

INSPECTION REPORT

BISHOP MILNER CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Dudley, West Midlands

LEA area: Dudley

Unique reference number: 103868

Headteacher: Mr D A Fagan

Reporting inspector: Joan K Arnold
2408

Dates of inspection: 29 October – 2 November 2001

Inspection number: 230017

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Burton Road Dudley West Midlands
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R White
Date of previous inspection:	4 March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
2408	Joan K Arnold	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
19491	Robert Jones	Lay inspector	Special educational needs	<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
2411	Robert Liley	Team inspector	<p>Chemistry</p> <p>Biology</p> <p>Equal opportunities</p>	<p>The school's results and pupils' achievements.</p> <p>How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p>
1464	Shona Walton	Team inspector	<p>English</p> <p>Theatre studies</p> <p>English as an additional language</p>	
23396	Nick Daws	Team inspector	Physics	
20593	John Rowland	Team inspector	Art and design	
4293	Chris Warn	Team inspector	Business education	
31555	Chris Durbin	Team inspector	Geography	
1440	David Bristow	Team inspector	Mathematics	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Bishop Milner is a small, mixed, Catholic comprehensive school in an urban setting. It has 715 pupils on roll including a small sixth form of 133. Overall, numbers of girls and boys are almost even except in Year 8, where the balance favours boys and in Year 11 where girls are in the majority. Approximately 15 per cent of the pupils (below the national average) come from minority ethnic backgrounds, a large proportion of these being Indian. 94 pupils (14 per cent and a high proportion) have English as an additional language, three of whom are at an early stage of learning English. 63 pupils (9 per cent) are on the register for special educational needs. Seven of those are at stages 3 to 5. Nevertheless, the range of pupils' attainment on entry aged 11 is average or, increasingly, above average. Students undertaking sixth form courses are nearly all of at least average ability but exceptional circumstances are taken into account. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, at 9 per cent, is below the national average of 18 per cent. The school is oversubscribed and numbers, both in main school and in the sixth form, are rising. Pupils come from two local Catholic primary schools but also from much further afield, from schools in Dudley Borough and surrounding areas. Many pupils come from relatively advantaged families. The majority comes from Catholic families but pupils who do not are from families who have subscribed to the family values which the school promotes.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Bishop Milner is a very good school. It achieved a School Achievement Award for substantially improving results between 1997 and 2000 and is currently named as one of the most improved secondary schools in England. Standards of attainment are above average. Pupils behave very well and show respect and consideration for each other, their teachers and visitors to the school. The headteacher provides strong leadership with a clear vision that all can succeed. This aim is central to the school where teaching is good and learning is the way of life. Staff and pupils alike work hard, display a will to succeed and a commitment to do their best. From average or above-average attainment on entry, pupils make very good progress up to 16 and satisfactory and often good progress in the sixth form. Spending per pupil and on staff is relatively high. Strategic financial planning and best value principles have still to be firmly established. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Provides teaching that is consistently good or better, regularly very good and often outstanding.
- Maintains an ethos for learning that nurtures mutual respect and tolerance, motivates pupils and encourages their positive self-esteem.
- Provides excellent care, support and guidance for pupils through the close relationships staff have with pupils and through constructive assessment and systematic collection and use of data.
- Ensures that pupils know how to improve their work and make progress.
- Benefits from leadership that is strongly committed to the success of all pupils and high standards in all areas of the school.
- Makes good use of the skills and expertise of the staff to maintain high standards and drive improvement.

What could be improved

- Strategic planning.
- Aspects of monitoring, evaluation and sharing good practice.
- Pupils' independent learning skills.
- Pupils' cultural development.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. The high standards and the well-ordered and supportive atmosphere for teaching and learning have been maintained and sometimes improved. Teaching continues to be good and is very good in the sixth form. Deficiencies in the provision for history have been rectified and standards in the subject have risen. Registration time is now used effectively. Procedures for the allocation and distribution of resources to departments are now clear. Monitoring and planning of systems and processes are better established, although aspects of monitoring teaching and strategic and financial planning are not sufficiently rigorous. Former health and safety issues have been resolved. The library facilities have been upgraded but not as much as intended because of structural problems with the old building.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				<i>Key</i>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	A	B	N/A		

Pupils' attainment in the standard attainment tests (SATs) at 14 is well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. Attainment overall in these subjects is improving at a similar rate to improvement nationally. Boys and girls at Bishop Milner School do better than boys and girls nationally and boys particularly so. Performance in the English SAT in 2000 was in the highest five per cent nationally. At 16, in 2001, a very high proportion of pupils (79 per cent) achieved five or more GCSE A*-C grades and all pupils achieved five or more A*-G grades. This places Bishop Milner School in the top five per cent of schools nationally for A*-C and A*-G grade indicators and science. English and science results were outstanding and results were very good in mathematics, geography, history, French, art and design, food technology and music. This continues the above-average improving trend over the last few years. Pupils do better in geography, history, combined science and business education than in their other subjects. English, mathematics and design and technology are not so good in this respect. Results for students taking GCE A-level or AS-level examinations dipped in 2001, the average point score per candidate being 16.6 compared to the 19.1 achieved in 2000, which was then above the national average. In 2000, the school's improving trend for A/AS-level point score was well above the national trend. The results in 2001, although lower, do not, in themselves, mark an overall deterioration but reflect weaker performance in biology and theatre studies. In 2001, English, physics, history, geography and art and design achieved 100 per cent pass rate and in English and geography, the majority of students achieved a high grade. At 16 and in the sixth form, girls perform better than boys.

From the sample of work examined and lessons observed, standards are generally at least average and often above average, particularly for pupils aged 14 or above. In the sixth form, standards in art and design, geography and business education are especially high. Most pupils' literacy and numeracy skills support their learning well. Throughout the school, pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good and often very good progress. The school's targets are realistic, based on sound analysis and provide good goals for individual pupils. However, there is room to be more ambitious to take account of the effect of the good teaching that exists in the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: pupils are very positive about the school and the education they receive. They show real appreciation for their teachers. This is confirmed by their parents.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent: the school has successfully created a climate where high standards of behaviour predominate. Pupils are extremely polite and friendly, and treat school property with respect. Exclusions are very rare.
Personal development and relationships	Very good: the school cultivates mutual respect and co-operation and promotes pupils' confidence and self-esteem very effectively. The many different ethnic groups work together harmoniously as do boys with girls.
Attendance	Very good: levels of attendance are above average throughout the school and there is very little unauthorised absence.

Pupils have very positive attitudes to their work. They are keen to come to lessons and arrive punctually. Pupils thrive on responsibility when it is offered to them. However, the ability of pupils in main school and, to some extent, students in the sixth form, to learn independently is hampered because insufficient opportunities are offered to them.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching at Bishop Milner is consistently good throughout the school. It is particularly good in the sixth form. In English, mathematics and science it is good. Literacy skills are taught well and numeracy skills satisfactorily. Teachers know their subjects and their pupils extremely well. They plan meticulously and use assessment productively so pupils know what to do to get better. This means that pupils of all abilities and backgrounds make good progress and are helped to do their best. The good learning happens because teachers create a climate where high standards of work and behaviour are the norm and levels of motivation and concentration are high. Very positive relationships are fundamental to the productive atmosphere, as are the high quality displays in classrooms. These are attractive, informative and reinforce what the pupils are meant to learn.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good: pupils benefit from a curriculum that gives them a breadth of relevant experiences.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good: effective support is provided for the pupil with a statement of special educational needs. Teachers plan well for pupils with special educational needs, and give sensitive and well-targeted support in lessons, because they know them well.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory: those students involved are given help with their written work and with organising their time through a community mentoring scheme.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good: the school successfully encourages pupils to develop positive moral and social values through the programme for personal development, sex education and citizenship. The Catholic atmosphere and the strong moral and spiritual ethos enhance this provision. However, insufficient opportunities are taken to learn from the school's rich ethnic mix to raise all pupils' cultural awareness.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well: teachers assess and monitor pupils' academic progress and their personal development very rigorously. The approach is detailed, thorough and helps all pupils to make good progress.

Parents and pupils alike have a very high opinion of the school. Pupils talk about their experiences enthusiastically and appreciate the high quality teaching they receive. The opportunities for doing fieldwork, going on trips and visits, including abroad, are good. The very long, concentrated school day allows the timetabled curriculum to be studied in depth; and provision for teaching citizenship has already been made.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good: the charisma and clear vision of the headteacher, supported by a very good management team, inspire everyone in the school community. There are further improvements to be made in strategic and development planning .
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactorily: governors rely heavily on the headteacher's good advice and professional expertise. They, with him, have made good staff appointments. They have yet to develop sufficient autonomy or to fulfil their evaluation role rigorously enough.

Aspect	Comment
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good: the school monitors its systems, policies and provision extremely well but does not make full use of the findings in setting priorities for further development. It is not yet using classroom observation and feedback to develop and share good practice nor is evaluation rigorously built into the school development plan.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory: the school manages its resources carefully. However, the school's development plan does not detail costs sufficiently and strategic planning is not formalised. These weaknesses limit the school's ability to achieve better value for money.

The leadership of key staff is very good because the school has explicit aims and values which are reflected in all its practices. These values create a positive learning environment where ambition flourishes and there is a will to succeed. Subject and pastoral leaders play a large part in the smooth running and success of Bishop Milner School. The sixth form is well led and managed. Principles of best value are not yet consistently applied.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That their child likes school. • The progress their child is making. • The good behaviour promoted by the school. • The good teaching their child receives. • The information they receive about their child's progress. • Being comfortable about approaching the school with problems. • The high expectations the school has. • How the school is led and managed. • The way the school encourages responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of activities outside school.

The inspection team agrees with most of the parents' positive views but the school could provide more opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities generally, and in their own work. The inspectors judge the range of extracurricular activities to be reasonable considering the time available and the bus arrangements but recognise that the school has not publicised them sufficiently to parents or pupils.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form at Bishop Milner School, with 133 students, is smaller than average but growing. Girls slightly outnumber boys. The wide range of subjects and vocational courses is enhanced by the links that are made with five further education institutions. Approximately two thirds of students from Year 11 continue into the sixth form and about one fifth of the sixth formers are from other local 11-16 schools. Over a quarter of students are from ethnic minority backgrounds (a high proportion). Overall ability on entry is above average; most students have attained A*-C grades at GCSE. Most students embark on two-year programmes leading to GCE A-level, AS-level or a vocational qualification and most of them complete their courses. The great majority of students gain further accreditation in information and communication technology as part of the key skills course.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form at Bishop Milner School is effective, cost effective and improving. It is well led. Good organisation provides a positive working atmosphere in which students are well supported, learn effectively and generally achieve good results. The range of academic and vocational courses caters well for students' needs and ambitions, and provides good opportunities for their personal development. Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good and often better. Overall, teaching in about a third of the lessons observed was very good or excellent and in only one lesson was teaching a weakness. Particular strengths were noted in the teaching of English, geography, history, psychology and art and design.

Strengths

- The high quality teaching that students receive.
- The quality of relationships between teachers and learners.
- The use of assessment and the monitoring of students' progress.
- The ethos for improving work and helping students get better.
- Care, guidance and the school's knowledge of its pupils.
- The arrangements for teaching key skills.

What could be improved

- Standards in biology and theatre studies.
- The balance between teacher-led, structured learning and independent study and scholarship.
- Strategic planning in some areas.
- The size and organisation of some teaching groups.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
English	Very good: standards are at least average and often above average. Students are well taught. Concentration and intellectual effort are impressive features of many lessons.
Drama (Theatre studies)	Unsatisfactory: results in the A-level course in 2001 were well below the expected levels. There were weaknesses in the teaching observed.
Mathematics	Satisfactory despite a decline in A and AS-level results in 2001 from very high levels in the past, standards in lessons are in line with those expected. Students' achievements in relation to their prior attainment are satisfactory.
Physics	Good: teaching is good and often better. Students' performance in examinations and in lessons is above average.
Chemistry	Good: students have attained above or in line with national averages over the past three years. The good and very good teaching is characterised by thorough planning and by the good relationships between teachers and students.
Biology	Satisfactory: results have been below or well below national averages for the past four years because students did not make the progress expected of them. Nevertheless, currently, teaching is good and students are developing good scientific skills.
Geography	Very good: high standards are achieved. Teachers know their subject well and employ a variety of well-chosen and planned learning activities.
Business education	Very good: standards are above average. All the teaching seen was at least good. Teachers have high ambitions for their students and help them to set challenging learning targets.
Art and design	Very good: high standards prevail. Teachers are skilled as artists and are able to model techniques effectively to help students develop their own work.

Provision is very good for the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) in health and social care, for history, psychology and the teaching of key skills. In the sample of lessons observed in these areas, teaching was consistently of a very high standard and students were making very good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very well: induction into the sixth form is good. The assessment and monitoring of students' progress is very thorough, helping them to review their achievements and stimulating them to aim even higher. Personal and career guidance is also very effective because the sophisticated tutorial support system enables teachers to get to know their students well and advise them sensitively and astutely.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good: organisation is very effective. Students' performance is tracked and analysed systematically and improvements are made. The school is establishing good links with other post-16 providers but this and other positive developments are not yet clearly articulated in a strategic plan.

In art and design and theatre studies in Year 12 and in biology in Year 13, teaching groups are very small. This limits the richness of discussion and debate that a larger group offers and challenges the viability of those groups.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are taught well and challenged to do their best. • Teachers are approachable and helpful. • They were well supported when they first entered the sixth form. • They are able to follow courses that will enable them to develop their talents and pursue a career. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some feel that they have not had appropriate career guidance. • They do not feel that there are sufficient enrichment courses or activities outside their main subjects.

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by the students. Careers and personal guidance they judge to be good and the range of other activities to be satisfactory considering the time available. The school does create good opportunities for trips and excursions; and opportunities for sixth form students to mentor younger pupils is a strong feature.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school provides teaching that is consistently good, regularly very good and often outstanding.

1. A sample of 91 lessons was observed across the school. Not all subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4 were inspected. The quality of teaching in almost three quarters of them was at least good. In one in every three lessons, it was very good or outstanding. Instances of unsatisfactory teaching are rare; only three such lessons were observed during the inspection week.
2. One of the main factors behind the consistently good and better teaching is the impressive learning and teaching policy, published in the staff handbook. It has a perceptive definition of learning, which is helpful to teachers because it describes what good learning should look like. For example, it identifies that pupils should *‘respond readily to the challenge of the tasks set, show a willingness to concentrate on them and make good progress’* and that pupils *‘are sufficiently confident and alert to raise questions and to persevere with their work when answers are not readily available’*. Having a shared definition of what is expected in classrooms provides a good model for teachers to follow. The policy also clarifies the roles of the teacher as *‘planner’*, *‘deliverer and leader’* and as *‘facilitator and guide’*. These roles emphasise the need for thorough planning and organisation, which still allows for flexibility and spontaneous learning; good subject knowledge and technical competence to promote respect and confidence and effective management and control to promote pupils’ self-discipline and motivation. Teachers at Bishop Milner School show strengths in each of the key teaching roles
3. Planning is very good. This enables teachers to set out the purposes of lessons clearly and sequence learning activities effectively. In one Year 11 art and design lesson, for example, the teacher planned an exercise that would increase pupils’ understanding of how basic collage work could be used as a basis for a creative piece using computer technology. The methodical, step-by-step structure of the lesson enabled pupils to understand how some artists had used the technique, practise their own collage skills and then develop their ideas creatively on computers. A very high standard of work resulted.
4. The extent and depth of teachers’ subject knowledge and technical competence is another significant strength. In a Year 12 English lesson on Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, for example, the teacher was able to ask probing questions that required students to construct detailed, specific answers, which deepened their understanding of the characters and relationships. The teacher used her extensive knowledge of the play by using different actors’ performances and articles to help students explore and understand different interpretations. This resulted in excellent learning. In another English lesson, in Year 9, the teacher’s own fluent and expressive reading, successfully moved the plot on, injecting pace and atmosphere into the story. This helped pupils to picture what was happening more vividly and assisted them with their task of interpreting events visually.
5. Another aspect of the teachers’ good subject knowledge is the way they use it to pose

questions and explain learning. In one Year 11 science lesson, the teacher questioned pupils when they asked for support. This stimulated their thinking and challenged them to make decisions about how to proceed. In a Year 9 drama lesson, the teacher worked in role as Macbeth and asked each pupil to comment about him to develop an awareness of his character. Consequently, pupils' insight into the scene and characters in it, increased significantly.

6. Teachers are good classroom managers. They organise time and resources effectively. Because of this, pupils behave and concentrate very well. These two factors do much to maintain the good standard of teaching. Other contributing factors are: good relationships between staff who support each other well in and across department teams; an effective school staffing strategy to appoint the best staff; and well planned schemes of work.

The school maintains an ethos for learning that nurtures mutual respect and tolerance, motivates pupils and encourages their positive self-esteem.

7. On entering the school one is immediately struck by the ordered, disciplined environment. This is not repressive, quite the opposite. It is characterised by calm, purposeful behaviour, bright, welcoming and informative display and above all, extremely positive relationships. The learning and teaching policy outlines the expectations that the school has for its learners. These are clear, sensible instructions, which emphasise the need for punctuality, order, good organisation and a positive attitude to work. Set out simply as rules for '*before, during and after lessons*', these expectations do much to establish a very positive and helpful ethos for learning. Teachers confirm these expectations consistently in classes and around the school so they are met by pupils who understand them and see them as reasonable.
8. Pupils and students in the sixth form all recognise the emphasis placed on hard work and endeavour. The 'Can Do' philosophy, which is central to the school's aims, is explicit in both the formal and informal conversations between staff and pupils. Students in the sixth form are very clear about how they are challenged to do their best. They list "*having regular feedback, deadlines checked, support for redoing inadequate work and printed forecasts of the term's work*" as being important factors which teachers use consistently and which they find helpful. Pupils and students are encouraged and stimulated by the consistency of this approach from all staff. It makes them feel valued and gives them confidence to succeed.
9. During the inspection week pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons were exemplary. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds work harmoniously together as they did in a Year 7 dance lesson, where their personal and social skills developed as they co-operated and supported each other to accomplish a sequence of learning tasks. Boys and girls work together productively with no fuss and a feature of many lessons is the way pupils help each other. Behaviour was also very good in and around the school. At lunchtime senior pupils help with the organisation of the dining arrangements and, despite the relatively small dining area and the short lunch break, a pleasant atmosphere prevails and pupils respect the routines, which run smoothly and efficiently. Pupils move sensibly and quickly between lessons, even where corridors and stairways are narrow. This means that lessons almost always start punctually and

make the most of the time available.

10. The very good relationships that exist and that are fostered provide an atmosphere in which pupils and adults alike are respectful and confident enough to share, experiment, take risks and learn from making mistakes. In a Year 12 geography lesson, because the teacher had the respect of the students, she was able to use humour to stimulate interest without losing sight of the learning that was intended. The students were, therefore, still keen to discuss, argue and debate about '*future population*' at the end of the day because of the very good relationship the teacher had established. In a Year 7 English lesson, when discussing '*Life before me*' in their family as part of a topic on autobiographies, the teacher drew out contributions from the Asian girls in the class so that pupils could explore and appreciate the cultural differences. The teacher was also sensitive to other possible family circumstances, for example, stepbrothers and sisters and previous marriages so that all pupils were able to feel equally valued and part of the lesson. This very good practice, taking the opportunity to develop pupils' cultural awareness was all too infrequent but was clearly a valuable experience for the pupils involved. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson, relationships were such that pupils were confident to answer questions on probability and were not afraid to make mistakes. This allowed the teacher to correct misconceptions and improve pupils' grasp of the concepts involved.
11. The school has experienced significant disruption because of structural weaknesses in parts of the buildings, consequent repair and anticipated building works. It is significant that this has not seemed to affect the positive environment for learning that exists in the school or the standards achieved. This was confirmed at the parents' meeting. Inspectors noted the very good display in all classrooms and around the school. For example, the environment in one, 'temporary' mathematics classroom is enhanced by the amount of visual prompts on the wall. These not only consist of word banks, identifying key concepts and technical vocabulary but also set out topics to be covered and the associated learning targets for each year group so pupils know what they are supposed to be learning. In other 'temporary' classrooms, pictures are used effectively to give pupils a feel for the period of history they are studying. In the entrance to the school, a very imaginative display, using the snakes and ladders theme, encourages pupils to aim high and do their best. In the foyer, records and pictures of pupils' achievements are displayed and celebrated. All these examples and plenty more, emphasise the value placed on learning by the school and contribute to the explicit ethos of study and achievement.

The school provides excellent care, support and guidance for pupils, through the close relationships staff have with pupils and through constructive assessment and systematic collection and use of data.

12. The school has established very good liaison with its primary schools. As part of this liaison, the head of lower school visits as many of the primary schools as possible to meet the pupils and to begin to form an academic and social picture of them. An induction day is organised so that the new pupils can begin to get used to the new situations they will meet. Parents are very positive about the helpfulness of these opportunities. Detailed records of pupils' attainment in their Key Stage 2 SATs are built up as baseline data and are used alongside a series of other tests as a basis for

establishing pupils' attainment on entry, and also for banding, setting and formulating mixed-ability tutor groups. Data on the pupils' attainment on entry are also used to set targets for each pupil. Therefore staff and pupils are clear about the progress that is anticipated for each pupil and the targets that are expected of them during their school career.

13. In addition to the baseline data, further regular tests are used extensively to gauge and track individual pupils' achievements through the school and progress towards their targets. The school collects and analyses data well, using a series of diagnostic tests in Year 9 and later in Years 10 and 12 to identify potential and future attainment levels and to measure how much the school is adding value to each pupil's performance. This identifies the strengths and weaknesses of different subject areas as well as providing information to help teachers and pupils to set their own learning targets.
14. A particular strength of the way the data is used is that all staff have ready access to it so subject staff and tutors know about individual pupils in detail. They know their strengths and weaknesses and can respond in lessons and tutorial time accordingly. This means that pupils' targets are regularly reviewed and if necessary, interim targets set to motivate those who find learning hard. For pupils who are making good progress, teachers often set more challenging and ambitious targets to push them on. This happens in the frequent opportunities planned in lessons for one-to-one work between teacher and pupil and in the individual discussions tutors have with pupils about their work. In one Year 7 information and communication technology lesson, for example, the teacher had planned time to work with each pupil individually. This maintained the impetus of the lesson, enabling pupils with more confidence to move on quickly and allowed the teacher more time to support the weaker pupils.
15. Staff are also very well informed about the needs of pupils with special educational needs by clear, detailed and sensible individual education plans. These set out the problems faced by the pupil and list those aspects of planning, activities, support and classroom management in each subject, which will help the pupil learn more effectively. Subject teachers incorporate these into their own planning with the result that pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

The school ensures that pupils know how to improve their work and make progress.

16. As a result of the clarity of the learning and teaching policy in the school, in the great majority of lessons, pupils are not only provided with the overall aims of the work they are doing but are also made aware, each lesson, exactly what they are supposed to be learning. This, they say, helps them concentrate and focuses them on what they need to do. In several subjects, for example, in history and in geography, pupils have brief descriptions of the unit of work they are studying stuck in the front of their books. These define the learning and give pupils a clear indication of the National Curriculum levels they are expected to reach and what their work will look like when they do.
17. In one history lesson, for example, pupils knew that they had to demonstrate their understanding about the reliability of source material in their article about conditions in the mills. In a Year 10 information and communication technology lesson, the audio-visual presentation made by the teacher not only provided a good model for pupils to follow but also gave clear hints on how they could improve their own work

to meet the higher-grade requirements of the examination.

18. A feature of how pupils are helped to improve is the constructive marking in many of their books and the helpful assessments that are made during lessons. When talking about their learning, pupils frequently drew attention to this aspect of teaching. Parents also commented on the positive and helpful comments on their children's work in addition to marks and grades. Pupils in Year 8 were able to explain the grading systems used by staff that gave them an insight into their National Curriculum levels and also how the teacher viewed the effort they had made. They appreciated the "*hints for improving work*" because "*it helps you do better*".
19. Parents were fulsome in their praise of the way the school keeps them informed about their children's progress. In addition to the annual reports they particularly appreciate the 'plus and minus' system, with which they can quickly see whether their child has made progress or regressed. Pupils also like this system as it forms an agenda for discussions with their tutors and for their parents with their teachers on parents' evenings.
20. Reports usefully include course descriptions, which clarify content, methodology and in some subjects, examination requirements, assessment arrangements and deadlines. This is very informative for parents and pupils and is presented in straightforward language. This means that pupils and parents can form a view of how well pupils are doing and, from many of the reports, of specific targets for improving work.

The school benefits from leadership that is strongly committed to the success of all pupils and high standards in all areas of the school.

21. The headteacher's personal vision seeks the best for all the pupils. His commitment to staff and passion for continued improvement is fundamental to the success of Bishop Milner School. He combines a warm, good-humoured and approachable manner with a more formal, demanding style, which inspires commitment and commands the respect and admiration of the whole school community. He has an intuitive understanding about what works and has a meticulous eye for detail and order. Pupils know and like him. They, with staff, can share a joke with him but recognise his determination in the pursuit of high standards so they do their best.
22. He has the total support of his senior managers and the whole staff, teaching and ancillary staff alike. This is partly through the strength of his conviction but also because communications in the school are very good. The morning staff briefings set the tone of the day with a prayer shared and important information exchanged efficiently. Staff-room notices are clearly displayed and labelled so everyone can see what is going on. Notes and written messages are used but more often, the head teacher delivers messages personally. In Bishop Milner School, teachers talk to each other and are keen to discuss improvements and ways of getting better. Neither are they afraid to knock on the headteacher's door because they know that he will always listen to their ideas and views and support them if they are well founded and will improve the school.
23. The school's very good communications with parents are also a key feature of its

success. This is principally done through the pupil planners, which are well used, nearly always neatly kept, promptly completed and regularly signed and checked by parents and staff. Increasingly, they are being used as the main conduit for information between the school and the home and vice versa and are even used by sixth formers to record requirements for personal study. The consistent way in which staff encourage the use of planners, leaving proper time for them to be completed in lessons and checking them rigorously in tutor time, has built up a good work habit in pupils that helps them manage their work at home and at school. It has also encouraged parents to write comments in them if they have a query or a concern and they appreciate the way in which the school responds to them.

24. A particularly strong feature of the management's drive for improvement is the way in which systems are thought out, tried, reviewed and improved. A good example of this practice is the way in which a senior teacher has been responsible for improving the system of reporting to parents. Over the past few years the annual reports have been increasingly woven into a more all-embracing system of keeping parents aware of how their children are doing. With end of term progress checks in the autumn and spring (the plus/minus system) and full reports at the end of the summer, parents' evenings are now held mid-year so that hints for improvement can be given and interim targets set. These can be commented upon in the end of the year report. Gradually, the school has sought to make the reports themselves much more informative so each subject describes what has been taught. Some also set out how the pupils are assessed. In all cases, the school's expectations for each pupil are made clear in the report by a grading system that links their attainment with what they will be expected to achieve in their GCSE examinations at 16. Parents confirmed that reports were clear and helpful and were extremely pleased with the way in which the school keeps them informed about their child's progress.
25. Another example of efficient management and organisation is the 'Achieve' reward system. Since 1998, this has been methodically developed, year by year, from a simple system of credit points to one that is structured, known to staff and pupils and suitably competitive to motivate the pupils. It is clear about what can be rewarded (**A**ssessment, **C**onsistent approach, **H**elpful attitude, **I**mprovement, **E**ffort, **V**erbal communication and **S**ervice) so pupils know where to target their efforts. It is used consistently by all staff. Pupils are very much involved, keeping track of their achievements by completing a record in their planners so parents know how well they are doing. Already an efficient and effective process, further improvements are now being made to reduce the workload for teachers and to place more emphasis on achievements outside the curriculum such as community service.
26. All these examples emphasise the commitment to and belief in continued improvement that exists within the leadership team. The headteacher constantly reminds staff that there is always room for improvement. "*We can get better*" are words never far from his lips and his meticulous eye for detail, for example, in the strict five-minute bell system that keeps parents' meetings to time is proof of his quest for the best for all pupils.

The school makes good use of the skills and expertise of the staff to maintain high standards and drive improvement.

27. All the key managers play an important and effective role in the life of Bishop Milner School. They provide excellent role models for the pupils and students and work extremely well as a team. A particular strength is the way in which their individual skills and expertise are used to most benefit. The philosophy of commissioning '*experts*' to take the lead on particular initiatives is very successful. They do preliminary work and prepare a paper or a briefing for staff before consultation. This saves precious time, gives staff good, reliable and up-to-date information and furnishes them with all they need to discuss issues and take decisions. The learning and teaching policy was created from a start such as this and has helped staff understand and own the policy which influences so much of their teaching.
28. Time is therefore, not wasted at Bishop Milner School. Meetings are held when necessary, not as a matter of course. Those that do take place are concentrated, businesslike and effective because staff are already well briefed about the purpose of the meetings and have the information they need to consider beforehand. All this allows staff to make best use of their time for planning and preparation or for working with the pupils. Some meetings are planned regularly. One such example was observed during the inspection. It was structured efficiently so that all members of the senior management team could update each other about pertinent issues for each year group and about the day-to-day management of the school. In addition, a large part of the meeting was spent reviewing developments that had been planned and considering further improvement. This meant that all the key managers gained a clear idea of the current priorities and could work in unison to achieve them.
29. Sometimes, specialist subject teachers, not always the subject manager, are given the responsibility for key areas of development. For example, a skilled English teacher is enthusiastically leading work on the current Key Stage 3 literacy strand. Staff contribute keenly because of the culture of endeavour and their sense of pride in and commitment to the school and the pupils. At other times, development has been stimulated by a particular project or initiative. For example, the learning and teaching policy, resulted from a piece of action research done by a senior teacher with pupils.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Strategic planning

30. A clear strength of Bishop Milner School is the clarity of its mission. The school's development plan is clear about current key maintenance and improvement priorities. However, it has important weaknesses that limit its use as a working document as it stands. They are:
- no clear priority order;
 - targets and success criteria that are framed as tasks and outcomes rather than improvement measured by its impact on pupils' achievements;
 - brief action points which do not give sufficient structure or guidance for implementation and which would stand better as separate working documents;
 - imprecise timescales;
 - incomplete sections on evaluation and funding.

31. Its structure is helpful in that it categorises issues under ‘Curriculum, Ethos, Staffing and School Community’ but it does not help governors or staff to identify which are the most important priorities at any one time. Some priorities have timescales that continue into the next academic year and some beyond that but these are too vague. For example, the review of policies is timed ‘2001/4’ with no indication of which are to be done when, in what order and with what interim time targets. However, the key weaknesses are that only a few priorities have any costs attached to them and few have measurable outcomes. This means that the governors and managers are not able to decide whether a course of action has been successful or whether they have achieved value for money. Too often, the measure is whether the job has been done rather than evaluating the cost of the action taken and its impact on pupils’ success and achievements.
32. Nowhere is there a formalised strategic plan, which outlines the school’s proposed improvement journey over the next few years. Without a comprehensive plan for successive years, it is difficult for governors, parents and staff to establish which are the most important developments, how they relate to maintaining existing high standards and how and in which order they will be funded. For example, the school is in the midst of some important major development in terms of the buildings and rebuilding plans. There is no mention of this initiative in the school development plan and no defined strategy, which clarifies what is intended. Thus, many members of the school community (parents, pupils and staff) are unclear of what is planned to happen and when and how it will affect them. This uncertainty undermines the confidence of some of the pupils, particularly the older ones who are impatient for information and for the new buildings to start. This school weakness is mirrored by the lack of strategic planning in many subject areas.

Aspects of monitoring, evaluation and sharing good practice

33. The school monitors and evaluates most of its current systems and processes very well indeed. As a result, they run smoothly because they are sensible, well considered and reduce administrative burden and paperwork to a minimum. The merit system ‘Achieve’ is a good example. The learning and teaching policy provides a very good basis for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching but it has not yet been used productively to monitor teaching. Thus far, lesson observation has not been used sufficiently, either to learn from the very good teaching or to iron out the few weaknesses that exist in one or two areas. There is much very good teaching to see. However, the staff as a whole is not yet reaping the benefit from it through observing and discussing practice, sharing ideas and trying and testing new approaches.
34. Although the school has made a good start with performance management, the line management approach, as it has been structured, limits the opportunity for teachers to observe teaching in other subjects and to see pupils learning in different ways. There is still much to be done in this respect, which could raise the current profile of good teaching to very good and improve standards further.

Pupils’ independent learning skills

35. Pupils work diligently because they are motivated and well taught. Mostly, progress they make in lessons is good because they know what they have to do and why. This

has helped them achieve well and attain generally high examination grades. There was, however, a relative lack of the highest A and B grades in A-level for this weaker cohort. One reason for this is the tightly structured way in which teachers direct pupils' work. On the one hand, this approach to teaching means that pupils are taken logically through their learning. On the other hand, however, it does not encourage them sufficiently:

- to decide on their own courses of action;
- to research and explore;
- to present their own views and arguments or
- to set their own learning targets.

The balance, currently, is too much in favour of the teacher managing and not enough on the pupils and students making their own decisions about how and what they should learn.

36. In one information and communication technology lesson, for example, the teacher was firm and fair with the pupils. This meant that the lesson ran smoothly. Pupils worked individually and the teacher intervened appropriately at times to move pupils on. However, too often, pupils asked for and received help, without experimenting for themselves to see if they could find the solution. The teacher was too quick to respond and did not urge the pupils to learn by exploring to make them more self-sufficient.
37. In the weakest lessons observed, the lack of opportunities for pupils to make contributions was a feature. Typical characteristics were:
- teachers posing closed (single-word answer) questions;
 - teachers jumping in too soon with the answers and answering the questions they have posed;
 - lessons that are so closely structured and timed that pupils are not given sufficient chance to develop their own ideas.

Pupils' cultural development

38. Bishop Milner School enjoys the rich cultural and ethnic mix of its community. There is a great deal of pride in it and respect for it. Nevertheless, pupils' cultural development is not as well catered for as it should be. Governors are rightly proud of the way in which pupils from all backgrounds join in with the essentially Christian way of life that the school promotes. Governors do not, however, sufficiently acknowledge or promote the positive nature of the diversity that is brought to the school in return and how it can be made to benefit the whole school population.
39. This is a complex area of pupils' personal development and the school is providing some good opportunities for cultural development. In art and design, there are very good examples where pupils and students are able to explore who they are, creatively and in depth. For example, pupils in Year 11 make powerful statements about themselves through symbolic imagery and one Year 13 student worked on a painting which demonstrated the conflict she felt between the school's Catholic values and those of her own faith. The business courses explore how business culture and the image of a company affects different personal lifestyles and the purchasing patterns of different people. Many departments in the school arrange stimulating trips to galleries

and theatres.

40. Nevertheless, three important areas are still to be developed further. There are insufficient opportunities, in lessons and other areas of school life:
- for pupils from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to express alternative values and beliefs so that all pupils can become more aware of different cultural needs, customs and viewpoints that exist;
 - for all young people, and particularly for those from minority ethnic backgrounds, to explore their feelings and emotions, celebrate their own cultural lifestyle and come to terms with any conflict between what the school promotes and what their cultural heritage provides.

Furthermore, despite the very good learning environment:

- the imagery displayed round the school and the detailed content of the curriculum do not yet sufficiently reflect the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nature of the school community.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

41. The school governors, in conjunction with the headteacher and staff, should take the following actions to raise standards.

The school as a whole, including features specific to the main school:

1) **Improve the precision and clarity of planning further developments by:**

- drawing up a detailed strategic plan covering at least three years with funded priorities to guide school and department development planning.

[30, 31, 32]

2) **Improve the monitoring of teaching and the sharing of good classroom practice by:**

- building regular and systematic observation of teaching into the effective monitoring and evaluation processes that currently exist.

[33, 34, 64, 73]

3) **Increase the opportunities for pupils and students to plan and organise their own work and to study independently by:**

- developing the range of techniques and approaches that teachers use in their lessons.

[35, 36, 37]

4) **Improve provision for pupils' cultural education, by:**

- providing and taking more opportunities within the planned curriculum to learn from the different ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the school community; and
- giving all pupils more opportunities to discuss and express their own cultural values and beliefs.

[38, 39, 40, 47]

Sixth form

1) **Improve standards in biology and theatre studies.**

[42, 75, 106, 107]

2) **Increase the opportunities for pupils and students to plan and organise their own work and to study independently by:**

- developing the range of techniques and approaches that teachers use in their lessons.

[52, 78, 84, 108, 120]

3) **Improve the precision and clarity of planning further developments by:**

- drawing up detailed strategic plans covering at least three years with funded priorities to guide sixth form and department development planning.

[63, 80, 86, 91, 104, 109]

4) **Increase the cost-effectiveness of sixth-form provision by:**

- improving the size and organisation of some teaching groups.

[65, 71, 108]

The numbers in brackets refer to the main paragraph(s) in the full report where these issues are mentioned.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	47
	Sixth form	44
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		49

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	9	4	17	14	1	1	0
Percentage	19	9	36	30	2	2	0

(In one Year 7 lesson, teaching was not graded)

Sixth form

Number	4	10	23	6	0	1	0
Percentage	9	23	52	14	0	2	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than two percentage points

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	582	133
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	52	5

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	77	0

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	117

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	0
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	60	59	119

National Curriculum Test/Task Results	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	49	50
	Girls	58	50	48
	Total	107	99	98
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	91 (84)	84 (81)	84 (67)
	National	N/A	N/A	N/A
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	53 (50)	67 (56)	44 (34)
	National	N/A	N/A	N/A

Teachers' Assessments	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	38	36	35
	Girls	47	42	37
	Total	85	78	72
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (90)	70 (82)	64 (72)
	National	N/A	N/A	N/A
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	34 (34)	50 (50)	28 (29)
	National	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	40	69	109

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	33	40	40
	Girls	53	69	69
	Total	88	109	109
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	79 (70)	100 (98)	100 (99)
	National	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	49.9 (45.8)
	National	N/A

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	13	25	38

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	15.2	16.7	16.1 (18.4)	3.5	2.6	2.9 (6.0)
National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	91
	National	N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	18
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	24
Indian	81
Pakistani	21
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	10
White	562
Any other minority ethnic group	27

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	4	0
Pakistani	4	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	82	1
Other minority ethnic groups	10	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	42.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.7

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	215

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	26.5
Key Stage 4	21.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	5

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/01
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	£
Total income	1,755,627
Total expenditure	1,755,627
Expenditure per pupil	2,688
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	0

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	678
Number of questionnaires returned	470

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40.0	52.0	4.0	3.0	1.0
My child is making good progress in school.	52.0	44.0	1.0	0	2.0
Behaviour in the school is good.	59.0	39.0	0	0	1.0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39.0	51.0	7.0	1.0	1.0
The teaching is good.	58.0	39.0	1.0	0	1.0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43.0	47.0	6.0	1.0	3.0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	52.0	39.0	6.0	1.0	1.0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	82.0	17.0	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	37.0	49.0	9.0	1.0	3.0
The school is well led and managed.	62.0	33.0	2.0	1.0	3.0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	63.0	34.0	2.0	0	2.0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26.0	44.0	15.0	4.0	11.0

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

42. Standards overall in the sixth form at Bishop Milner School are high. Up to and including 2000, the results for students taking GCE A or AS-level have been consistently above average, both for those taking two or more subjects and particularly for those taking less than two. Up to and including 2000, the average point score per student was 19.1 compared to a national average of 17.9. Against this improving trend, the results in 2001 were disappointing, with an average point score of 16.6, below the national average and an average point score per entry of 6.6. This decline does not in itself mark an overall deterioration but reflects weak performance in biology and theatre studies. The overall pass rate was 86 per cent but 100 per cent pass rate was achieved in English, physics, history, geography and art and design. In some subjects, for example, in geography and English, the majority of students achieved high (A or B) grades. In 2001, however, the number of high grades was relatively low, also contributing to the lower average point score. Results for students taking the advanced General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in business or health and social care were very high, all attaining merit or distinction. The school achieved very good value for money in this last respect.
43. All students work diligently. Of those who enrol for courses in the sixth form, a very high proportion remains to complete the course (93 per cent in Year 12 and 100 per cent in Year 13 last year). They achieve at least as well as expected and often make more progress than their prior performance in GCSE suggested. This is particularly so in English and geography, where many pupils achieved grades above those predicted or expected by the school. It is also true in the business courses where the high standards secured in the former GNVQ course are being continued in the new Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) courses. The school's analysis (using the A-level Information Data (ALIS) system) confirms these strengths but also highlights the relatively poor performance by students in biology and theatre studies compared to their GCSE scores. There are few variations between different groups of students. The performance of the high proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is no different from that of the whole sixth form. Male students attain grades that are in line with national averages and female students, above them. However, this last difference was not observed in the lessons sampled.
44. From the examples of students' work that were scrutinised and the lessons observed, students demonstrate well-developed knowledge and skills. In business courses and physics, students use information and communication technology (ICT) productively for research, presentation and analysis and, in art and design, to produce highly sophisticated images. In geography, students' ability to interpret data is very well developed and in English, students display a deep understanding of the meaning, symbolism and interpretation of different texts. In science subjects, students work accurately with a good understanding of scientific processes and systems. With the exception of theatre studies, students' literacy, numeracy and communication skills in all subjects are at least good enough to enable them to achieve appropriate standards

and make very good progress towards their individual targets. The very detailed targeting and monitoring information system (TAMIS), used in all subjects, helps teachers to review students' progress, set interim targets where necessary and to urge students to aim even higher when they are doing particularly well. Most students are successful in gaining the grades they need to follow their ambitions for higher education or employment.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

45. Students' attitudes, values and personal development overall, are very good. At Bishop Milner School, students have a thirst for learning that is characteristic of the school as a whole. They are exceptionally positive about the school, describing their experiences enthusiastically and showing a real appreciation for the quality of teaching that they receive. At 95 per cent, attendance is very good. Students are prompt to arrive at lessons, behaviour is immaculate and students play an important role in establishing the excellent relationships that exist in the school. Notable are the responsible way in which they manage the smooth running of the dining room at lunch times and the sensitive contribution that many of them make in mentoring and supporting younger pupils with their learning. In one Year 11 music lesson, for example, a sixth form student worked closely with the pupils and helped them improve their performance by practising aspects of their technique alongside them.
46. A key feature of the sixth form is the excellence of all the relationships, between students and significantly between teachers and students. The high degree of mutual respect breeds a productive climate, in which views about students' work are expressed openly. This means that their work is examined and criticised honestly and topics can be approached with an element of humour and fun that does not detract from the depth of study. Increasingly, students are learning to manage their own work, for example many of them use ICT independently for research. However, in most lessons, there are insufficient opportunities for them to make decisions about their work because teachers tend to direct activities too closely.
47. Students acknowledge and respect the values and beliefs that the school promotes and appreciate the Catholic atmosphere. Thus, their spiritual, moral and social development is very good. However, cultural development is weaker. Despite some opportunities, for example, in art and design and English, students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are given insufficient opportunity to express and share alternative values and beliefs. This means that all students do not always benefit from learning about the different cultural needs, customs and viewpoints that exist. Teachers do not plan or take sufficient opportunities for young people, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds, to:
 - express their feelings and emotions;
 - celebrate their own cultural lifestyle; and
 - come to terms with any conflict between what the school promotes and what their heritage provides.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

48. Teaching is a strength of the school. It is at its best in the sixth form, where it is very good. It promotes effective learning. In the sample of 44 lessons observed, in only one was teaching judged to have several weaknesses and in 37 it was judged to be at least good. Inspectors saw examples of outstanding teaching in psychology, English, mathematics and key skills; and of very good teaching in geography, history, chemistry, art and design and AVCE health and social care. They also recognised many strengths in the good lessons they observed in all subjects. Parents and students confirm this picture, paying tribute to the excellence of the teaching they receive. The school's learning and teaching policy and its effective implementation play a large part in ensuring consistently good standards of teaching. Thus, planning is thorough, meticulous and geared to meet the individual needs of the students and work routines are well established. The teaching of key skills in a structured course is effective. However, three features in particular combine to make the quality of teaching in the sixth form as good as it is:
- the teachers' expertise, knowledge and skills and the way in which students are motivated and inspired;
 - the very good knowledge teachers have of their students so they can help them improve; and
 - excellent relationships which nurture a purposeful and mature approach to learning and study.
49. Teachers know their subject well. They are skilled at introducing topics in interesting ways which promote enquiry and learning. They use 'real life' examples effectively. In one Year 13 AVCE business lesson, for example, the teacher gave a well-informed and clearly expressed resumé of *'the history of the European Union'* as an introduction to a unit on its trading strength. Humour was used judiciously to lighten what could have been a dry subject and students were attentive, motivated and keen to succeed. It inspired good debate, initiated by two students about whether the UK should join the Euro and later, an interesting discussion about the current economic problems in the European airline industry. In a Year 12 history lesson on Henry VII, the teacher's intimate knowledge of the period enabled her to question the students in depth, challenging them to greater understanding of the threats to the Tudor dynasty. By posing further demanding questions such as *'how they would rate Henry's prowess as a financial expert?'* and giving students ten minutes to come up with ideas to justify their answers, she led them to an understanding of how he secured the Tudors through marriage alliances and trading treaties.
50. Teachers also know their students well. Almost without exception, lessons are planned with the individual needs of the students in mind. In many lessons, the individual attention that teachers give each student means that they know their strengths and weaknesses and are helped to improve their work. In one Year 12 mathematics lesson, the teacher was revising simultaneous equations with the whole class; but carefully targeted questions to individuals made sure that each understood the processes involved. In another mathematics lesson, this time in Year 13, informal assessment of students' body language enabled the teacher to focus on those who were not following the explanation and to ask them further questions to clarify their understanding. Another reason why teachers know students' capabilities so well is the excellent marking they do. This is often shared with the students in follow-up lessons. Indeed, students were very complimentary about the quality of marking their work

receives and the feedback they get in lessons. A good example of this was in a Year 13 English lesson on *Volpone*. The teacher returned students' essays on '*pleasure and profit in the play*'. Very thorough marking helped individual students to increase their understanding of satire and, in the lesson, the teacher's strong criticism of students' planning techniques was balanced by helpful guidance on how they could improve them.

51. Excellent relationships form a solid foundation on which students' very positive and mature approach to their learning is based. Teachers get on with their students and students like and appreciate their teachers. In this climate, teachers can share humour, encourage healthy debate and risk more unusual and quirky activities that stimulate and intrigue students. In a Year 12 psychology lesson on '*eye-witness testimony*', for example, the teacher captured the students' interest by using a fun memory activity. The lesson 'buzzed' from the start because the teacher 'volunteered' a student, who was asked to stand with his back to her, facing the class. He was then challenged to describe her. The difficulties he encountered trying to remember specific details, served to highlight aspects of memory that were later expanded and discussed in the lesson.
52. The one aspect of teaching that is less strong, is that the balance of teaching is often too much in favour of the teacher directing activities with insufficient time planned for students to manage their own work. In lessons where this is so, opportunities for the students to get more out of the activities and learn for themselves are missed. For example, at the start of a Year 12 AVCE business lesson, the teacher's super-efficient organisation had the counter-productive effect of making students dependent on her instructions and the information she provided. By contrast, when, later in the lesson, students worked in pairs to elicit information from a text book for themselves and then classify it, their reasoning skills were challenged and insight strengthened. Similarly, in another business education lesson, the teacher drew out graphs to illustrate the theory of elasticity but in doing so himself, prevented the students from becoming more confident about using them for themselves. In the physics lessons observed, students were not sufficiently encouraged to express their views orally. They did not, therefore, have enough opportunity to practise the more demanding thinking skills of justification and linking cause to effect that would have enabled them to secure a better understanding of the complex phenomena they were studying. In approximately a quarter of the lessons observed, teachers lost opportunities to help students become more self-sufficient in their studies and move from directed learning to independent scholarship.

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

53. The opportunities offered to all sixth form students at Bishop Milner School are very good. Despite the small size of the sixth form, students can choose from a worthwhile range of courses in 16 subject areas, suited to their individual needs, capabilities and ambitions. This is made possible by the very productive links that the school has made with four local further education colleges and a sixth form centre in such subjects as graphic design, sociology, sports studies and motor engineering. The successful introduction of the new business AVCE course is attracting increasing

numbers of students. Indeed, one student said that the business course had “*changed his life*” because he was now aiming for a double A grade in business and economics, not having performed especially well at GCSE. He attributed his success to the motivating nature of the course, the structure of the learning, the recognition made of his progress and being able to use ICT. The provision of a structured course in key skills for all students, is very well planned and results in impressive work, particularly in assignments which combine numeracy, communications and ICT elements. In addition, one week’s work experience is planned for all Year 12 students and a work placement is offered through the local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Currently, courses in modern foreign languages (French) are not run because of lack of take up and ethnic minority languages and music are not offered. Despite this, there is no evidence of any students being unable to follow the courses they want.

54. On the whole, students’ programmes are realistic and coherent. They have a balanced timetable with appropriate time and space for private study. The personal, social, health and moral education programme (PSHME) helps them prepare for the future in terms of further education, careers advice, study skills and target setting and emphasises charity work. The school is reviewing this programme to include more up-to-date personal development themes and sex education. There are plenty of enrichment opportunities, often of a social nature, for example, mentoring younger pupils, teaching football in local primary schools and helping with the main school homework club. These give sixth formers opportunities to take on responsibilities across the school, for example, one sixth former is setting up a website (Whirling Words) which will publish pupils’ writing. Various sport and arts activities are offered and a first aid course is also run. The sixth form council makes a significant contribution to improving the provision.
55. Eight students in Year 12 and twenty in Year 13 are following courses in subjects such as ICT and sociology in collaboration with five further education institutions, whilst still attending Bishop Milner School. This collaboration is a developing strength. The school has chosen to run a further mathematics course for one student because there were no other local providers. This uneconomic group is balanced by very cost-effectively large groups studying business. At the moment, there are also very small groups in art and design and theatre studies in Year 12 and in biology in Year 13. Whilst they offer very good opportunities for individual, tutorial style teaching, there are insufficient opportunities for these students to benefit from the range of views and depth of discussion that a larger group offers. This means that students are not challenged as much as they might be, to think more independently, justify their views and counter criticism. The school has yet to consider other alternative and complementary ways of providing for these minority subjects but is aware of the need to do so.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

56. The care provided for students in the sixth form at Bishop Milner School is excellent. Parents and students are equally satisfied with the detail and quality of the school’s approach both to the personal support offered and the academic guidance given. The inspectors agree with this view.

Advice, support and guidance

57. Following helpful careers' interviews and talks in Year 11, students planning to continue on into the sixth form are helped by an effective induction week held a fortnight after their GCSE results are published. Students consider their proposed timetable in the light of future career prospects and ambitions. They are given good, impartial advice about the courses open to them, including those at other education institutions. They report that this advice is useful in helping them to put their achievements into perspective and to set themselves goals. All through their sixth form career, students know that they have open and regular access to personal tutors, to careers staff, whom they see at least twice, and to senior staff in the sixth form. Tutors know them very well and because relationships are so good, students take regular advantage of timely individual help and advice on course-related and personal problems and applications for higher education.

Assessment

58. The range and rigour of the school's monitoring and assessment processes in the sixth form contribute significantly to students' very good progress. Students are very clear about how their achievements are tracked and how they can make further progress. They list as instrumental in the process:
- the very detailed and constructive marking of their work;
 - the very specific feedback in lessons on how to improve and how to meet course expectations;
 - the way that they can see staff on request for individual help;
 - the predictions made of their potential grades based on ALIS data;
 - half-termly individual tutorials in which work is reviewed and interim targets set; and
 - the system of tracking their progress by means of a plus/minus system that indicates progress from term to term.
59. This comprehensive approach and the very detailed analysis and profitable, diagnostic use of data by all staff are strengths. For example, the language needs of some students with English as an additional language, were picked up by the head of the sixth form. She negotiated with a local charity for them to have professional mentors to help them organise and review their work. Although this is a recent development, the students have learned rapidly. The students who enter the sixth form from other local schools are well integrated and feel very satisfied with the way they are supported. Information about students' progress and achievements is fed back into course and lesson planning processes and forms the basis for the clear and accurate reports to parents.

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

60. Parents and students have extremely positive views of the school. All the parents of sixth formers who attended the meeting before the inspection were unanimous in their

praise of the school. In particular they highlighted the hard-working ethos, the good leadership and organisation, the excellent behaviour and the progress their children make. These views were confirmed by the very high number of questionnaire returns (representing nearly three-quarters of all the pupils and students in the school) and by inspectors during the inspection. The school works very well with parents. Communications are very good. Parents are kept informed about their child's achievements and progress through regular letters, reports and comments in the student planners.

61. Students also spoke very positively about their experience in the sixth form. They are very satisfied with the courses on offer and the way in which they can relate to staff "*who are always ready to help*". One student commented that he found it much easier to make progress with his work in the sixth form than at a local college where he follows a music technology course. Others have come to Bishop Milner School from other schools because of its growing reputation. A recent ALIS survey shows general satisfaction with all aspects of the sixth form. Most see themselves as continuing at university or in further education. Attitudes towards vocational and general studies courses are particularly positive but are less so about theatre studies. The analysis shows that students appreciate the opportunities to go on trips and to undertake charity work.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

62. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Set within an atmosphere of family values, the sixth form mission is consistent with that of the whole school – *'for students to achieve the best possible academic results in an environment that positively encourages the development of personal qualities'*. The effective organisation creates a positive working atmosphere in which relationships and aspirations thrive. Clear directions to get better and improve the quality of provision and work are reflected in the attitudes of staff and students. The shared commitment in pursuit of these aims means that the school has the undoubted capacity to succeed.
63. Key managers, inspired and supported by the headteacher and other senior and pastoral managers, fulfil their roles well. They are fully aware of the challenges that face such a small sixth form. They have constructive plans to market it in other local 11-16 schools and to continue to forge links with local post-16 providers to ensure sufficient numbers for viable groups and a sufficiently wide-ranging curriculum that meets all students' needs. In some departments, for example in geography, future developments are extremely well set out in a strategic plan. Paradoxically, none of these positive plans appear on the school's development plan nor is there a separately articulated plan for the sixth form. This means that longer-term implications for its development, proposed departmental improvements and other whole-school initiatives, such as the plans for new buildings, are not clearly mapped into a strategic plan for the sixth form. Thus, time and energy are spent in persuasion, clarification, and reworking of short-term plans; efforts are dissipated and opportunities for the systematic harnessing of resources to key developments are missed.

64. The headteacher keeps up to date and involved with developments in the sixth form and knows its strengths and weaknesses. There are very good systems for monitoring and evaluating systems and processes. These are well used to ensure that courses are appropriate, students' progress is tracked and advice is provided to help them improve and reach their targets. However, as yet, and mirroring the situation in the school as a whole, there is no formal system for improving the quality of teaching through observation and the sharing of good practice. Because of this, the governors do not have a sufficient understanding of the particular strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form teaching and provision so they cannot take a sufficiently active role in setting priorities for its improvement, for example, in ensuring that the balance between teacher led work and independent study is improved and that unviable teaching groups are avoided.

Resources

65. The recent increase in the numbers of students in the sixth form has meant that spending on the sixth form is appropriately balanced with spending on the rest of the school. The average group size is appropriate at approximately 13. The small subsidy of 1.1 per cent from the budgets of pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 does not detract from the quality of provision for those pupils. Spending on sixth form students is about average. Generally, students make at least satisfactory and often good progress in relation to their attainment on entry although the recent A-level results were less convincing in this respect. The income received covers staff costs for the sixth form. The sixth form provides satisfactory value for money. Financial administration is secure. Nevertheless there is more to be done so that the sixth form provides better value, particularly with regard to the opportunities for students in the small teaching groups. The school is aware of this. In addition, without a strategic plan for the sixth form and with only rare, specific mention of the sixth form in the school's overall development plan, the cost of priorities that particularly concern the development of the sixth form cannot be effectively anticipated within the context of whole-school planning. The school is therefore not in a position to apply best value principles to its spending on the sixth form or on the school as a whole, which is a matter of some urgency.
66. Staffing in the sixth form is sufficient and of good quality. Roles are clear and staff work well together. Staff take their tutorial responsibilities very seriously and team meetings of tutors take place regularly. The senior sixth form managers are effective, well respected and give strong and valued support to staff, particularly those who are new to the sixth form. Generally, subject staff have the necessary qualifications and experience to match the demands of the curriculum. The accommodation and learning resources for the sixth form are adequate and allow for the sixth form curriculum to be taught effectively.

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

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

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

GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English	19	100	N/A	48	N/A	3.4	N/A
Religious education	14	93	”	43	”	2.8	”
Mathematics	16	75	”	25	”	1.9	”
Biology	8	100	”	38	”	2.7	”
Chemistry	6	100	”	50	”	3	”
Physics	10	90	”	50	”	2.7	”
Geography	7	100	”	72	”	3.4	”
Economics and business	9	67	”	33	”	2.1	”
Information and communication technology	21	95	”	10	”	2	”
Art and design	12	100	”	17	”	2.4	”
Theatre studies	9	100	”	0	”	2.1	”
History	11	100	”	54	”	3.4	”
Psychology	11	55	”	18	”	1.1	”
Further mathematics	5	80	”	40	”	2.6	”
General studies	24	88	”	0	”	1.5	”

GCE A-level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Religious education	8	88	N/A	13	N/A	4.3	N/A
English	19	100	”	69	”	7.5	”
Mathematics	11	73	”	18	”	3.8	”
Biology	7	57	”	0	”	2.3	”
Chemistry	6	67	”	34	”	3.7	”
Physics	2	100	”	0	”	2	”
Geography	4	100	”	100	”	8.5	”
Economics and business	17	94	”	24	”	5.3	”
Theatre studies	3	0	”	0	”	0	”
Art and design	8	100	”	13	”	5	”
History	4	100	”	25	”	6.5	”
GNVQ Advanced, business education	4	100	”	75	”	16.6	”
GNVQ Advanced, health and social care	6	83	”	50	”	13	”

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching in lessons is good.
- Teachers' knowledge of individual students and attention to their learning needs help them make good progress in lessons.
- The way that teachers put mathematics in context helps to motivate students.
- The individual and collective strengths of members of the department give it the capacity to improve.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that AS and A-level courses are completed on time.
- The department does not have a system for monitoring teaching and for the explicit sharing of good practice.

67. The inspection looked in detail at the A and AS-level courses offered by the school. In addition, the further mathematics course and the post-16 course for students re-sitting GCSE were inspected. Some key skills lessons on the application of number were also observed.

Standards and achievement

68. Standards in A and AS-level examinations have been variable but overall they are in line with the national averages. They have declined from very high levels in 1999 to below or well below national averages in 2001. Nevertheless, standards in lessons and of students' work are now average for the course.
69. The same picture is true for students' achievement, which is now also satisfactory. In 1998 and 1999, students' mathematics results were significantly higher than their results in their other subjects but in 2001 their mathematics results were below their results in their other subjects. In lessons, students are now working to their abilities and making good progress. This is borne out by the school's own data, which tracks students' progress in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE. This shows that in 1998, 1999 and 2000, individual students made progress to A-level grades that was broadly in line with national average rates of progress. There is no evidence of any systematic difference in attainment or achievement between students of different gender or ethnic origin.
70. The school does offer further mathematics A-level as an option but it has only been chosen by small numbers of students over the years. No students were entered for this A-level in 2001. However, a number of students were entered for AS further mathematics. Standards in further mathematics are generally in line with expectation

for this level. Not surprisingly, students retaking GCSE mathematics achieve below-average standards. However, they do make satisfactory progress during the year, and most improve their performance by at least one grade. It was not possible to make a secure overall judgement about students' skills in the application of number. Nevertheless, observations across the curriculum suggest that they are able to cope with the mathematical demands of the subjects they study.

The quality of education.

71. The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory or better. In lessons it is typically good or better. All syllabuses have been chosen to show mathematics in context as far as possible and this enhances students' motivation. The planned rationale for the number part of the key skills course is good and the teaching in the lessons sampled was also good. All teachers know their subject and their students' abilities well and plan their lessons well to take account of all students' learning needs. Teachers give clear explanations, mark homework and diagnose errors to help individual students make good progress. Some lessons show particular strengths. These include very good use of graphic calculators and overhead projector technology, and very good use of questioning. At its best, questioning draws students into discussions very well, giving them opportunities to explain concepts and outline the reasons why they are suggesting particular methods instead of merely giving single word or short phrase answers. Individual lessons are paced well but this has not always been translated into good pace over the longer term. For example, in the first year of the new A-level structure last year there were some difficulties in pacing the AS course properly, in time for the final module tests. In some lessons, students are given too little opportunity to influence and determine their own learning. This is especially true of more able students and those studying further mathematics. For example, whilst the small size of the further mathematics teaching group enabled very close, individual attention, there was little opportunity given for the interchange of ideas and for the student to offer an alternative view or to explain his ideas.
72. Students' attitudes to the subject are always at least good. All students respond well in lessons, and make full use of the opportunities offered to them. Where they are offered more opportunities to show initiative or to think more deeply and respond at greater length in lessons, they take them. However, this does not happen often enough.

Leadership and management

73. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Resources for learning are currently satisfactory. The materials chosen for the new courses are very good, but some texts that have been ordered are not yet available from the publisher. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Appropriate action has been taken to deal with weaknesses that have been identified, and the department has a good base for improvement as it gains experience with the new AS and A-level courses. As yet, there is no planned programme for monitoring teaching. Consequently, explicit opportunities for sharing the good teaching practice that exists, are missed.

Nevertheless, the overall capacity to improve is good, particularly as teachers have many highly developed skills that could be shared within the department.

BIOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to ask probing questions and to lead discussions effectively.
- Lessons are well planned and resourced and have a good balance of theory and practical work.
- Teachers help students to make progress; good diagnostic marking makes a particular contribution.
- The good science routines are helping students to develop good scientific skills.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are not high enough.
- The department has not developed clear, coherent plans for improving the curriculum, teaching and learning. Strategic plans to minimise the negative effects of teacher turnover are not in place.
- Teachers sometimes give students too much support. This does not help students to study more independently.
- Performance data, particularly for identifying students who underachieve and setting interim targets, are not used sufficiently.

74. The inspection looked in detail at the A and AS-level courses in biology. Over the last few years, the department has been adversely affected by teacher absence and turnover.

Standards and achievement

75. Attainment at A-level is below national averages. Students have attained below national averages over the last three years and their results in biology have been significantly below what was anticipated given their results at GCSE. In some cases the standards have been well below national averages. In 2001, of the seven candidates, no student attained an A or B grade and three were graded N. Recent results in AS-level were more encouraging with three out of the eight candidates attaining an A or B grade and all achieving a pass grade.

76. Standards observed in lessons are in line with those typically found and students are making satisfactory progress because the teaching they now receive is of a good quality. Nevertheless, there is more to do to help students make better progress through the course so they all achieve the standards of which they are capable.

77. In lessons students in the sixth form know and follow the work and safety routines well. Students are developing good scientific skills in line with the comments made in the last inspection report. In one lesson, they exhibited good microbiological

techniques to maintain a bacteria-free environment when measuring the effect of varying strengths of disinfectant on prepared bacteria cultures. In practical lessons, students display accurate observational skills, for example, when testing for proteins in foodstuffs.

The quality of education

78. Teaching is satisfactory overall, and often much better. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and this allows for on-going dialogues to be undertaken with students through skilful questioning techniques. Good lesson planning means that equipment and other resources are used most effectively. Lessons contain an effective balance of theory and demonstration work led by the teacher, and students' practical activities. A wide range of teaching strategies is used to improve and promote students' quality of learning. During practical lessons students receive one-to-one support from the teachers on a basis of need. The activities in biology lessons require students to work individually, in small groups and extract information from a wide range of sources by research methods. Sometimes, too much support is given. This limits the effectiveness of the research approach because students are too reliant on the teacher for help.
79. Lessons are taught in a good working atmosphere because relationships between teachers and students are effective. Students are kept informed of how well they are doing through the clear diagnostic marking of pieces of work. However, there is insufficiently rigorous assessment of their progress relative to national grade levels. Whilst teachers complete the TAMIS tracking charts and mark work diagnostically, the department does not adequately ensure that students' assessments are clearly linked to national subject grades and that those students who are underachieving are supported and advised appropriately.

Leadership and management

80. Leadership and management of the department are generally sound. However, a clear three-year strategic plan for the subject and a more detailed one for the current year are not in place. These plans are needed because the department has not managed the disruption caused to the AS group by recent teacher illness. Despite the department's efforts, teachers have not provided a coherent programme of teaching for that course. The courses provided in biology are appropriate and relevant for the students. The delivery and collection of resources by the technicians are excellent and resources for the subject are sufficient in quality and quantity. However, the overall direction the department now takes to improve standards is an important and pressing issue for the school.

CHEMISTRY

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

Strengths

- Attainment in the subject has been above or in line with national standards over the last three years.

- Teaching is good; students are very appreciative of the range of different approaches teachers use to help them learn.
- Teachers' knowledge of students is very good. Students are kept informed of their rates of progress against national averages and told what they have to do to improve.
- Lessons are well planned and resourced to give a good balance of theoretical, demonstration and practical activities.
- Relationships are very good. These help to create a positive working environment in lessons.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good. Lessons are well organised and effective strategies to move on weaker students are in place.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not plan sufficient opportunities for students to use ICT.
- The department does not have a sufficiently clear strategic framework on which to plan improvement over one year and three years.
- Too few opportunities are offered to students, particularly in Year 12, to take more responsibility for their own learning through the use of less heavily directed teaching approaches.

81. The inspection looked in detail at A and AS-level provision for chemistry.

Standards and achievement

82. Students have attained in line with national averages or better over the last three years. Students achieve well in chemistry in relation to their GCSE examination performance. In the most recent AS-level examinations, all six candidates passed and three of them attained high A or B grades. At A-level, two of the six students attained a high grade but two did not achieve a pass grade. Standards observed in lessons are in line with students' expected achievements and in line with or better than national averages.
83. In lessons, students in the sixth form know and follow the work routines well. Safety features are securely in place. Students have well-developed manipulative skills; for example, they demonstrated accuracy in volumetric analysis when preparing standard solutions. They apply their knowledge of ionic and covalent bonding effectively in determining the shape of molecules and generally display a sound general scientific knowledge.

The quality of education

84. Teaching is good and sometimes very good. The planning of lessons is very good because resources and time are used most effectively. Lessons contain a good balance of theory, demonstration and practical work. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to improve the quality of students' learning. These include discussion and presentations as well as co-operative learning methods. Students are used as a major information resource within lessons because teachers plan for them to be involved in the activities. Lessons are taught at a good pace and benefit from the regular use of interim timings for the activities. However, the lack of sufficient opportunities for

students to use ICT as an approach to study is one factor that currently limits students, particularly in Year 12, from developing into effective independent learners.

85. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this creates a good working environment. Students are most appreciative of the strategies used to support them on an individual basis and are keen to learn. In practical lessons, interactive one-to-one support from the teachers is differentiated and linked to students' needs. They are kept well informed of their progress relative to national grade levels. Those not meeting the necessary criteria are effectively supported and advised appropriately. Assessments are used well to recognise concerns with individual students. Effective learning is promoted in the subject through students having regular dialogues with the teachers of chemistry. Underperforming students are set interim achievement targets so that they are able to review their own rate of progress.

Leadership and management

86. Leadership of the department is good. The provision of chemistry is well organised and the courses are appropriate and relevant for the students. Regular meetings of the teachers are held to evaluate the course modules and discuss practice. Resources are sufficient in quality and quantity, and the technical support to teachers is excellent. Teachers have a secure knowledge of students' progress through completion of TAMIS tracking charts and through the monitoring of test performance in the course modules. The department does not have a three-year strategic plan. Neither is the one year plan sufficiently detailed. This means that teachers in the department are not clear which priorities are the most important, and how and when they should tackle them.

PHYSICS

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

Strengths

- Students benefit from enthusiastic and stimulating teaching.
- Information from the monitoring and recording of individual students' progress is used systematically to improve teaching and learning.
- Schemes of work are well planned. This ensures that lessons are well organised and resourced effectively.
- Learning resources are of high quality and are carefully chosen to be supportive of all students' learning.
- Students' positive attitudes significantly contribute to improving their learning and raising standards of achievement.
- Students' progress is reinforced by teaching and assessment, which is well targeted to meet their individual needs.

Areas for improvement

- The department does not have a strategic improvement plan to anticipate and plan for change.
- Insufficient emphasis is given to the observation of teaching in the department's improvement plan.

87. The inspection examined A and AS-level courses in physics.

Standards and achievement

88. Students' A-level examination performance over the last four years has been above average in comparison with national averages, except for 2001 when it was average. However over the period, all students entered have obtained pass grades and some, high grades. In this respect, performance has been maintained from the last inspection. A strength of most students' examination performance is the high score obtained in the practical component of the examination. In 2000, four of the five students obtained an A grade for the practical exam which followed the pattern for 1999. Students' performance in the new AS examination in 2001 was well above national averages. School analysis indicates that, on average, these students achieved three quarters of a grade higher than that predicted on the basis of their prior attainment. The recruitment of students into AS physics has improved significantly over the last two years. Standards observed in lessons in Years 12 and 13 are above average. All students successfully achieve at levels appropriate to their prior attainment. For example, they know how to use the internet to obtain information regarding recent developments in particle physics. They can also make calculations of forces in circular motion to judge the feasibility of action sequences in cartoons and films.

The quality of education

89. Teaching is good or better. Lessons are characterised by the enthusiastic approach of the teachers. Planning is good and resources are well organised and deployed. Apparatus, worksheets and information sheets are well matched to students' learning needs and fuel their application. Teachers encourage different outcomes according to the students' individual potential. Teaching stimulates students' thinking by supporting their application of learning to novel and interesting contexts. For example, in one Year 12 lesson students related their readings about neutrino intensity from the sun to biblical beliefs and made a presentation, using ICT, to other students in a religious education lesson. In this case, the experience allowed students to reflect and make spiritual links to deepen their understanding. A strength of the department is that teachers work well as a team, for example, by sharing the tasks of writing schemes of work to revise the curriculum. Tests, teachers' marking of work and the feedback they give students, all help to lever up standards. The effectiveness of all these strategies is strengthened because they are consistently applied by the teachers.
90. Students respond well to, and appreciate, the variety of teaching approaches and the learning experiences provided. The quality of students' notes and the selections of marked assessments and practical investigation write-ups sampled indicate that students have good understanding of topics. Despite the variation in the standard of organisation of their coursework files, students have responded well to the responsibility given to them to maintain a revision resource. Students' use of *Word* and *Excel* for presenting and analysing results in coursework supports their development of ICT skills. The relationships between students and teachers are strong. They underpin students' confidence in their teachers and their positive

response to the teaching. This in turn strengthens students' belief in themselves as effective learners.

Leadership and management

91. The physics department is well led. This is illustrated by the improvements made for resourcing the new AS and A-level courses. The construction of a system for rigorous on-going assessment and effective monitoring of individual students' progress is also an improvement. More formal planning, monitoring and review is still to be developed. This leads to some missed opportunities for further improvement. For example, the department is aware of its success in increased recruitment and retention of students, an important factor in the light of the small size of the sixth form overall. It has not analysed the reasons for this success with a view to further improvement, or to sharing strategies with other departments. The lack of clearly articulated, long-term planning priorities with associated funding and timescales detracts from the department's overall improvement. Having such a plan will help ensure that the challenge for the department to maintain high standards of progress and attainment, with increased student numbers studying both AS and A-level, is met.

BUSINESS

BUSINESS EDUCATION

Overall, provision in business education is **very good**.

Strengths

- Attainment at the end of both Years 12 and 13 is well above average. Students make impressive progress on all business courses.
- All of the teaching seen was good and some was very good. Teachers have high expectations of their students and help them to set and reach ambitious learning targets.
- Lessons and schemes of work are very well planned. Students gain greatly from having efficiently organised learning opportunities.
- Students are taught how to use new technology effectively to support and extend their studies.
- The subject area is very well managed. Three major new syllabuses have been successfully introduced since September 2000.

Areas for improvement

- Some students who take business courses receive insufficient support for analytical and evaluative writing and for giving reasoned spoken answers to questions.

92. The focus of the inspection was on AS/A-level business and economics and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) business courses.

Standards and achievement

93. Business education was not reported on in the last inspection report. Since 1996, results in the A-level business and economics course have remained consistently well above the national average. The pass rate has been almost 100 per cent and the

proportion of higher grades (A and B) has been high. The results of the first AS-level examinations taken by Year 12 students in the summer term of 2001 were good with three of the nine candidates attaining higher grades. The four students who took the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in business up to 2001 also achieved well, one achieving a merit and three a distinction. Students achieved especially high marks in coursework, thanks to very well organised and supportive tuition from teachers. The retention rate on business courses has been good and a sizeable proportion of students has gone on to study for degrees in business, economics or accountancy.

94. The evidence seen from work in lessons and in students' files during the inspection shows that the high standards achieved at A-level in the past are being maintained in the new A2 course in the current Year 13. Equally, the present Year 13 students who are taking the new AVCE course are working very well in class and are continuing the tradition of high standards secured in the former GNVQ course. In a Year 13 AVCE lesson students were able to provide useful examples of contrasting trading environments in various parts of the European Union. In an A2 lesson, students were proficient at analysing the effects of changes in consumer demand in elastic and inelastic markets. Many students are very capable users of ICT to process and present work. They make extensive use of the internet to gather contemporary examples of business trends. However, in the lessons seen, students were given relatively little scope to develop their reasoning and deductive skills through oral presentations or classroom debate.
95. Students also achieve well in Year 12 lessons. Many of them have adapted to the AS-level and AVCE course requirements quickly and are enjoying their studies. They particularly like the topicality and relevance of the subject. A greater number of students have been attracted to the business courses this year than ever before. Some of these students have relatively weak literacy skills and find analytical writing difficult. They need a lot of help to develop the ability to justify, classify and summarise ideas and facts.

The quality of education

96. The lessons sampled during the inspection indicate that teaching in business education in the sixth form is consistently good and sometimes very good. Teachers have high expectations of their students and encourage them to aim for ambitious personal learning targets. Teachers present facts and concepts with great clarity. They give students interesting tasks to complete and clear, unambiguous advice on how to improve further. Students are provided with detailed mark schemes and are encouraged to participate fully in the assessment of their own work. As a consequence they know what level they are currently working at and how they could achieve a higher grade. This produces a culture of self-improvement that has enabled some students to discover new talents and to prepare themselves well for university life. Teachers are exceptionally good at helping students who experience difficulties in completing coursework assignments or who lose confidence in their capacity to succeed. However, in the lessons seen, teachers sometimes discussed case studies of actual businesses with insufficient visual or statistical information to give students something concrete to which they could refer.

Leadership and management

97. Business education is very well led and managed. The syllabuses used have been very well selected to meet the learning needs of the students. Lessons are well prepared with plenty of supportive literature. Since 1996 the subject has been taught in a well-appointed specialist room. New technology has been used prolifically and effectively to support and extend learning. As a consequence of effective teaching, leadership and management high standards of attainment have been maintained. Many students make better than predicted progress between the start of Year 12 and the end of Year 13. The subject is attracting increasing numbers of students.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- The very good quality of teaching and the very good level of teachers' subject knowledge. This promotes effective learning and high standards.
- The department is well led and managed. This supports the positive ethos of high achievement and promotes students' very good attitudes to art and design.
- The good links teachers make to the work of artists support students' own work.
- Students understand how to improve their work because teachers model techniques effectively and give students clear criteria against which to judge their work.
- The teaching of basic skills, e.g. observational drawing, is very strong and this supports students in the development of their own creative ideas.
- The use of ICT as a medium in art and design is substantially extending the range of opportunities in art and design for students.

Areas for improvement

- The department lacks a systematic approach to evaluating its work and planning further development.
- Currently the numbers of students opting for art and design in the sixth form are low.
- The sixth form timetable arrangements do not currently allow each group to be taught as a whole cohesive unit.

98. The inspection looked at art and design A-level. One lesson was observed in each of Year 12 and Year 13.

Standards and achievement

99. Over the past four years results in A-level art and design have varied. Over the same period of time numbers of students opting to follow the A-level art and design course have been maintained at a largely satisfactory level. Currently, however, there are only two students in Year 12. The results in 2000 were above the national average. Despite all eight candidates having passed, the most recent results were below the

national average. They were disappointing as only one candidate attained a higher B grade and all candidates were graded lower than the school had expected, given their prior attainment. AS-level results were also below average in 2001. The picture was similar to that of A-level. All twelve candidates passed but no higher grades were achieved. However, the evidence from work seen in lessons during the inspection shows that standards of work have recovered and, overall, are now once again above the national average.

100. Students are achieving as well as they can. In Year 13 they are confident in the use of a variety of media and are able to use the visual elements effectively to produce strong images based on a secure foundation of observational drawing skills. The use of ICT is a strength in the department and students exploit the potential of this media in a variety of ways including picture manipulation, animation and *PowerPoint* presentations. The use of sketch books for research purposes is excellent and for some students is outstanding. The best students reflect a mature approach to the collation and use of relevant information which is then used to develop a range of creative ideas. Year 13 students use the work of other artists very well to enhance and develop their own studies, for example, the study of William Morris leads to the sensitive use of pattern and colour in silk screen printing. Many students in Year 13 approach their work with great maturity and some develop paintings which are full of symbolic meaning.
101. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course but are achieving as much as can be expected. They are beginning to use new media with increasing confidence, for example, in their sensitive use of water colour. Students display a growing understanding of composition and are starting to apply this effectively to their paintings.

The quality of education

102. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. Lessons are effectively planned with well structured tasks that support the achievement of high standards through the development of key skills such as observational drawing. Teachers use clear demonstrations and well focused interventions to help students understand more clearly how to improve their work. Students understand how their work is assessed and know what to do to improve it because teachers make assessment criteria clear and have very good subject knowledge. This enables them to challenge and support the development of students' ideas effectively. Good relationships and high expectations mean that students respond positively to the support and guidance provided by teachers and strive to do the best they can.
103. Students have excellent attitudes to art and design. They enjoy the subject and display a mature approach to their work. Students are very articulate and talk with confidence and real insight about their own work and the work of other artists. They show great pride in their work and apply intellectual creativity to solving problems in their drawings and paintings. They reflect carefully on decisions made and show initiative, taking responsibility for their work and persevering when tasks become difficult. The current difficulties of timetabling have meant that the two Year 12 students are taught at different times. This lessens the opportunities open to them to share, discuss and

debate ideas.

Leadership and management

- 104 The department is well led and managed. The head of department provides a clear vision for the department and leads with conviction and commitment. The department has a positive ethos of self-reflection and of the achievement of high standards for all students. The current improvement plan identifies an appropriate range of priorities but some of these do not have clear success criteria or monitoring and evaluation methods identified. There is no long-term plan to guide the future work of the department, for example, evaluating the weak uptake in 2001, planning a counter-strategy for future cohorts and improving the timetable for the current students, when they move into Year 13. The department has maintained the strengths identified in the previous inspection and has the clear capacity to manage further improvements very effectively.

DRAMA (THEATRE STUDIES)

Provision in the current A-level theatre studies course is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- No significant strengths in theatre studies have been identified.

Areas for improvement

- Students did not achieve to their potential in A-level theatre studies in 2001.
- Weaknesses in some of the teaching of theatre studies are still to be resolved.
- Currently the numbers of students taking A-level theatre studies are low.

105. The focus of the inspection was limited to the A-level theatre studies course. The course is taught by two teachers. Only one lesson was able to be observed.

Standards and achievement

106. In the past three years, numbers of students taking theatre studies A-level have been low, which makes comparison with national averages inappropriate. Results have fluctuated. In 1999, nine out of the eleven candidates passed, three with a high (A or B) grade. In 2000, all the three candidates passed, one with an A grade, but in 2001, the three candidates were all graded N.
107. Standards observed in the A-level theatre studies course in the sixth form were well below average. Students lacked confidence. They were unable to retell events or recall understandings from the play being studied adequately or to read the text with appropriate expression. Progress within the lesson observed was limited.

Quality of education

108. In the lesson observed, teaching was unsatisfactory because students were not helped to understand the text sufficiently well to be able to express their ideas, perceptions and views with confidence. Partly, this was due to the small size of the group, one of whom has only recently joined the school. With so few students, the flow of ideas did not come easily, students relying too much on the teacher. However, it was also partly

due to some of the teaching, which did not make use of current drama teaching practices and so did not improve students' insecure understanding and confidence. The range of opportunities for imaginative development or intellectual learning was limited in this particular lesson. However, provision for theatre visiting is good, with up to six trips to challenging and appropriate productions each year.

Leadership and management

109. Managers and others within the school and department have not worked sufficiently to resolve the weaknesses in some of the teaching by observing and advising more closely and by reviewing the arrangements for recruiting larger teaching groups for drama. There is an urgent need to make a strategic plan which prioritises increasing numbers, improving weaknesses in teaching by sharing good practice and improving standards at A-level.

HUMANITIES

GEOGRAPHY

The overall provision for geography is **very good**.

Strengths

- Students achieve very well. Many students achieved grades above those predicted and expected by the school.
- Learning is very good because students have an excellent understanding of how to improve.
- Leadership and management are very good. This is because the head of department shows clear educational direction.
- Assessment is excellent because it is positive and encouraging. It also clearly identifies what needs to be done to improve geography in the school.
- Attitudes to geography are excellent. Students are very committed to do well.

Areas for improvement

- Plans for the systematic development of ICT skills, knowledge and understanding related to geography are not yet sufficiently implemented.
- The retention rates during sixth form are disappointing.

110. The inspection concentrated on the A and AS-level courses in Years 12 and 13.

Standards and achievement

111. Over the last three years, students' attainment at A-level has been well above the national and similar school averages. This is an improvement since the last inspection. In the period 1999-2001, all students except one reached either A or B grade. This is unusually high. Although the numbers of students who do not complete the A-level courses falls within national averages, there are still too many and the department does not have systematic strategies to ensure better retention of students. The achievement of students who complete the courses is very good as many gain grades above those predicted and expected by the school. These standards have been maintained in the new AS-level course. Results for 2001 show that all students passed. There is no difference in performance of pupils of differing genders and ethnic backgrounds. These successes at A-level, and good results in GCSE have improved recruitment to the AS-level course in 2001. As a consequence, many students, including those from an ethnic minority background, regularly go on to geography or geography-related courses at university.

112. Standards seen in lessons reflect the successes in recent examinations. The standards of geographical enquiry are very high with all students attaining an A grade for their coursework in 2001. The range of studies is varied and students work with interest, applying a good number of data analysis strategies, some very complex. Students' analysis is thorough and they are able to interpret data to a very high standard. Students' literacy skills help them to write extended pieces. However, it is above all the consistent practice students have in geographical enquiry and extended writing and teachers' rigorous assessments, that contribute to students' success overall. These able students' knowledge and understanding of geographical patterns and processes are above expectations. This is largely a result of the effective GCSE teaching they received in Years 10 and 11. Their place knowledge is good. A deeper understanding of the geographical links between places and themes and more sophisticated powers of description are less well developed because teachers do not plan regular use of high quality visual images, maps and atlases.

Quality of education

113. Teaching and learning are very good because the teaching is consistently good or better. Teachers have high expectations and the students respond both in lessons and during self-study and homework time. Teachers know their subject well and the relationships between students and teacher are excellent. This enables students to discuss geographical theories confidently and thoroughly, and apply them to their own experiences of the West Midlands. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on central areas of cities, students could draw on previous work at GCSE and A-level and openly

asked and responded to questions. This clarified their understanding. Regular, high quality, subject-specific assessment, enables the teachers to have detailed knowledge of the students. In consequence, students understand how to improve their work in geography. Furthermore, key skills are integrated into their work throughout the course, for which students undertake a range of challenging activities. This stands students in good stead for higher education and the world of work. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on river hydrology, the teacher shared criteria for an effective seminar as well as the criteria for good geographical research into the factors affecting hydrology of rivers in different parts of the world. This enabled students to present their findings professionally as well as to develop deeper insight into social, economic and environmental issues. Students value this high quality experience in geography very highly.

Leadership and management

114. The department is very effectively led and managed because the head of department shows clear educational direction. The development plan is well written and is clearly based on excellent data analysis and professional judgement using this analysis of what can be made better. The vision for the subject is clear and monitoring of standards is rigorous. There is good teamwork in curriculum development, planning and the implementation of improvements. Geography makes a rich contribution to the life of the school through a range of fieldwork visits, lectures at the Dudley branch of the Geographical Association and conferences at higher education institutions. The learning resources have been well chosen, with a good range of textbooks and journals. The access that students have to these resources at both school and home helps to keep standards high. A good range of maps is deployed but there is insufficient use of visual images and room for more systematic development of ICT through the course. Nevertheless, the high quality subject leadership has made a significant impact on improving the department.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- The A/AS-level results for English for 2001 are well above average; this reverses a slight declining trend.
- Teaching of English at all levels is good or better and is sometimes outstanding. Teachers know their subject extremely well and both challenge and inspire students
- Teachers' marking and assessment is meticulous. It ensures that students have a clear understanding of their progress and helps them improve and do their best
- English is well led. Teachers have a clear philosophy, a wide range of complementary skills and an energetic commitment to pupils' learning
- Homework is used well. Students are very productive and independent and follow up by teachers is rigorous

Areas for improvement

- A wider range of techniques to promote problem solving and group learning strategies is

required.

- Opportunities to use ICT in ways other than for research are insufficiently provided.
- The English curriculum on offer in the sixth form is not attracting enough boys.

115. The focus of the inspection was on English courses, but work in key skills communications were also sampled.

Standards and achievement

116. Results at A/AS-level English Literature since 1998 have been consistently above national average. In 2001, most students gained an A or B grade and for most students, this was their highest grade in any subject. The GCSE post 16 results in 2001 were an improvement on the previous year and, over time, they have generally been in line with national averages. Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.

117. In lessons and in coursework seen during the inspection, A-level students in Year 13 are achieving standards that are above average, as a result of challenging tasks. They respond by working hard. In one lesson, students responded very maturely to severe criticism from the teacher for an essay done inadequately by all the class. They reviewed the teacher's individual comments, worked hard in the lesson and were able to explain the development in their understanding of Jonson's use of satire as a result. In Year 12, although only a little way into the course, students are already showing a good understanding of the authors' intentions and techniques in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In lessons, some students are still somewhat reticent and would benefit from more structured development of their oracy skills. In GCSE English lessons, standards for students re-taking the examination are average and below. However, students make good progress, in line with expectations for this course based on students' earlier GCSE results.

Quality of education

118. Teaching is very good. Teaching seen was never less than good and was sometimes outstanding. The principle features of the good teaching are:

- teachers' very good knowledge of the subject;
- the high levels of intellectual challenge and pace in the lessons;
- excellent use of marking and assessment that enables teachers to intervene precisely to promote improvement;
- good scheme and lesson planning; and
- good use of homework.

Teachers also create a very stimulating learning environment. In a lesson on *All Quiet on the Western Front* the display of photographs, documents, maps and quotations provided contextual information relevant to the period. 'Word walls' of advanced, subject-specific vocabulary were clearly presented. This helped students assimilate information and use sophisticated technical language to improve their work.

119. In all A/AS lessons, students of both genders and all ethnic backgrounds had equal access to the work. Female students, who are in the majority in almost all groups, tended to express tentative or emerging ideas more confidently in discussion. The male students however, successfully produced a structured synthesis of a discussion

for presentation. In all the discussions inspectors had with students, it was clear that they have a secure awareness of their progress and attainment. They know precisely what features of their work need to be improved and how to go about it. They are able to explain what they have learnt and they can identify and appreciate the teachers' contribution. Students in both year groups are very conscientious. They plan, research, respond to comment on and redrafting their written work. In the GCSE lesson, the students' application and motivation were good. Their confidence improved as a result of very detailed, well-planned study of a media text that built on their prior understandings. They were able to analyse relevant newspaper articles and other data and plan their essays effectively.

120. There are two areas in which learning in lessons could be improved:
- the integration into lessons of more activities requiring individual research, structured group investigation and problem-solving; and
 - the development of a wider range of ICT opportunities such as use of interactive CD-ROMs and *PowerPoint* presentations
- In this area, A/AS-level planning could adopt some of the good practice already embedded into the key skills programme.

Leadership and management

121. Leadership and management are good. Good teaching and learning are the result. The philosophical clarity and energetic commitment of the leadership team create a strong, coherent departmental view of the subject. The intellectual scholarship of the head of department sets a high standard of professional development, to which the individual members contribute complementary and creative skills. The rigour with which examination papers, boards' requirements, results and standards are analysed is a significant contributor to good outcomes in English at all levels and is testament to the commitment to improving standards. Two areas of relative weakness were noted:
- So far, the department has not documented its internal analysis of attainment by ethnic minority and other factors such as GCSE examination centre.
 - Currently the English curriculum on offer in the sixth form is not attracting enough boys, and the reasons have not been systematically evaluated.