Students' painting and drawing are often extremely sensitive, with a recently completed Year 10 project based on the alphabet showing high levels of creativity, and unusual understanding of the need to produce a personal response to the stimulus. This happens through very good teaching and excellent management of constraints, such as large classes in very small rooms which necessarily limits the nature and scale of what can be attempted. Both students and teachers manage these restrictions very well, and by Year 11 students' work has often developed a good degree of individual flair. The difference between standards of boys' and girls' work is much less than average, with both showing the same degree of investigation and aesthetic awareness. Attainment in the present sixth form matches expectations, although Year 13's work indicates that they have more potential than they are currently demonstrating because of missed deadlines and a rush to complete projects towards the end.
128. There is a sense of enjoyment of the subject in almost all lessons, but it is in Key Stage 4 where students' attitudes to art are most positive. Their enthusiasm and motivation lead many to undertake vast amounts of homework and extensive research and investigation about their projects. This produces good preparatory work which enhances their final pieces. Students are mature and sensible, settling to lessons quickly and working fast. Most rise well to the high expectations and challenge which teachers provide. Since the sixth form accommodation is now

completed, and students can be in greater contact with the department, their attitudes to their work are becoming more committed, which should improve the standards of their work.

129. Teaching in the department is very good overall. Only with a non-specialist was teaching less than good, and here it was satisfactory because of good support from the head of department. The specialists' strong subject and curriculum knowledge, combined with their own enjoyment in art transmits to students and creates in them similar enjoyment in their developing skills and knowledge. Lessons are lively and interesting, with good introductions and plenary work. The main vehicles for challenging and pushing individuals, though, are teachers' excellent individual sessions with students in lessons, which are sensitively differentiated to reflect a good knowledge of each student's needs. Teachers encourage wide experimentation and ensure historical and critical aspects are covered appropriately. While students respond to this well, their studies are not always directly related to their practical work, and, in some cases, insufficiently deep.
130. Since the last inspection standards have improved at both GCSE and Advanced Level. However, there has been little significant progress in the use of information, and communications technology. Although the department has recently acquired computers, staff require training in their use so that they can encourage and support students to regard them as a creative tool to use automatically in their work.

BUSINESS EDUCATION (BUSINESS STUDIES, ECONOMICS)

131. The business studies department provides a very wide range of opportunities for students of all abilities. Vocational Education, GNVQ provision in particular, has increased significantly since the last inspection. The main provision of the department in Key Stage 4 is GCSE business studies. In the sixth form, A level business studies exists in both years, with the final year of A level economics in Year 13. GNVQ business studies Intermediate level exists in Year 12, providing a very useful fresh start for students who have not attained very highly in GCSE. GNVQ advanced level business studies provides an option for higher attaining students who prefer a different learning style from A Level. A Level Law is new provision this year but no lessons were seen.
132. GCSE business studies A*-C results in both 1998 and in 2000 were higher than average at about 67% compared with around 50% national average for similar schools. In 1999, though, poor results were of great concern, dropping to 32%, with a very high proportion of students not achieving a grade at all. This was because they did not realise their assessed potential to enter a higher "tier" of examination. Work seen in Key Stage 4 business studies lessons shows an average spread of attainment at present.
133. Recent A Level results have been mixed. Business studies results have been above average, and current work in Year 13 shows similar potential. A Level economics results have been poor, though, when judged against the national average for higher grades, but were in line with predications and with students' abilities. The present Year 13 A level Economics group is the last one in school, with attainment reflecting recent results. Advanced Level business studies GNVQ results have been good, with several merit grades awarded, and often represented very good achievement for individuals. Attainment in Intermediate GNVQ has also been good, again with higher grades represented in 1999 and 2000. In lessons seen, the Intermediate GNVQ group showed very good progress from the start of Year 12, with students developing mature attitudes towards all aspects of their course, and benefiting very greatly from the opportunity to develop their learning in this new way. Students' confidence and independence are greatly enhanced, and they often speak articulately and proudly of their work. Both levels of GNVQ provision show this high degree of ability to work independently, and to work effectively together in groups to achieve results. Students' early experience in a course at a nearby army camp was instrumental in "bonding" groups together well.
134. The wealth of external contacts which teachers provide for students, particularly those in the sixth form, greatly extend their understanding of the world of business, and their work reflects good learning from these visits, events and speakers. All teaching seen was satisfactory, with some good and very good teaching on both GNVQ and A Level courses. Teachers are well qualified, and in the best lessons teachers use their often extensive knowledge and experience of the business world to very great effect in their teaching. Teachers' assessment of students' work is

good, giving them useful criteria for improvement, and showing them what they need to do to enhance standards. Their relationships with students are generally very positive, generating a good atmosphere for learning in most classes.

135. The last inspection report indicated some minor issues. One of these was a loss of students from GNVQ courses. This no longer occurs, except in occasional cases where students go into appropriate employment. Business studies GCSE results have returned to an above average level but have fallen in A Level economics. Some lessons still occur in unhelpfully crowded classrooms. Students' access to computers is generally good which eases the department's extensive use of information and communications technology. Frequent access to the internet has reduced the need for book-based resources.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

136. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is in line with expectations for students of that age. Students can use basic equipment such as tenon saws, bench hooks, sanding disks and glue guns with confidence and improving accuracy. They are able to join materials in an appropriate manner. Students in a Year 9 class, who were building torches, were able to build simple electronic circuits and bend and shape plastic to form packaging. In a Year 9 food technology class, students were able to define their analysis in terms of appearance, smell, texture and taste, as part of an investigation of food products. Students are beginning to understand the design process by the end of Key Stage 3. Graphical work is developing at Key Stage 3 as part of the design and make process and there are some good examples of graphical work in design folders.
137. Performance in the GCSE examinations has improved steadily since the last inspection and is now above the national average for A*-C grades. In lessons at Key Stage 4 attainment is always at least in line with national expectations and in approximately one quarter of lessons it is good. Students achieve good standards of practical work with their final examination projects. For the 2000 examination a wide range of design solutions were produced to a good standard using a variety of techniques and materials, including wood, metal, plastic and control systems. In a Year 10 resistant materials lesson where students were making brass jewellery boxes they were able to mark out accurately using engineer's blocks and level gauges and use a selection of files to remove material with precision. In a Year 11 systems lesson where students were designing a range of projects, they gave high quality presentations of their initial research and analysis, they were able to describe a range of research activities, including discussions with external consultants, with confidence. By Year 11 students demonstrate a good knowledge of the design process. By the end of the sixth form, attainment in lessons is appropriate for the course.
138. At Key Stage 3 progress is satisfactory in all lessons, in three quarters of lessons it is good. Students make the best progress when they are appropriately challenged. In Key Stage 3 there is transfer of learning between the contributory subjects as students progress through their design and technology courses. At Key Stage 4 progress is at least satisfactory in all lessons. In approximately one quarter of lessons it is good. Students make particularly good progress in the development of designing and making and graphical presentation as they move through years 10 and 11. Good progress occurs when targets are set and lessons have a clear purpose. Students with special educational needs always make satisfactory and appropriate progress. In the sixth form progress is appropriate in all lessons.
139. Relationships between teachers and students are good and these contribute to a good working atmosphere in lessons. Students are generally enthusiastic and enjoy their lessons whilst working both independently and working with each other in groups. They are well behaved in lessons and respond well to the high standards of behaviour required by teachers.
140. The quality of teaching is always satisfactory and is predominantly good. Lessons are well planned and structured to promote learning. Lesson plans are thorough and systematic. Teachers have good class control and share the objectives of the lesson with students. Teachers have good subject knowledge. There is a good balance between whole class and individual work, activities selected are appropriate and they enable students to gain experience of design and making and to evaluate their work. Teachers regularly set homework, which is well selected to promote and support learning. In the best lessons a brisk pace is established early on and

expectations of students work are high as was evident in a Year 10 food lesson when students were carrying out sensory analysis and developing attribute profiles. The teacher used deadlines well to establish a fast pace and made good use of key demonstrations as the occasion arose to brief the whole class efficiently.

141. The previous inspection identified a variety in the quality of teaching at Key Stage 4 and unsatisfactory translation of design into finished products and systems. The school has addressed both of these issues successfully.

GEOGRAPHY

142. Standards in geography at the end Year 9 are above average. In 1999 the proportion of students achieving GCSE A* -C grades is well above average. Over one fifth attain A* and A grades. Although girls outperform boys at the highest grades, there is no difference in the proportion gaining A*-C grades: this is the result of the department's efforts to reduce boys' underachievement. Since the previous inspection, examination results have risen steadily from below to well above average. They dip in 2000, possibly due to staffing difficulties, now resolved, but remain slightly above the 1999 national average. A Level standards have risen. In 1998, they were well above average. They fell below in 1999 with few students achieving higher grades. In 2000, the results were above the 1999 national average and nearly half the students achieved A and B grades. In the Advanced GNVQ course in leisure and tourism, students achieve very good results. This year, three out of ten passed with distinction and four with merit.
143. Students enter Year 9 with average standards in geography. They make good progress in relation to their prior achievement. Teachers support their progress by insisting that they use technical vocabulary correctly and enable them to express ideas clearly through oral work and detailed writing such as that by higher and middle attaining students about Viking settlement. Good frameworks help them to organise and synthesise ideas and are useful for revision purposes. In an exercise about choosing sites, higher attaining students can explain their decisions well. The work of lower attaining students is clearly organised but more descriptive. They show sound understanding of pattern, process and development issues in work about shopping, microclimate and "Street kids in Tanzania". Students handle information well because research techniques are carefully explained. Not enough use is made of the local area to develop these skills.
144. At Key Stage 4 students continue to make good progress and achieve above average standards in lessons. Teachers support them by building effectively on previous work. Year 10 students; for example, improve their understanding of settlement. They improve their technical vocabulary and regular tests help them to remember previous work well. Their skills are effectively developed through fieldwork and increasing emphasis is placed on independent learning. By the end of Year 11, most students show good understanding of pattern and process and know more about places. In investigations about environmental quality in Morpeth, higher attaining students link practice well to theory, substantiate conclusions and suggest shortcomings. Middle attaining students establish variations in quality but do not always identify the full pattern. Lower attaining students collect and collate data well but have gaps in understanding.
145. A Level students work with a high degree of independence and achieve above average standards. They have a good grasp of ideas demonstrated in work about river management and the ethical issues involved in world trade. Fieldwork is used well to develop critical skills. Work; for example, about shopping hierarchy shows that they can construct logical and coherent arguments linking their ideas effectively to models. They make very good progress as a result of high quality teaching.
146. Throughout, students handle information competently, their numerical skills support them well. Information and communications technology is not used enough to assist this process.
147. Students with special educational needs make good progress because teachers are aware of their individual plans and providing suitable activities.
148. Students' positive attitudes contribute to their progress. A large number choose to take geography as an examination subject. Most concentrate well, listen attentively to the teacher and each other and take part willingly in activities. They show concern for others less fortunate than

themselves and translate these concerns into action by participating in fund raising; for example to help the street children in Tanzania. Their commitment is shown in enquiries and individual studies completed for homework. Many are of high quality, demonstrating that they have spent considerable time and care on them, often using their own information and communications technology at home to improve the presentation.

149. Teaching is good. In a quarter of the lessons seen, it is very good. It is most effective in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, where teachers use their expertise particularly well to respond to students' questions and stimulate intellectual curiosity. Overall expectations are high. They set demanding but achievable tasks. Lessons are planned very well, with very good supportive resources. Key Stage 3 work schemes support non-specialists in their planning. Most lessons are well managed and students are clear about what they have to do so that little time is wasted. Occasionally teachers do not intervene enough to keep students focused on their work, particularly towards the end of the lesson. This was so in the unsatisfactory lesson when the teacher lacked the expertise to refocus the lesson effectively, resulting in slower learning. Sometimes, there is insufficient emphasis on developing students' answers in order to extend their understanding. Marking is encouraging and helpful to students. Homework supports classwork well. Most lessons are lively and interactive with a good balance between teacher and student activities. These characteristics were seen in a Year 13 lesson about waste management. In an imaginative introduction, the teacher immediately engaged students in discussing contrasts worldwide in the cultural factors affecting the creation of waste and waste disposal. In a good humoured and supportive atmosphere, students felt able to give their opinions and to challenge the common view, high attaining students, in particular, arguing their case convincingly. Verbal feedback clarified any misconceptions. Given up-to-date information to examine they had the opportunity to test their views. As a result, they made very good progress in understanding alternative approaches to waste management.
150. Since the previous inspection, students have benefited from new leadership with clear educational direction. Teachers use improved work plans that give more opportunities for independent thinking. Present GCSE students are benefiting from the change to a more suitable syllabus. The use of information to identify underachievement, combined with effective revision techniques, is helping students to improve. To improve further, the department needs to build on its policy of supporting and sharing good practice and develop information and communications technology systematically so that everyone benefits.

HISTORY

151. Standards in history are very good overall. By the end of Key Stage 3 they are good as a result of clear continuity from Year 8 in partner middle schools. At GCSE standards are well above average. In 1999 over three quarters of candidates gained A*-C grades compared to the national average of 56%, and the percentage of candidates achieving A* or A grades was more than twice the national average. The percentage gaining A-G grades was in line with the national average. Similar high standards were achieved in the results for 1998 and 2000. Results at Advanced Level were also very good over the three-year period, and in 2000 all candidates achieved at least grade D, with three quarters of candidates gaining A or B grades.
152. Standards of work seen are also well above average. Students in their first term in Year 9 were able to organise and communicate their work on the Agricultural Revolution through extended narrative, demonstrating high standards of literacy. In Year 10 students completing GCSE coursework on the First World War were already achieving very high levels of historical enquiry and interpretation, with the most able candidates able to evaluate the sources with considerable maturity. By Year 11 average and below average students were able to analyse the long and short-term causes of war. In Years 12 and 13 students achieve an accurate depth of subject knowledge in the modules they are studying. By the end of Year 13 they are able to produce well-structured essays in which they can consider different interpretations of their topics. However their work lacks reference to independent reading and research.
153. Teaching is generally very good. In all the lessons observed it was good, very good or excellent. In two thirds of the lessons it was very good or excellent. The excellent subject knowledge of all the teachers is seen in the outstanding teaching resources which are prepared in the department. A resource pack on local history was used to introduce students in Year 9 to challenging new

investigational skills. It is a great tribute to teaching in the subject that by the start of Year 10 students have the skills in historical enquiry to complete a major part of their GCSE coursework. The support provided for students of all abilities through regular coursework clinics out of school hours is appreciated by parents as well as students. All teachers follow the departmental policy of sharing the learning aims of each lesson with students at the start of the lesson and due to effective planning and good pace the aims were usually fulfilled. In all lessons students responded with co-operation and hard work. They worked well together in discussions in pairs and small groups and showed respect to the views of others during feedback sessions. Students in Years 12 and 13 worked with interest but they relied heavily on teacher guidance and rarely showed independence or initiative in discussion.

154. Good departmental management ensures assessment is a particular strength of the teaching. Marking is regular, detailed and supportive. The criteria for assessment are fully shared with students at all ages. As a result by Key Stage 4 students are able to assess their own progress very accurately. Targets are set for all students and are regularly reviewed. In addition the students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are asked to evaluate the teaching of the subject and their comments are used in lesson planning. Teaching has improved further since the last inspection.
155. The high levels of attainment in history noted in the last inspection have been maintained and further improved. Currently the subject is not meeting the statutory requirements for information technology in Key Stage 4 and schemes of work need to be revised to incorporate information and communications technology for all students.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

156. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is at least satisfactory, with the majority of students achieving the national expectation. At Key Stage 4 only approximately 35% of students follow a course in information technology and the school therefore does not meet it's the requirement to provide a Programme of Study in information and communications technology for all students. Attainment is always at least satisfactory and in approximately half of lessons it is good. In GCSE examinations the percentage of students achieving grades A*-C has continually increased and is in line with the national average. Attainment in the sixth form is appropriate for the information and communications technology courses which students follow.
157. Cross-curricular use of information technology is variable, although there are very good examples of it being used in some subject areas; for example, video conferencing in modern languages, position, motion and temperature sensing in science, control and data analysis in design and technology and research on the internet in business studies. However, the school does not systematically co-ordinate and monitor where, how and to what effect information technology is being used in other subject areas. A very good extra-curricular information and communications technology club is operating after school with students designing and building a network, led by a Year 11 student who recently won the Young Engineer for Britain competition.
158. In Key Stages 3 and 4 students make appropriate progress as they progressively develop information and communications technology skills. Students taking GNVQ courses are well motivated and cover a broad range of programs and skills. Students with special education needs make good progress. Students in the sixth form following the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education in information and communications technology make good progress.
159. The quality of teaching in all lessons is always at least satisfactory or better and is often good. Teachers have good class control and they establish good working relationships. Schemes of work are well developed, with good support materials, and lessons are well prepared. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject and show a good understanding of processes, software programs and skills. Students' analytical skills are developed through a well thought out and challenging programme of assignments. These attributes lead to students being well motivated and committed to the demands of their course, and contribute to the overall good quality of learning.
160. The working atmosphere in lessons is good with students focused on their work. Behaviour in lessons is invariably good. Students are courteous and respectful to each other and to teachers.

Students are encouraged to develop good research skills. In the sixth form, students are treated as mature adults whose opinions, ideas and talents are valued and they respond accordingly.

161. The last inspection identified that the school needed to address information and communications technology as a whole school issue and the school has responded with a number of strategies including the setting up of a user group, the development of networked facilities in various locations and a range of training opportunities for staff. However there is a need to focus the development to ensure that all students receive their full entitlement to information and communications technology in accordance with the latest regulations.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

162. Attainment of students on entry is high. At the end of Key Stage 3, 65% of students achieved level 5 or above in French, which is above national expectations. GCSE results have shown a progressive increase in the proportion of students gaining A* - C grades. 65% gained A*-C, in the 1999 French examination, which increased to 71% in 2000. In German, in 1999 56% gained A* - C grades, with 59% in 2000. The number of students achieving A* in both languages is high. However, the proportion of girls achieving higher grades A*-C, is significantly above that of boys. Spanish has only recently been introduced into the curriculum. The numbers of students taking 2 languages is increasing. In Year 12 non-linguists have the opportunity to study Spanish using a language package.
163. Success continues at A Level 2000 in both French and German with a 100% pass rate in French and only 1 student not gaining an A - E grade in German.
164. High standards are enforced at both key stages, in all three languages. In all ability groups pronunciation, accent and intonation are creditable. The majority of students answer confidently, with the more able showing the ability to expand on minimal answers and manipulate the language. Students should make greater use of the foreign language in classroom situations and teachers are making a definite effort to promote this approach. For example, one student had to explain his late arrival before he sat down, whilst another enquiring a pen was encouraged to ask using the words needed from a wall display. Listening skills form an integral part of lessons and are often reinforced by the use of overhead projector and worksheets to help with the understanding. Written work varies according to ability. Students take pride in the presentation of their work and in accuracy. Motivation is good. Students are able to work collaboratively and independently.
165. Progress in all languages at Key Stage 3 is good. The profile of languages amongst students is high. Language learning is made to be fun. In a Year 9 beginners' Spanish lesson on adjectives to express school subjects, the students were agog as the teacher illustrated the meanings of words using mimes. They quickly grasped the meanings of the new words as a result of the enthusiastic teaching and were quickly using the same words effectively in sentences. In a Year 9 French lesson the revision of time, followed by the introduction of daily routine, was taught in such a way that it was fun. The pace was so brisk, that the class had little time to breathe between activities, which had been carefully structured to ensure consolidation.
166. At Key Stage 4 students continue to be motivated and enjoy challenge. Teachers share the marking criteria with students, so that students are aware of their targets. In a lesson where coursework was returned, many questions were asked of the teacher; for example "what grade would this give us?" Whereupon the teacher emphasised that in some cases grades could be greatly enhanced by the addition of a few simple opinions. A lower ability group in Year 10 French made rapid progress as a result of the variety of interesting activities, all enthusiastically delivered by the teacher.
167. Sixth form groups attract students of high calibre. Students are able to discuss, debate, and express ideas displaying maturity and an exceptionally high standard of ability that are also reflected in listening and written skills. All Year 12 students study a language. A Year 12 German lesson contained elements of magic, as students identified the imperfect tense via the song, *Paff der Zauberdrachen*. The Year 13 debate on drugs illustrated the high standards, which are in evidence and the expectations of both teacher and students.

168. Teaching is a strength of the department. At Key Stage 3 all lessons were satisfactory, eight out of ten being good or better. All lessons at Key Stage 4 were satisfactory, with almost nine out of ten being good or better. All sixth form lessons observed were very good.
169. Staff are well qualified, enthusiastic and committed. Currently two members are teaching three languages in order to establish Spanish. The use of foreign language teaching assistants is a bonus. Teachers are role models in the use of the foreign language to conduct lessons. Staff work as a well managed team, sharing ideas. They share lesson objectives with the students making them aware of high standards and effort required in order to become proficient. Objectives are aimed at the ability levels being taught. Lessons are carefully planned and delivered. They include a large variety of methodology and tasks. Although books are regularly marked, there is some inconsistency. Regular monitoring of the marking would help raise standards even further.
170. The Language College status of the school offers many benefits. There are close links exploited with other schools, colleges, the community and industry. Information and communications technology has enabled distance learning to be set up, benefiting the students.
171. The department has addressed issues from the last inspection. Work in languages is now very challenging. Teaching is no longer over reliant on textbooks and a wide range of methodology and strategies are in evidence. Work is carefully prepared to suit the ability of the students, but at the same time offering challenge.

MUSIC

172. Standards in music have been maintained since the previous inspection. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are close to national expectations with students having a clear understanding of the elements of music. Some basic skills are underdeveloped, such as keyboard playing, which inhibits fluency, but this is balanced by good rhythmic sense, which means that ensemble work is successful. Students achieve well when they are challenged; for example when they created a polyrhythm piece based on words. Imagination did not flow freely but the pieces were skilfully performed by most groups with a firm rhythmic base.
173. Standards in GCSE have risen steadily over the last two years and are now in line with national averages. Students' achievement is very good and the present Year 11 is now producing compositions, which they are proud to take into the repertoire of the school orchestra and jazz band. Through imaginative teaching the students make links between the three components of the course, using established works to inspire their own compositions, gaining a deeper insight into listening and appraising through their own performing. Musically gifted students further develop their talents through the instrumental teaching programme and extra-curricular activities.
174. A Level results are very high, but from a small entry. Sixth form students build on earlier experience and continue to develop as well-rounded musicians. They perform individually and in ensembles with a professional flair. Their understanding of musical form and history stems from practical involvement in music. This in turn stimulates their own creativity; for example a student researching African drum patterns finds practical application in his own performance and composition for drums. Tastes in music are very personal but by the end of the sixth form not all students have developed a sufficiently universal approach to fulfil the needs of the A Level examination.
175. Students enjoy music. They value the opportunity to work with up-to-date technology, which helps them to relate work to their own taste in popular music. There are about 100 instrumentalists who learn through the County Music Service and privately. They play regularly in the school orchestra, jazz band and Ceilidh band. There is no school choir but a number of girls sing with 'Pongos', a choir that draws membership from nearby Gosforth and Ponteland.
176. All teaching is at least satisfactory with over half the lessons equally good and very good. Students' learning is inspired through excellent musicianship, which supports their efforts and sets a good example. Much is expected of students both in standards of work and in independence to make full use of the available resources. Lessons are well planned to give a balance of learning experience, which includes teaching the whole class and allowing them to develop ideas through group and individual work. Students rise to the challenges set for them by

producing their best work. Homework is not set consistently in Year 9 to allow students to extend their thinking but in the later years work begun in class is continued and furthered at home and in the department during lunchtime. The department should strengthen its arrangements for assessment, both to bring them into line with the requirements of the National Curriculum to report levels of attainment and to use the information to help improve performance.

177. The range of both teaching approaches and resources, particularly information and communications technology, has improved since the last inspection. Under the guidance of new departmental management, the needs of well-motivated, talented musicians are recognised and opportunities sought to provide exciting music making. There is no regular pattern of vocal rehearsals, which would give the opportunity for the many non-instrumentalists to develop their musical involvement. Parents' demands are high and they value the performances, which are the opportunity to celebrate the schools' achievement in music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

178. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with that expected by the National Curriculum for students aged 14. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 for those following the core course in physical education slightly exceeds the national expectations and for those following the GCSE course results in 1999 were well above the national average with 63.4% obtaining A* to C compared to a national average of 49.8 %. Over the past 3 years results have been steadily rising and in 2000 73.5 % obtained A* to C, compared to a national average of 53% A* to C. The school also obtains a high level of A* results, with 20.6% in 1999 compared to the national average of 13.6% and 28% in 2000. In 1999 girls did significantly better than boys but in 2000 the results were similar. An AS Level course has been started this year and it is a popular subject, as yet there are no results available for any statistical analysis.
179. By the end of Key Stage 3 students understand the safety aspects of the subject and are able to organise their own warm up activities. All have ball skills that enable them to participate in a variety of small games including soccer, rugby, netball and hockey. They apply a limited number of rules and are slightly weak in positional play and spatial awareness. Students are also able to undertake planning; for example in gymnastics when they plan to link a series of balances into a flowing sequence. By the end of Key Stage 4 students take part in more advanced games, showing a greater level of skill and tactical awareness. They are able to lead warm up sessions and show a good understanding of fitness programmes and how they affect the body. Students in both key stages are able to offer an evaluation on the performance of others and do this constructively when asked; however, this is not often spontaneous. The GCSE students show a higher level of practical skill and many of the students have a good understanding of the theoretical background to the subject. A number of students in Year 12 are finding the transition from GCSE to AS difficult in the depth of knowledge expected in anatomy and physiology but are beginning to get to grips with the concepts. The school has achieved a number of successes locally in a range of team games and a number of individuals have achieved success at local, area and national levels. Progress can be seen within lessons and from one key stage to another with the majority of students entering the school just achieving the expected level and exceeding it by the time that they leave. Students of all abilities progress at a similar rate.
180. The teaching of physical education is good, with no significant difference in the teaching in the different key stages. Over two thirds of the lessons seen are good or better, with no unsatisfactory teaching. The best lessons were well planned, with a good progression of the skill development. Other strengths within teaching are the challenge given to the students and, when they are given responsibility, in leading, planning or evaluation. Weaker aspects are the missed opportunities for peer evaluation; for example, when parts of lessons are teacher led rather than drawing out points from the students and some missed opportunities to offer extension work. The marking of written work at times lacks constructive comments on how the work can be improved.
181. Attitudes to physical education are very good; students come suitably equipped and levels of participation are high. Relationships between students and between students and staff are also very good and all of these enable learning to take place in a positive environment.
182. There is a range of extra- curricular activities in physical education and these are open to all students, so that there are opportunities for students to follow up interests and improve their skill

level whatever their starting point. Higher ability students have the opportunity to take part in school teams and other students are able to experience competitive games in the tutor team competitions. There is no core physical education available for students in the sixth form. In 1999 the school obtained the Sportsmark award for physical activities provision.

183. Assessment within the department is good. A scheme of booklets is in use that enables students to be involved in their assessment and a comprehensive record is kept. These booklets have been revised to take in to account the new national curricular levels of achievement and were well used in a dance lesson when peer evaluation became a formative assessment in order to raise standards
184. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection in that teaching is now good, the National Curriculum areas studied have been broadened, the underachievement of the more able students has largely been addressed and the activities offered are suitable for all students. In order to develop further the department should continue to refine the assessment system and formulate a clearer role for the few non-participants. They should also ensure that the improvement of the 2000 GCSE examination results is maintained, especially in the performance of boys.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

185. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with expectations of the local agreed syllabus for most 14 year olds. The students have a wide knowledge and understanding of important features of six of the world's major religions. They respond positively and with interest to clear and effective teaching. In lessons and over time they make satisfactory and better progress in understanding that beliefs, values and practices both differ and are shared across religious traditions.
186. The core programme of religious education at Key Stage 4 provides all students with good opportunities to apply the knowledge and understanding gained at Key Stage 3 to a wide range of contemporary social and moral issues. Displays of their work show appropriate maturity of thought in such matters as racism, drug abuse and relationships in the perspective of religious beliefs. They show that they are making satisfactory progress in their awareness of the influence of beliefs in everyday life. Students say that the course offers them worthwhile opportunities to consider ultimate questions about life and meaning. By the end of the course the majority of students attain at a satisfactory level expected for most 16 year olds.
187. GCSE standards have deteriorated markedly since the time of the previous inspection in 1995. Over this time changes in the school option system has resulted in considerably fewer students, particularly more able students, opting to take GCSE religious studies. Results in 2000 show that most students achieved in line with their ability, although there was a marginal underperformance against their predictions in grades D - G. The department is endeavouring to adapt teaching strategies to meet the ability needs of the current option groups. A good example was seen in a unit of work on Christianity, with a class of Year 10 GCSE students using a range of activities such as a picture and video extracts to engage all students in the different ways they learn. Students across the ability range were able to make good progress within the lesson and showed a good level of interest and commitment in their learning.
188. Option groups in the sixth form are small with a move towards developing AS level courses. The current students are attaining in line with national expectations of their ability and are working appropriately towards their targets. Religious education is not offered to other students in post-16 education, a statutory requirement that has not been addressed since the previous inspection.
189. The quality of teaching at all key stages is good. The high standard of teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is a strength. In all lessons it is used advisedly to widen the students' perceptions and understanding. Lessons are invariably well introduced to encourage recall and set the context for new work. A good example occurred in a well-prepared lesson with Year 9 students who were asked to work in pairs, matching religious terms and their meanings. The students worked quickly with good recall and swiftly moved on to a new topic. In all lessons students are made fully aware of the purpose of their learning and what is expected of them.

190. Teachers create productive working environments based on good rapport, humour and interesting activities. For example, a class of lower ability students in Year 9 were able to make good progress in their knowledge of Islamic duties through the use of artefacts and group competition. Students were eager to find correct information and be the first to complete the task. They worked with good concentration and enjoyment.
191. RE makes a major contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the study of other faiths, the exploration of beliefs and values and some time to reflect on what they learn from religion although some lessons run out of time before this aspect is fully developed. Discussion and debate feature prominently in teaching methods contributing widely to the development of students' basic skills of speaking and listening.
192. There are good procedures for monitoring, review and assessment of the students' work within a well-managed department. To make further progress the department should continue to adapt its teaching strategies for lower ability students, consider appropriate accreditation for all students at Key Stage 4 and try to involve students more actively in first-hand experiences of religion in their community.