

INSPECTION REPORT

ST BENET BISCOP CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Bedlington

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122367

Headteacher: Mr Nick Bowen

Reporting inspector: Dr R G Wallace
1050

Dates of inspection: 14 – 18 January 2002

Inspection number: 242892

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 13 - 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Ridge Terrace
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Northumberland

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Kevin Robson

Date of previous inspection: February 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1050	R Wallace	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities Special educational needs	What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements How well are pupils or students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9002	D Ashton	Lay inspector	Community links	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
4922	M Driver	Team inspector	Science	
14573	H Wareing	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
27984	J Whitehall	Team inspector	Mathematics	
20421	E Raitt	Team inspector	English Drama	
31129	J Pickering	Team inspector	Art	
1759	G Edwards	Team inspector	Design and technology	
5819	P Gorring	Team inspector	Geography	
23480	M Harding	Team inspector	History	
23550	M Blewitt	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students
18589	M King	Team inspector	Music	
2458	A Hamilton	Team inspector	Physical education	
31146	P Brooks	Team inspector post 16	English	
22695	R Cardinal	Team inspector post 16	Sociology	
Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities

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4689	M Christian	Team inspector post 16	Information and communication technology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Benet Biscop is a voluntary aided, Roman Catholic comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 13-18, with 925 pupils at the time of the inspection. The sixth form is larger than in most schools. The school serves a very wide catchment area, admitting mostly the children from a small number of Roman Catholic middle schools, but also a significant proportion of others. The attainment of pupils when arriving in Year 9 is judged by the school to be average overall. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average, whilst the proportion with statements of special educational needs is about average. Only one of the few pupils from ethnic minorities needs support in learning English. The school serves a stable population, with few pupils arriving or leaving other than at the start or end of their courses. There is social deprivation in parts of the very large area from which the school's pupils come, although the number of pupils taking free school meals is quite low.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Benet Biscop is a good school, well led and managed with good teaching, above average test and examination results in 2001 and very well-behaved pupils who learn well. It has a caring approach towards its pupils and places a strong emphasis on their moral development. There are some weaknesses that have not yet been resolved. Attendance is unsatisfactory but the school is tackling the problem with vigour. There are some weaknesses in the curriculum, including inadequate provision for the development of information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Some of the accommodation is poor. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The test and examination results in 2001 were good.
- Attainment in English, art and business studies examinations is consistently high.
- Teaching is good overall.
- The pupils are very well behaved and relationships are good.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- Pastoral support for pupils is strong.
- Parents generally approve of the school's work.
- The strong senior management team knows the problems that need to be tackled and is determined to tackle them.

What could be improved

- Attendance is below the national average and unsatisfactory.
- There are weaknesses in the leadership of some subject departments.
- The school does not develop the pupils' ICT skills sufficiently and is not fulfilling National Curriculum requirements.
- Standards in Spanish and design and technology are consistently unsatisfactory.
- Some lessons, particularly in Year 9, are insufficiently challenging for abler pupils.
- Accommodation for the sixth form is unacceptable in size and quality.
- The resources for learning are inadequate in the learning resources centre (library), art, geography, music and modern foreign languages.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in February 1997. The 2001 results were a considerable improvement on those of 2000 and took the school above the national average in Key Stage 3 SATs, at GCSE and GNVQ, and in line with the national average at A level. Attendance was below the national average in 1997 and remains so. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good in 1997 and behaviour is now very good. The school has responded well to all but one of the key issues of the previous report. Staff training and

more varied teaching methods are raising the pupils' learning skills. Monitoring of standards is now systematic and routine. There is now no imbalance of funding between the sixth form and the rest of the school, and resources for learning are adequate in the majority of subjects. Improvements in the quality of teaching in modern foreign languages and geography have been made but they are insufficient. Information to parents about the pupils' progress is now good, except in ICT, where formal assessments are still not made, despite this having been raised as an important matter in the 1997 report.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	B	C	B	B
A levels/AS levels	B	C	C	

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

The results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 (SATs) in 2001 were above the national average overall and above the average for similar schools (those with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals). English results were well above average, science above average and mathematics average. There were similar differences between subjects at GCSE in 2001, with English, art and business studies doing well, as in previous years, and the pupils' achievements in design and technology and Spanish being well below what the pupils achieved in their other subjects. Drama and music results were also unsatisfactory. A level results in 2001 were similar to the national average, whilst GNVQ Advanced Level results were higher than the national average. There has been an upward trend in the SAT and GCSE results. There are differences in the results of boys and girls, but with no consistent pattern over the years. The school's targets for GCSE in 2001 were met or exceeded. The targets set for 2002 are lower, but are challenging when the predicted results for the year group are taken into account.

During the inspection, above average standards were seen in English, art and physical education. Below average standards were seen in design and technology, some modern language classes, ICT in Years 9-11 and both geography and sociology in the sixth form. Throughout the school most pupils make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs and the most able pupils make good progress, although there are lessons where some of the latter do not, mainly in some Year 9 classes.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The pupils have good attitudes and learn well, although some are passive, taking little responsibility for their own learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The pupils behave very well and can be trusted with confidence to move around the school with the minimum of supervision.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are good. The pupils are considerate towards each other and bullying is rare.
Attendance	Attendance is below the national average and unsatisfactory.

The school is conscious of the need to improve attendance and has set itself a demanding target. Its actions brought improvement in the term before the inspection.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good overall. It is very good or excellent in one in five lessons and at least satisfactory in all but six per cent, with little difference between the key stages. The teaching of English, literacy and mathematics is good at all stages; that of science is good in Year 9 and in the sixth form, and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Number skills are taught well in mathematics lessons and occasionally in other subjects, but there is not a well-developed school policy to promote numeracy throughout the school.

The teachers' good knowledge of their pupils, their support for individuals and their combination of good relationships with firm expectations of behaviour and progress are amongst the main strengths of the teaching. Much marking is good, but there are variations in the quality, sometimes even within departments. The weaknesses in teaching are few, in some cases aberrations by teachers who otherwise taught well, but occasionally persistent weaknesses that have not been tackled.

There has been an improvement in the independent learning skills of pupils, although this remains patchy. Overall, the pupils, whatever their starting point, make good progress and achieve well. The pupils taking drama examinations learn well in class but their achievements are not then reflected in examination results, a weakness to be tackled.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is satisfactory overall and meets national requirements except for ICT. There is a good range of post-16 courses.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision is very good; the pupils make good progress both in separate classes and in their lessons as a whole.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The provision is good overall. The school provides very well for its pupils' moral development and well for their spiritual and social development. Its provision for their cultural development is satisfactory overall but there is insufficient emphasis on the cultures of other lands.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares well for its pupils and has good procedures for assessing their attainment and progress.

The school works well with parents to promote their children's welfare and progress. The sixth form curriculum offers wide opportunities for students to continue their studies at the school. The development of the pupils' ICT skills in Years 9-11 is inadequate and does not meet national requirements.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The new headteacher and his senior colleagues provide clear and good leadership. There are some weaknesses as well as many strengths at head of department level. The school's development plan lacks a sharp focus.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are experienced and committed. They monitor the school's performance well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is a strong feature of the school, with regular monitoring of lessons and much analysis of data.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its resources well to achieve its aims.

The staff are well qualified for their roles and sufficient to meet the school's needs. Aspects of the accommodation are poor. Most departments have adequate resources for learning, but there are shortages in some. The senior staff are aware of the weaknesses that they need to tackle, which are in planning and in the management of some departments. The school applies the principles of best value when purchasing equipment or services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school and make good progress. • Teaching is good and expectations high. • Behaviour is good. 	A minority of parents express concerns about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on their children's progress. • How closely the school works with them. • Extra-curricular activities.

The inspectors agree with parents about the strengths that they have identified. They find the reports on pupils satisfactory, although not containing the teachers' assessments on ICT standards. The range of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory, given the high proportion of pupils who have to catch school buses at the end of school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than in most schools with 262 students at the time of the inspection. It has grown substantially in recent years and is self-contained, having no courses shared with other providers. The number of students taking GCE A level was a little higher than the national average in 2001. The number of students taking Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) was four times the national average and the number taking GNVQ Intermediate Level courses double the national average. There has been a big growth in the number of students combining GCE and AVCE courses. An average grade at GCSE of 5 (equivalent to an average of C grades in all subjects taken) is expected for admission to GCE A level courses and an average of 4 points for AVCE. In 2001 72 per cent of Year 11 pupils stayed into the sixth form, with only three students leaving the school to take courses elsewhere that were available at the school and only three students joining from other schools. As in the rest of the school, there are few students from ethnic minorities and a below average number entitled to free school meals.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The large sixth form achieved good results in 2001 with GCE A level results similar to the national average and GNVQ Advanced Level results higher than the national average. A high proportion of Year 11 students stay into the sixth form where a wide variety of courses is available. Despite the high overall achievement of most students, a few begin courses but do not sustain their attendance or do not make satisfactory progress. In the autumn term 2001, eight students left the sixth form, including four in Year 13.

Strengths

- A level results have matched or exceeded the national average in recent years.
- Results in examinations and in lessons have been consistently above average in English, art and business studies.
- There is a good range of courses at GCE A level, AVCE and GNVQ Intermediate.
- Challenging teaching develops the students as independent learners in history, ICT and GNVQ health and social care.

What could be improved

- Attendance is below the national average for sixth form students and is unsatisfactory.
- Many students are dissatisfied with guidance on admission to the sixth form and higher education courses, and there is some high absence by some students and some failures.
- The common room and study facilities are poor.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Unsatisfactory. Current work under new leadership is better than in recent examination results, which have been below average nationally and for the school.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Biology	Good. Standards in examinations are average. The students have a sound grasp of knowledge and concepts, teaching overall is good and the subject is led well. Some practical work is insufficiently challenging.
Chemistry	Satisfactory. Standards of work in lessons and examinations are average. Much teaching is good and the students are interested and keen to succeed.
Design and technology	Unsatisfactory. Examination results in graphics have been unsatisfactory; those in design and technology average. The work seen is of average standard or below. The impact of using ICT is beginning to be beneficial.
Business	Good. Examination results and the work seen are above average. Teaching is good. The subject is well led and the students are keen.
Information and communication technology	Good. Students following a good range of courses have a sound grasp of concepts and benefit from good teaching. No candidates have yet been presented for A level examinations.
Art	Good. Very good standards are achieved in lessons and examination results have been consistently high and amongst the school's best.
Drama	Satisfactory. Small numbers of students have been entered for A level with generally below-average results. The teaching is mostly satisfactory with some good features and the standards of work seen are higher than in examinations.
Geography	Unsatisfactory. Examination results have been consistently unsatisfactory. Some of the teaching is now better, but some unsatisfactory teaching remains.
History	Good. Examination results are average but current teaching is very good overall, with challenging tasks set the students who mostly rise well to the demands of the lessons.
Sociology	Unsatisfactory. Staffing the subject has been difficult, examination results have been consistently unsatisfactory, some of the present teaching is unsatisfactory.
English	Good. A level results have been consistently above average and amongst the best in the school. The subject is well led and well taught. The students make good progress.
French	Satisfactory. Results have improved and teaching is now mostly good. The number of students choosing the subject has increased.

Lessons and the students' work were also seen in physics, health and social care, media studies, Spanish, physical education and core studies (personal, social and health education). Most of the work seen was average for the course being followed. Most of the health and social care teachers are contributing significantly to the students' development as independent learners. Media studies examination results are good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The procedures for guiding students on courses in the sixth form and higher education are satisfactory, but a high proportion of students are dissatisfied with them in practice. Individual students are supported well.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form is satisfactorily managed. As in the rest of the school, expectations are high, targets for improvement are set, standards are monitored and students have equal access to a varied curriculum. A significant number of students, in both Years 12 and 13, have unsatisfactory attendance and the school has not acted successfully to tackle this.

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 well taught and their work is thoroughly assessed. • Teachers are accessible. • They are helped to work independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The common room and study facilities are poor. • The school is unresponsive to their views. • Advice about future options is unsatisfactory.

The inspectors agree with the favourable comments, although there are lessons where more independent working could have been encouraged. They also agree that the accommodation for the sixth form is poor. Relations between sixth formers and teachers are good. The dress code is generally applied quite lightly except for the school's dislike of denim jackets. Inspectors found that the provision for advice on future options is satisfactory for those going on to higher education, but not so for students leaving after a one-year course. They were not able to reach a judgement on the quality of the advice given.

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

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The attainment of the pupils as assessed by external tests in 2001 was above average in the Key Stage 3 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) and at GCSE, average at GCE A level and above average at GNVQ Advanced Level. There have been considerable fluctuations in the results in recent years, mostly between average and above average. There have also been variations between subjects, with some subjects (English, art and business studies) doing consistently well and others (resistant materials, Spanish, and, at A level, geography and sociology) doing consistently poorly.
2. In the SATs taken by 14-year-olds at the end of Year 9, the results have varied greatly, from well above average in 1999 to average in 2000 and above average in 2001. The 2001 results were also above average when compared with similar schools (those with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals). There were significant differences between the three subjects, with English well above average, science above average, and mathematics average. The mathematics overall results were brought down by the lower numbers of pupils achieving Level 6 and above than in the other two subjects.
3. At GCSE the school's results have been average or above average in recent years when compared with all schools nationally. In 2001 the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in five or more subjects was average, but when the grades of all pupils are taken into account, the results were above average, both for all schools and when compared with similar schools.
4. There were considerable differences between subjects in the 2001 GCSE results, with pupils doing particularly well in English, art and business studies, but achieving below average results in design and technology, drama, religious education, Spanish and food studies. The history results for pupils gaining A*-C were a little below average, but within that result the number of pupils gaining A* and A was high. The results in mathematics, science and French were similar to the national results. A more detailed analysis of the 2000 results shows that some departments enabled their candidates to do better in their subjects than the same pupils did in the average of all their other subjects. The effective subjects were English, mathematics, science, art, business studies, geography and history. Subjects where pupils did not achieve as well as in their other subjects were design and technology, Spanish and religious education. An analysis of the 2001 results, which compares attainment at the beginning of Year 10 with GCSE performance in the different subjects, shows that English, mathematics, art, business studies and history again enabled their pupils to do better than in their other subjects. Again, it was design and technology, Spanish and religious education where the pupils did not do well. In 2001 the pupils taking music and drama also did less well than in their other subjects.
5. The trend (rate of improvement) in SAT results at the school was lower than that found nationally until 2001 when the much improved results allowed the rate to exceed the national. At GCSE the trend at the school matched the national trend until 2000 and then exceeded it in 2001. There have been inconsistent patterns in the differences between boys' and girls' achievements in examinations, with the attainment of the pupils themselves varying by gender and with no evidence of any school factor influencing results.

6. Schools are required by statute to set targets for GCSE achievement. In 2001 the school almost hit its target of 54 per cent of pupils achieving A*-C grades in five or more subjects and exceeded its targets for the average points score and for pupils achieving at least one subject at grades A*-G. The GCSE targets set for 2002 are significantly lower than both the targets and the achievements of 2001, indicating the school's expectation that GCSE results in 2002 will not match the high of 2001. The targets are, however, based on the pupils achieving significantly better than forecast on the basis of their national test results two years earlier.
7. The standards of the pupils' work seen during the inspection, judged in lessons and by sampling written work, largely reflect their test and examination results of recent years. In Year 9 (Key Stage 3) and Years 10-11 (Key Stage 4) standards are broadly in line with the national average. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of good teaching and the support that they receive in some lessons. The more able pupils mostly do well, although there are some lessons, especially in Year 9 where they are not sufficiently challenged to make the progress of which they are capable. The pupils are working at below the expected level in music in Year 9, arriving at the school with several key skills of the National Curriculum not adequately promoted in their previous schools, but they make good progress during lessons. Despite some good teaching, the pupils' achievements in music lessons have not yet led to significant numbers following examination courses.
8. There are variations between subjects, largely the same as those in test and examination results. The standards of ICT in Years 9-11 are a cause for concern. Pupils enter the school with widely differing experiences of using computers in their middle schools. Their skill levels are not carefully assessed on arrival, nor are they systematically developed in Year 9. The development of skills is insufficient in Years 10-11 unless the pupils opt for the GNVQ ICT course. By Year 11 most pupils have not reached the expected standards.
9. Standards of literacy are average overall, with the standards of writing above average. The school made a late but vigorous start in the promotion of literacy across the curriculum. Most subjects have responded well, and progress is being made in the improvement of the pupils' listening skills. The pupils now have more opportunities to speak and listen to each other in lessons than at the time of the previous inspection, and their speaking skills have improved. Number skills are satisfactory overall. There is no up-to-date school policy for the development of numeracy in subjects and little systematic enhancement of number skills in most subjects, although several subjects make good use of these skills.
10. At GCE A level, attainment has varied greatly in recent years, sometimes matching the national average, sometimes exceeding and sometimes falling short. In 2001 the overall results were similar to the national average. There were wide variations between subjects. The subjects enabling their students to achieve more of the higher grades A and B were chemistry and art, whilst there were low proportions of these higher grades in biology, drama, geography, mathematics and design and technology. An analysis undertaken for the school shows that in 2001 the subjects where the students made the greatest progress from GCSE were English literature, art and business studies. The subjects where they made the least progress were French, statistics, Spanish and Christian theology, and in the AS courses in design and technology and Spanish. Over the last three years, the best subject has been English literature and the least successful have been sociology, geography and Spanish. The 2000 GNVQ results at Advanced Level were significantly above the national average.

11. The standards of work seen during the inspection, whilst generally matching those of recent examination results, are overall a little higher than the average course requirements of GCE A level and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE). There is a very wide variation in the attainment of sixth form students preparing for GNVQ Intermediate Level. In geography at A level there are signs of improvement in Year 12, although not in Year 13. In the present Year 12 AVCE group in health and social care there is a very wide range of standards, with some students not yet managing the greater demands of the course at this level and some not attending school regularly. Standards of drama seen during the inspection matched those required by the examination, although no recent results have done so, and there are questions of syllabus and examination technique that require attention.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. The pupils' attitudes to their work, play and extra-curricular activities are good. They are willing to learn and to be taught. This reflects the good teaching and good relationships throughout the school. There is a positive approach to tasks. The pupils respond to their teachers' positive, caring attitudes and demand for courtesy and respect for others. They take a pride in the school, their appearance and the presentation of their work. They make the most of the opportunities provided. They work well together in different groupings and productively on their own.
13. The standards of discipline and behaviour are high. Pupils are polite, courteous and friendly to each other and to adults. They show patience, tolerance and maturity in many situations, for example as they move around the sprawling site. The good relationships that exist between pupils and teachers support very effective learning. No aggressive behaviour towards other pupils was observed. Parents and pupils report that past, isolated incidents have been speedily resolved once they have been brought to the attention of the teachers. The number of fixed-term exclusions is about average, with two permanent exclusions in the last academic year.
14. Pupils with special educational needs show a willingness to learn, responding and behaving well in lessons. The improvement targets for many relate to aspects of personal development, including behaviour, with very effective support from staff. These pupils increase their self-confidence and ability to organise their own work independently. Physically handicapped pupils are very well supported, mix well with other pupils and are fully integrated into the day-to-day life of the school.
15. The pupils grow in maturity as they move up the school, carrying out responsibilities sensibly and thoughtfully. For example, they take their duties as form representatives seriously, fulfilling them willingly and conscientiously. They respond well to the system of awards and certificates for academic, sporting and social achievements.
16. Attendance is below the national average and is unsatisfactory. The school's revised procedures for monitoring absence have improved attendance in the most recent term.

Sixth form

17. Students are very responsible, work well together and provide support for younger pupils. They take part in a peer group tutoring scheme for pupils with weak language and number skills, maturing and learning much themselves in the process. They are attentive and industrious but sometimes appear diffident or passive in lessons. Most willingly undertake role-play in lessons and in this way are increasing their confidence.

18. Attendance is unsatisfactory. There are several students, even in Year 13 A level classes, who do not attend regularly enough to sustain progress. The attendance of several students in the Year 12 health and social care groups makes it unlikely that they will be able to complete course assignments. The school has applied the sanction of withholding the educational maintenance awards, provided as part of a national pilot scheme on a means-tested basis, of up to £30 a week. Students also forego a termly bonus of £50 if they fail to achieve 95 per cent attendance. These benefits and sanctions are not sufficient to improve the attendance of some students, who are insufficiently committed to their courses.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

19. The standards of teaching are good overall, with 94 per cent of lessons taught satisfactorily or better and one in five lessons taught very well or excellently. There is little variation in the quality of teaching by key stages.
20. A strength of the teaching is a combination of very good class management and a dynamic style that produces good work, often from pupils who are quite passive. An example of this was seen in a Year 11 English revision lesson on Simon Armitage poems, when the teacher set challenging tasks and the pupils learned well. There are many classes where pupils are appropriately challenged and made to think, for example in a Year 9 geography lesson on world development. Lessons pitched at an appropriately high level for abler pupils in top sets were seen in several subjects, notably in a Year 11 French lesson on health, conducted by the teacher throughout in French and involving a range of tenses, and in a Year 11 mathematics lesson on problem-solving using linear equations, expanding brackets and factorising. Most teachers make similar demands on the ablest pupils in mixed-ability classes, but this is not always the case, particularly in Year 9. Class teachers mostly work well with the learning support teachers and assistants to enable pupils with special educational needs to make good progress.
21. Most teachers have a high level of subject expertise and prepare their lessons well. A feature of much good teaching is the staff's ability to combine a sympathetic approach with firmness and clear expectations of hard work and concentration from their pupils. This was evident, as one example amongst many, in a Year 9 games lesson on badminton. The teachers know their pupils well and are very responsive to the needs of individuals. Some teachers create attainment groups within mixed-ability classes, most notably in Year 10 ICT lessons, where groups of pupils with similar skills work together and make good progress.
22. There is a variation in the quality and promptness of marking. These are mostly satisfactory and often good, for example in history, with points on what the pupils need to do to improve their next piece of work. Sometimes, however, marking is cursory, with ticks and just a short judgement on the quality of the work without advice on how the pupils can raise their standards. There is sometimes a variation within departments, for example in mathematics and geography, indicating that monitoring is not bringing the weaker markers up to the standards of the best. No assessments of the pupils' standards are made in ICT at the end of Year 9 and there is little evidence to indicate what they can do. Homework is mostly used satisfactorily to support learning in lessons.
23. The weaknesses in teaching, observed in 6 per cent of the lessons seen, were varied and mostly related to individual teachers, although in a few cases the unsatisfactory lessons were aberrations by teachers who otherwise taught well. The pupils in the Year

10 top-set French group did not achieve as well as they should, lacking skill, confidence and knowledge of their own standards. Occasionally the teaching is pitched at the middle level of mixed-ability groups, not meeting the needs of the ablest or less able pupils.

24. Overall, the quality of teaching is good and the many strengths far outweigh the weaknesses.

Sixth form

25. Teaching overall in the sixth form is good. The same strengths are evident in the sixth form as in the rest of the school. The teachers have a high level of subject knowledge and prepare well. In a Year 12 history lesson on an aspect of the French Revolution, for example, the teacher organised the lesson very well, using a profound knowledge of the topic to guide the students. There is a wide variety in teaching methods and this is helpful to the students' learning. Many teachers are using their own substantial training to develop the students' ability to think independently and logically. This was evident, for example, in a Year 12 English lesson on *The Rover*. They are also promoting speaking skills by requiring students to present their ideas in class.
26. Basic teaching weaknesses were seen in some A level geography and sociology lessons. The staffing of sociology has been a difficulty and the consequences for students are evident in the consistently poor examination results. In a Year 12 graphics lesson, a lecture without pauses to check the students' understanding led to inadequate learning. Progress was very slow as a result of dull teaching in a Year 12 health and social care Advanced level lesson. Overall, though, there is a high proportion of good and very good teaching, far outweighing these weaknesses.

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

27. The overall quality and range of learning opportunities offered to pupils are satisfactory, although there are some weaknesses. The curriculum is broad and balanced. The school's curricular aims are successfully fulfilled, provision is inclusive and there is a variety of extra-curricular activities. The tutor period is mostly used well but there is a variety, from the cursory to the serious and devout, and missed opportunities for pastoral work and the development of reading for pleasure. The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements for the provision of ICT for most pupils in Years 9-11.

28. In Year 9 pupils study all the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education, and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Information and communication technology is not, however, timetabled as a discrete subject and many subjects do not include it on a regular planned basis. The pupils' varied previous experience of ICT is not adequately assessed when they arrive at the school, so that there is no continuity from their earlier learning. No provision is made for the systematic development of their ICT skills in Year 9. The provision made in Years 10-11, except for those opting for the GNVQ course, is insufficient to enable the pupils to reach the expected standard by the end of Year 11. There are also omissions of some required ICT skills such as control.
29. The Year 9 timetable arrangements for French and Spanish, and similarly history and geography, undermine progress. Continuity of study is also hindered by some inadequacies in the curricular links with middle schools. It is evident from this inspection that in design and technology and music the pupils arrive at the school with very varied previous experiences and in some cases with inadequate subject knowledge and skills for their age group. There is no local agreement on which of the required units of study in history at Key Stage 3 should be taught in the last two years of middle schools and the first year of upper schools. It is not possible, therefore, to know whether pupils have covered all the required units or have duplicated some. In several subjects, notably design and technology, ICT, geography and music, the pupils arrive at the school with widely different middle school experiences. Local arrangements for reaching agreement on curriculum coverage and the standards expected, in a system where the change of schools does not occur at the end of a National Curriculum key stage, are not working.
30. In Years 10 and 11, in addition to the core subjects and options, the pupils are able to choose two more subjects: GNVQ ICT and a short course in French or Spanish. One hour a week for a language course is insufficient to ensure progress. Design and technology is treated as separate areas rather than a whole. The art curriculum is too narrow. The PSHE programme is comprehensive and is closely linked with the local parishes and careers advisers. All pupils are interviewed and advised on careers and any pupil can ask for additional advice whenever needed. The pupils' learning is enriched by work-related activities.
31. There is a variety of extra-curricular activities, although these are limited by the long distances that some pupils travel and the need to catch school buses at the end of the day. There are teams in many sports, although parents report that practices are sometimes cancelled without adequate notice. There are gymnastics, dance, tennis, badminton and circuit training. About a third of pupils take part in at least one extra-curricular activity in physical education, organised and run by six members of staff. A small number of pupils gain district and county representative honours. There are outdoor activity weeks, trips abroad, revision clubs, choir and band practices. Other activities include field trips, theatre and museum visits. Drama productions and musical evenings are increasing. Some parents and the sixth form expressed dissatisfaction with the level of extra-curricular activities but the inspectors judge these to be satisfactory, given the need for most pupils to catch school buses at the end of the day. The school has good links with the community, with universities and industry. Visiting speakers are welcomed.

32. The school has policies in place to ensure equality of access to all pupils. Evidence from the pupils indicates that these are successfully implemented. Pupils who are unhappy with option choices do have the opportunity to change within time limitations. The pupils are treated as individuals. Provision is made for wheelchair users so that they have access to the curriculum.
33. The school's provision for personal development is of good quality overall and it is firmly set in a context of Christian values, appropriate to its Catholic foundation. The high priority for personal development is shown by its inclusion in planning for key future developments by the school managers and also by many subject leaders.
34. The school's provision for spiritual development is good. There is an ethos in which pupils can grow and flourish. In many lessons there are opportunities for pupils to be inspired by human example and achievement, to experience creativity and to be reflective. Many school gatherings are enriched by music and drama contributions from the pupils, although some of the assemblies seen were more mundane.
35. The pupils' moral development is promoted very well. There is a clear code of conduct, well known by pupils, and a good balance of rewards and sanctions. The school trusts its pupils to a high degree. There are no bells between lessons and the pupils have access to rooms during lunchtimes. The pupils are expected to behave well and they accept the responsibility to do so. The teachers set the tone by their good example and the quality of their relationships with pupils. Assemblies give strong moral messages. Ethical issues are explored in many subjects, for example in the consideration of what is unfair and unjust in several history lessons. In English lessons poetry is the means for learning that racism and stereotyping are wrong, and in geography lessons environmental issues are confronted. Care for others is encouraged, particularly through the fundraising for a range of charities both global and national, and by the annual Christmas cabaret and party for local elderly citizens who take away generous hampers. Many pupils from all years are involved in this. Several elderly people have lunch at school daily as welcome visitors, a practical example for pupils.
36. Provision for the pupils' social development is good. The school is a strong and inclusive community where the most vulnerable pupils with serious physical and medical impairments are well integrated, and all kinds of achievement are applauded. The PSHE programme teaches many aspects of social development well. The work experience programme is of good quality and is valued by the participating pupils. Many opportunities are given for pupils to work together co-operatively in lessons. The opportunities for specific responsibilities are limited but there are elected form representatives in every year. There is a range of visits and fieldwork that provide good social opportunities and widen horizons. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is available through partnership with a neighbouring school.
37. Provision for the pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The cultures of Britain and Europe are taught well, especially in English, modern foreign languages, history and art, and through dance in physical education. The Youth Theatre, choir and other music groups contribute significantly. The local Northumbrian Christian Heritage features well in school life. A stained glass window celebrating the school's patron, St. Benet Biscop, was commissioned for the millennium. It is significant culturally as well as spiritually for the school. Displays of the pupils' own artwork add cultural interest to the corridors. There are many enriching experiences such as the link with the French school in Frontignan, which brings French pupils into school each year. There is, however, insufficient exposure to wider cultural diversity. Music lessons are an exception with the inclusion of African and Indian music, and the school's link with a community in Peru,

which it supports, is also important.

Sixth form

38. In the sixth form there is satisfactory provision of GCE A level and vocational courses at Intermediate and Advanced Levels to meet the interests, aptitudes and needs of the students, all of whom study core studies and key skills. There are opportunities to resit GCSE English, mathematics and science. The sixth form is growing. AVCE is also offered for those who prefer a more vocational course of study. Sometimes AVCE and GCE AS/A level subjects are combined. Intermediate GNVQ is offered in business, health and social care, ICT and leisure and tourism. The school's involvement in a commercial training organisation provides the opportunity for students to take an industrial qualification. There is a work experience element for language and vocational courses. Students are advised about choice of subject, but the proportion of students who drop out of courses or are frequently absent indicates that placement and retention on courses need more rigorous monitoring.
39. Students express dissatisfaction at the range of extra-curricular activities available to them. They do contribute to the school's work, for example by participation in the paired reading scheme, where students are trained to help younger pupils. Sixth formers also help in some language lessons. There are strong links with the universities and students can use many of the university facilities. These are, however, opportunities for sixth formers to contribute to the school's work and to develop their skills, not extra-curricular activities provided by the school for them. The sixth form also has regular social activities, such as an annual barbecue and a leavers' ball, and the opportunity to participate in activities, arranged for the entire school, such as the ski trip. Inspectors judge provision to be satisfactory.
40. Sixth form provision for personal development mirrors the same Christian context and management policies as the main school, but suitably adjusted for mature young people. Spiritual development is promoted well. Some religious education is included in core studies and collective worship continues to be part of the daily experience. Similarly, there are opportunities to be inspired and to enjoy creativity. In some subjects, such as art, the students develop their aesthetic appreciation.
41. Provision for the students' moral development is very good. The students are caring and responsible young people. This was well illustrated through discussion with the head boy and the head girl who, with their deputies, are voted into office by both teachers and students. Similar attitudes are evident in the large number of students who participate in the schemes to provide peer support to younger pupils and undergo training for this role. Students intervene on the buses to resolve incidents with pupils, and the school encourages and welcomes their responsible attitudes towards younger pupils. Moral considerations are an underlying aspect of many lessons. There were very good examples in French conversation lessons, in geography and in a debate by history students on whether *The Terror* during the French Revolution could be justified.

42. The social development of students is good. They rapidly become confident and independent, and the teaching styles in some subjects encourage this effectively. Some students have the initiative to use major libraries in Newcastle for their studies. The Young Business Enterprise Scheme and the research that the students undertake for coursework also promote personal responsibility well, as do the visits to universities for lectures and the opportunities for fieldwork. There are social occasions organised by Year 13 which help to integrate Year 12 students into the sixth form community and there is a leavers' ball. Some of the opportunities for exercising responsibility are indicated under moral development, but despite the high numbers becoming peer mentors, the range is too limited. There is no school council.
43. Cultural provision is satisfactory overall. It is good in a range of subjects for British and European culture but, as in the main school, the development of the students' knowledge of diverse cultures is not sufficient to prepare them well for life in modern Britain. Cultural education is well embedded in art, drama, music, English and modern foreign languages.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

44. The school provides good care and support for its pupils. A disciplined yet friendly atmosphere enables a sensitive and reassuring support system to thrive. Teachers know their individual pupils well and inculcate a strong sense of belonging, with the result that pupils feel able to talk openly about problems and interests to staff and other adults. The quality of teaching is enhanced by this relationship. Professional counselling is available to pupils.
45. There are systematic and effective ways of monitoring and improving the pupils' behaviour. Award systems are in place and certificates are presented where merited. The school's behaviour policy is clearly understood and consistently implemented. An escalating series of sanctions, when necessary, is carried out. Parents are kept informed and involved where appropriate. These procedures have successfully limited the number of permanent exclusions.
46. The monitoring of attendance is now satisfactory. The school has strengthened its procedures and, with the support of the two education welfare officers, is taking measures to improve attendance throughout the school.
47. Procedures for assessing the pupils' standards of work are good except in relation to ICT in Years 9-11. A thorough guidance procedure ensures that pupils choose courses for which they are suited. A professional careers advisor is available in addition to the tutorial assistance provided. The school works closely with parents through regular reviews of pupils' standards. Targets are set and progress is monitored.
48. The assessment of pupils with special educational needs is good. Their individual education plans vary in quality, even within a subject such as design and technology, but many are of high quality with specific subject targets. Most staff have good knowledge of their pupils' needs, allowing resources to be well used to promote their progress. This knowledge ensures that the pupils with special educational needs, including those with physical disabilities, are able to take a full part in lessons.

49. The sixth form students interviewed commented positively on the guidance that they had received in Year 11 about their future courses but there was much dissatisfaction from the larger number of students who completed the questionnaire about such guidance and also guidance on careers and courses after the sixth form. Further evidence from informal conversations that inspectors had with individual students confirmed these concerns. The provision as outlined by staff to inspectors is satisfactory. Inspectors are unable to reach a conclusion on the quality of advice and therefore of the decisions taken, not having been present when guidance was given. The gap between the school's perception and that of many of its students is something for the school to investigate.
50. The school has an appropriate child protection policy. There is the required nominated officer and staff have received training in accordance with the local authority programme. Suitable records are maintained. The staff are aware of procedures to be followed when child abuse is suspected or reported to them.
51. A comprehensive health and safety policy is in operation, and a health and safety officer has been appointed. Procedures and provision, for example for fire precautions and medical and first-aid support, are good. Records are well maintained. Risk assessments are regularly undertaken and the governors give priority to issues brought to their attention. Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure safe passage of pupils around the school and on departure to their respective buses.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

52. The school and parents work well together. The parents show in their response to the inspection questionnaire and their comments at the pre-inspection meeting that they think highly of the school. They have favourable views about their children's progress and the quality of teaching, and are pleased with the good standards, pastoral support, Catholic beliefs, discipline and community spirit. Parents appreciate the professionalism of the staff, the behaviour and discipline of the children and the helpfulness of consultation evenings. Inspection findings confirm the parents' views.
53. Links with parents are of a consistently high quality. Pupils' planners, which are monitored weekly, provide an effective means of exchange of information between home and school. Communication between the school and parents is good. A comprehensive, attractively illustrated prospectus, annual governors' reports, regular news bulletins, and the headteacher's letters provide a wealth of information and keep parents well informed. School documents are clearly presented and enhance the reader's knowledge of the school. The prospectus contains a whole page on the importance of attendance.
54. Annual reports on pupils' progress are of a good standard and provide a complete record of academic achievement, including target setting. The reports contain suggestions about how parents might help their children to improve. Opportunities for further consultation are provided by mentoring and career presentation evenings, when parents attend with their children. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are appropriately involved in their children's learning and are kept well informed about their progress.

55. Parents give good support to the drama and musical events held by the school and consultation evenings are well attended. Appointments can be made to see members of staff. Parents find the school welcoming, considerate and responsive.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

56. The school is well led by the senior managers. The new headteacher brings experience of senior management and a fresh eye. The deputy head brings long experience of the school's evolution and the local area. Their strengths complement each other and they are well supported by assistant headteachers. Monitored by the governors, they provide clear direction, with a focus on raising standards whilst maintaining the well-established caring and supportive ethos of the school. Pastoral leadership and that of special educational needs are strong.
57. The governing body is experienced and active, with a good knowledge of the school's strengths and what needs to be done to take the school forward. Several governors are regular visitors to the school and the chairman is a frequent visitor for important discussions with the headteacher and other staff.
58. Self-evaluation is a strong feature of the school. There is much analysis of data about the pupils' attainment, setting of targets for the school and for pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and observation of teaching by senior staff. The assessments are used to raise standards.
59. There are weaknesses at the middle level of management, mainly in the arrangements but also in performance. The management of ICT is confused. One teacher, who does not teach in Years 9-11, is responsible for ICT for those years. The curricular arrangements do not allow the National Curriculum requirements to be met and most pupils do not develop their ICT skills to the required level. The otherwise effective governing body has not ensured compliance with National Curriculum requirements in this regard. Information and communication technology in the sixth form is managed separately. There is a big overlap of ICT with business studies. There are also weaknesses in the management arrangements for modern foreign languages and unsatisfactory relationships that are impeding progress. Design and technology is managed as two curricular areas with little co-operation between them and big differences in the standards of the pupils' work, the quality of teaching and response to school policies. In a few subjects there are weaknesses in teaching that have existed for some time and have not been tackled.

Staffing

60. Staffing arrangements are good and make a very positive contribution to the effective leadership and management of the school. There are sufficient teaching and non-teaching staff to meet the school's requirements. There is an appropriate staffing structure. The teachers are well matched by qualification and experience to meet the school's curricular and pastoral needs. Staff are well deployed. There is a good balance of experienced and more recently qualified teachers. Staffing requirements are effectively kept under regular review.

61. The professional development of staff is very well managed and effectively co-ordinated. Staff training and staff learning are very well supported by all teachers. Training and learning are linked to performance management and thoughtfully targeted to meet the needs of individual teachers and those of the school. Dissemination of training is effective.
62. Induction arrangements for new and recently qualified teachers are good. There are strong and productive links with four local universities, more especially in respect of business education, information technology and initial teacher training. These links are of mutual benefit to both the school and the universities.
63. The administrative staff and technicians make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the school; they are fully integrated members of its community.
64. Staffing levels are adequate, although the teachers as a whole have an above-average number of lessons to teach in a week. Staff development is a strong feature of the school. Teachers, like their pupils, are regarded as learners and participate routinely in their own professional development. Good training opportunities are also provided for non-teaching staff.

Accommodation

65. The school is pleasantly situated in 25 acres of land and has large playing fields. The buildings and grounds are well maintained and respected by the pupils. As the governors are well aware, the accommodation is unsatisfactory in several regards and is inadequate for present purposes. Storage facilities are inadequate and some cupboards are used as offices. Areas of high quality exist, for example in science and ICT, but facilities are unsatisfactory in art, physical education, music, special educational needs and the temporary classrooms. Changing rooms and showers for physical education are poor, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. Access to the learning resources centre (library) is limited because lessons are taking place. Building work for a new art, drama, music media and ICT (ADMIT) centre is imminent, and this will be available for community use. It is hoped that income from the proposed sale of land will be used to improve accommodation.

Resources

66. The materials available to the pupils for learning were regarded as inadequate in Years 9-11 at the time of the last inspection. There have been improvements. In the core subjects the school now provides satisfactory learning materials. There is good provision in ICT. The resources for learning remain inadequate in art, geography, music and modern foreign languages. In design and technology reference books are poor and in modern foreign languages there is a shortage of listening stations. Resources for the use of computer-assisted manufacture are inadequate in design and technology. The library has a limited range of books and is under-resourced in many subjects, including English prose for the younger pupils.
67. The school balances its budget successfully, despite a comparatively low income. Within the tight financial limits under which it operates, it uses its resources well. Earmarked funds, such as those for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need, are properly used. Funds generally are well linked to the school's priorities, which themselves relate well to national priorities. The appropriate staff are well versed in the principles of best value when making purchases, and they apply these appropriately. The school development plan is not an effective instrument for planning the school's

immediate or medium-term future, being too general and lacking action programmes, timescales and costs.

68. In 2001 the school achieved above average test and examination results overall, with a below average income and pupils whose standards on admission were judged by the school to be average. It is giving good value for money.

Sixth form

69. The management of the sixth form is a combination of general school management and the specific work of the head of the sixth form and the tutors. The management is satisfactory overall. The students seen during the inspection are a credit to the school, but persistent absence by some students is at a significant level in the sixth form and, by not being tackled successfully, becomes accepted. The procedures for guiding pupils about admission to the sixth form are mostly sound, but a high proportion of students in the sixth form are dissatisfied with the procedures as implemented and also with guidance on the next stages of their education and careers. As inspectors, who judge the procedures themselves to be mostly satisfactory, were not present when guidance was given, they cannot reach a judgement that would explain the students' dissatisfaction. Insufficient guidance is given to students who have completed GNVQ Intermediate courses about the much greater demands of AVCE or, in some cases, the guidance is given but not accepted so that students are allowed to embark on the course without a genuine prospect of success. Eight students dropped out of courses in the autumn term before the inspection, four of them in Year 13 and therefore more than half the way through two-year courses. There are weaknesses in the school's approach to the admission of students to courses and its retention of students on courses when they are not reaching the required standard or are not attending regularly.
70. The students are pleased to be at the school and recognize the quality of the teaching that they receive. They take up the opportunities offered to them to contribute to school life, reflecting the good relationships that they have with the staff. Standards of work are mostly good and examination results are mostly in line with the national average. The sixth form is successful in these important regards. Occasionally, school policies, such as the disapproval of one kind of cloth for jackets, seem unreasonable to the students but the dress code is in fact neither onerous nor applied harshly, except in this one regard.
71. The teachers are well qualified for the courses that they teach. Accommodation for the sixth form is unacceptable in size and quality. The school's success in recruitment, particularly to the sixth form, has resulted in overcrowding. The common room is poor and facilities for study are inadequate. Learning resources are mostly satisfactory but the learning resources centre (library) does not cater well for the reading requirements of sixth formers and is not usually available as a place of private study. The sixth form is giving satisfactory value for money.

COMMUNITY LINKS

72. The community links are satisfactory. The school is recognised by a commercial organisation to provide training in the installation and maintenance of ICT networks. Adult learning in the community is well supported by this facility. Strong links exist with the diocese and include a charity and youth mission team. A chaplaincy team of teachers supports the community faith development. Partnership work is effective within the family of Roman Catholic schools within the diocese, although not on curricular continuity and progression where links are unsatisfactory. Good links exist with charitable organisations, two football clubs, business and commerce, local universities, a hospital and a reform centre. Musical concerts are given by the school band to local organisations. Several community groups use the school's facilities. The annual Christmas party for senior citizens is a significant contribution by the school to the local residents. Staff work hard to increase pupils' awareness of the local adult community and seek out links with institutions both near and far, in order to involve pupils in stimulating activities requiring a range of practical skills.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

73. The school is strong. It needs to tackle the remaining weaknesses, of which it is already aware:
- (a) improve attendance by continuing with recently enhanced procedures, in accordance with its development plan, and evaluating them rigorously at the end of the current school year (paragraphs 16, 18, 46, 53)
 - (b) tackle low standards in some subjects by:
 - clarifying the management arrangements for ICT (paragraphs 59, 117)
 - ensuring that National Curriculum requirements for ICT are met in Years 9-11 and that teaching systematically develops the pupils' ICT skills (paragraphs 8, 22, 27, 28, 29, 47, 59, 81, 87, 89, 90, 113-115, 117, 122, 141, 173, 178, 187)
 - increasing the monitoring of modern foreign languages, completing departmental documentation and achieving a coherent departmental approach to planning and task-sharing (paragraphs 59, 122, 207)
 - achieving greater coherence in the approach to design and technology and monitoring carefully the work in resistant materials and graphics in order to identify and eradicate weaknesses (paragraphs 62, 102-105, 173)
 - (c) use the knowledge and skills acquired through the staff development programme and the expertise that many teachers have to ensure that all teachers, but particularly those in some Year 9 classes, make higher intellectual demands on the most able pupils (paragraphs 7, 20, 23, 90, 106, 121)
 - (d) continue to seek ways to improve accommodation, as in its development plan, particularly the common room and study facilities available for the sixth form, the learning resources centre, special educational needs and changing and showering facilities for physical education (paragraphs 65, 71, 75, 98, 137)
 - (e) carry out an audit of learning resources, particularly in the learning resources centre, art, geography, music and modern foreign languages, and plan in future budgets to reduce the shortages (paragraphs 66, 71, 81, 98, 107, 121, 129).

Sixth form

- (a) tackle unsatisfactory attendance in the sixth form, as in the school's development plan, by confronting the students concerned about their commitment to their chosen courses of study and, if appropriate, guiding them towards other options (paragraphs 158, 179, 191)
- (b) carry out an open and thorough investigation of why so many students have recorded dissatisfaction with the guidance given to them about admission to sixth form courses and opportunities for post-sixth form careers and higher education, when the procedures as outlined to inspectors are sound; in view of the conflicting evidence, governors should consider the advantages of engaging an external consultant to identify the roots of the problem (paragraph 49)
- (c) continue with the school's attempts to release funds in order to improve the present unacceptable standards of common room and study facilities for the large

sixth form (65 and 71)

The Governors should also give consideration to these other issues:

- (A) There is insufficient co-operation between middle schools and St Benet Bishop School to ensure continuity and progression in the curriculum and to avoid duplication. (paragraphs 8, 29, 99, 105, 116, 118, 137)
- (B) Whilst marking is generally done satisfactorily, there is a variation in quality that current monitoring is not eliminating (paragraph 22).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9-11	131
	Sixth form	74
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 9-11							
Number	2	23	56	43	7	0	0
Percentage	1.5	17.5	43	33	5	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	0	14	37	16	6	0	0
Percentage	0	19	50	22	8	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	663	262
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	89	8

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	23	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	109	6

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	28

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.3
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	135	101	236

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	96	96	103
	Girls	89	76	75
	Total	185	172	178
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (68)	74 (69)	75 (68)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	50 (28)	42 (43)	37 (29)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	87	98	103
	Girls	78	78	79
	Total	165	176	182
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (76)	75 (75)	77 (66)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (40)	43 (42)	40 (37)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	108	119	227

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	56	101	103
	Girls	65	116	116
	Total	121	217	219
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (49)	96 (95)	96 (96)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	42.3
	National	39.0

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	40	25	65

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	16.7	19.67	18.0	3.9	4	4
National	*	*	17.4	*	*	*

* National data not available at time of reporting.

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	*

* National data not available at time of reporting.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	7
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	915
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	32	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Ys 9-13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	50
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

Education support staff: Ys 9-13

Total number of education support staff	11.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	328

Deployment of teachers: Ys 9-13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.5
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Average teaching group size: Ys 9-11

Key Stage 3	23.2
Key Stage 4	21.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-01
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	£
Total income	2115563
Total expenditure	2108400
Expenditure per pupil	2394
Balance brought forward from previous year	-52355
Balance carried forward to next year	-45192

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	9.8
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	13

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	43
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	925
Number of questionnaires returned	267

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	49	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	46	5	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	46	41	6	1	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	47	14	3	3
The teaching is good.	44	50	3	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	38	14	2	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	33	3	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	31	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	39	41	16	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	38	46	3	2	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	47	4	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	38	14	6	15

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Well above average results at Key Stage 3 and in English at GCSE in 2001.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and manage their classes very well.
- Pupils make good progress, especially in becoming competent writers.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of ICT in English, and too little drama.
- Both through English and across the school pupils do not read enough for research and for their own recreation.
- The marking of the pupils' work, though encouraging, is not consistently informative about what pupils should do to improve.

74. In the national tests taken in Year 9 (Key Stage 3 SATs) in 2001, the results in English were well above the national average, a big improvement on the results in 2000. Results have fluctuated over the past four years. The results in English in 2001 were higher than those in mathematics and science. Girls do better than boys in the tests, as is the case nationally.
75. Standards in the work observed in Year 9 (the end of Key Stage 3) are above average and pupils make good progress. Because of some weaknesses in speaking and reading, standards are not as high as those in the 2001 national tests. Teachers manage their classes very well, with the result that pupils listen well to the teacher and to each other. The pupils speak fluently but their speaking is no higher than average for their age, as a significant minority do not speak distinctly. The teachers are good role models but they do not sufficiently require pupils to speak and read expressively. Teachers provide many more interesting opportunities for pupils to discuss in a focused way in pairs and in groups and to answer searching questions, than was the case at the previous inspection. These enable pupils to gain confidence in responding to what they read and to generate and refine ideas. Pupils gain an above-average understanding of the plot, characters and setting of their class literature texts, and of the purpose and main conventions of a range of non-fiction. Only a minority, however, readily analyse the effects of an author's language. Pupils read less outside class than they should be doing at this age.
76. Standards of writing are also above average. Pupils write engagingly for a range of purposes like poetry, factual reports, newspaper articles, stories and letters to explore topics imaginatively chosen by the teacher to stimulate writing. This happened with writing from different people that might have been involved in a case of a young, possibly neglected, child who suffered an accident. The highest attainers write very confidently and competently, with good vocabulary, on controversial topics such as racism and banning smoking. Other pupils write mostly correctly, with some, but not many, spelling errors, though their vocabulary is more limited. They redraft work in order to improve it. There are only a very few pupils who struggle to write correctly. Some boys find writing laborious if they do not see the importance of a writing task; they are slow to settle to it and sometimes leave it unfinished. Occasionally teachers do ask pupils to write when

faster, oral work would be more appropriate.

77. In GCSE English in 2001 the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C was well above the national average; the proportion of A* and A grades was above average. All pupils are entered for English literature, whereas the national entry is more selective, and results in 2001 at grades A*-C were similar to the national average, although with fewer of the highest A*-A grades than nationally. In the 2000 examinations English literature was better than in 2001 and results at A*-C in both subjects were well above the national averages, with A*-A grades just below the national average. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the most recent year for which analysis is available, the pupils achieved higher results in English and English literature than in the average of all their other subjects. School data shows that in the 2001 GCSE results the pupils achieved significantly better in English than in the average of their other subjects. English results were better than those in mathematics and science. Girls did better than boys.
78. Standards in Year 11 (the end of Key Stage 4) are above average and pupils make good progress through the key stage. Speaking and listening are now above average; pupils increase in fluency and the highest attainers use some sophisticated vocabulary, which they are more apt to use in speech than in writing. Pupils speak out well in role-play but reading aloud is rarely expressive. Understanding of what they read, including previously unseen texts, is above average. Helped by the teachers' well-structured approaches, the confidence gained by both boys and girls in discussion in small groups and the fast-paced teaching, the pupils amass their own, well-regained notes. Conscientious revision of these enables them to do very well in the GCSE examinations. The highest attainers analyse the language that authors use and they write very effectively, thus gaining A* and A grades. The pupils in a Year 11 mixed-ability class have written parodies with moral messages and clever manipulation of words and verse form. Average attainers use sound grammar, punctuation and spelling but do not always remember to include enough explanation and example to gain a C grade. Because of the teachers' awareness of their specific targets and a variety of engaging tasks, pupils with special educational needs make good progress at both key stages.
79. After a late start, the school has recently promoted literacy across the curriculum vigorously and appropriately. Across the whole school speaking is of an average standard. Pupils are fluent but sometimes indistinct and not often expressive. Many subjects now give pupils chances to pool and refine ideas through focused group work, which is good improvement since the previous inspection. There is some very good questioning in science, which makes pupils think and elaborate on their ideas. In history Year 9 pupils devised drama about the night before a Somme battle. Year 12 students held a well-informed debate on the Troubles in Ireland. In physical education in the sixth form students gave a well-researched, articulate presentation on cricket. The pupils' listening skills are average overall and above average in modern foreign languages where pupils are taught to listen acutely. Standards in reading are up to expectations in that nearly all pupils can read well enough to understand their textbooks and examination questions. Most subjects teach well the vocabulary that is specific to their topics, and pupils learn to comprehend, use and spell these correctly. In art pupils have responded to evocative words by expressing them in colour, texture and form. However, reading for research and personal enjoyment from a range of both printed and electronic texts is insufficiently promoted across the curriculum. The library is underused both by classes and individual pupils. When downloading from the Internet pupils do not sufficiently assess the value of the material, select from it or record its source. At Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form writing is the strongest feature of literacy and is above expectations. A very high proportion of pupils write competently with correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. In modern foreign languages and science pupils write letters

and in history and geography pupils write for different purposes. Nevertheless, teachers do not capitalise on as full a range of interesting writing tasks as they could.

80. Teaching in English is good at both key stages. The main strengths are teachers' very good management of their classes, their very good subject knowledge, which contributes well to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their setting of worthwhile homework. As a result, the pupils' attitudes to English are good; pupils are amenable in class, all pupils are ready to work with any other pupil, and most are conscientious workers. The main weakness in a minority of lessons is a loss of pace so that pupils mark time or lose interest.
81. The very committed head of department manages his department well, leading them in their vigorous pursuit of high standards and strong reflection of the school's aims and values. Half of the department have substantial other responsibilities in the school, and department meetings, held on a school rota, are too infrequent for the large amount of communication, moderation and curricular planning that needs to take place. Moreover, drama, media studies and English need to share skills, knowledge and resources more than is happening at the moment. Teaching is regularly monitored but more attention needs to be given to monitoring marking as not all the teachers indicate clearly to pupils, including the highest attainers, what they need to do to make further progress. Action as a result of analysing examination results and tracking pupils' progress is good. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Results have improved overall in the last four years. Resources have increased since the previous inspection but the range of prose, poetry and drama texts, including multicultural texts, in both the English stock and the library is inadequate. There is insufficient use of ICT and drama at both key stages.

Drama

82. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in 2001 was well below the national average, and school data show that they did significantly worse in drama than in the average of their other subjects. Girls did better than boys, who outnumbered the girls in that class.
83. Whilst drama takes place in English lessons in Year 9, it is not specifically timetabled. In previous years it occurred for only a few weeks. Pupils entering the GCSE drama course in Year 10 start with much less experience than is nowadays usual of working in groups to explore ideas, situations and feelings and of using drama techniques to present these to an audience as well as evaluating their own and others' work. Standards in Year 11 are currently below expectations. Standards of GCSE coursework in Year 10, however, are already above expectations. From a low base Year 11 have made satisfactory progress; Year 10 are making good progress. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, gain confidence. In both years the teacher's very good selection of stimulus material and good management of the classes motivate all pupils to research and work well in groups to reach a good grasp of issues such as violence, exclusion and mental illness. Year 11 have gained the confidence to present two different interpretations of material from the news, one realistic and the other stylised. Year 10 pupils, rehearsing their own monologues arising from their research into mental illness, entered convincingly into their roles, and over half effectively used pace, pause and facial and vocal expression to engage their audience. In both years the pupils' skills of evaluation are average for their age; they tend to dwell on content and feeling but less on details of vocal and physical expression. Teaching needs to place more regular emphasis on these skills as several pupils speak too fast and do not project their voices enough.

84. Currently the writing of lower attainers in Year 11, just over half the class, lacks sufficient detail and mastery of key vocabulary to gain grade C at present, a matter that the teacher is already taking in hand. Year 10 pupils are following a more performance-based syllabus where their useful ongoing logbooks are the only written outcome required.
85. Teaching is good and contributes well to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The result is that behaviour is good, pupils work well together and some are very committed. More precise assessment and use of this to help each pupil to know exactly what to do to improve will help to raise standards.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- The standard of teaching is good.
- The management of the department is very good.
- Relationships in the department and with the pupils are very good.

Areas for Improvement

- Standards, particularly for higher-attaining pupils in Year 9, should be higher.
- Information and communication technology is insufficiently used.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent.

86. In the national tests taken in Year 9 (Key Stage 3 SATs) in 2001 the results in mathematics were close to the national average, as they were in 2000, with the lower proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 6 than in the two other core subjects. The results in mathematics were lower than those in both English and science and the results for boys were not as good as the results for girls. The trend in results over the last few years is in line with the national trend. Pupils have average attainment on entry to the school; consequently achievement in Year 9 is satisfactory.
87. Standards in Year 9 (at the end of Key Stage 3) are as would be expected from the results of the national tests. There are, however, indications that some pupils are reaching a higher standard. For example, they are encouraged to learn independently and are given challenging tasks in selecting and using mathematical techniques when investigating a series of tasks involving the irrational number Pi. They respond well and show a keen interest in the task that is well directed by the teacher. The standard of teaching in Year 9 is good. Firm class management and sound teaching techniques occur in all lessons observed leading to at least a satisfactory gain in knowledge. For example, during a lesson with a group that includes a number of pupils with special educational needs, the teacher's sympathetic understanding and sound technique of frequent repetition enable a large majority of pupils to gain an understanding of factors. A small number of pupils confuse factor with multiple. Most lessons in Year 9 include a section where mental skills are consolidated. For example, in the plenary session, calculations involving length, height and depth reinforce the idea of the volume of cuboids. The plenary is mostly used effectively to consolidate the learning in that lesson. Little if any use is made of ICT to aid teaching or to enhance pupils' learning.
88. The proportion of pupils achieving A*-C in the 2001 GCSE examinations, as in 2000, was similar to the national average. In 2000, the most recent year for which the national analysis is available, the pupils achieved higher results in mathematics than in the

average of all their other subjects. Results for mathematics were similar to those in science but not as good as those in English. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Pupils enter Year 10 with average standards of attainment, so that achievement at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory.

89. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 are similar to standards in line with the examination results. Teaching is good. Lessons are delivered at a pace appropriate to the group taught. Year 11 high-attaining pupils are presented with challenging work that requires the application of skills in algebra to solve a range of problems of varying complexity. The pupils respond well and show interest. Clear explanation and effective illustration by the teacher enable the pupils to solve the simpler problems. More complex ideas cause greater difficulty. A slower pace is equally effective with another group who draw the straight line, given the co-ordinate of two points. The majority of the group can then determine the equation for the line drawn. A significant minority of the pupils show weak understanding of basic ideas of number. Pupils have the opportunity to improve their independent learning skills in a Year 10 lesson when they discuss how to find the area and the perimeter of the sector of a circle. The teacher draws upon their ideas to derive a general formula based on specific examples worked out by the pupils. The pupils' positive reaction, seen in many lessons, shows a willingness to learn. Information and communication technology is not used to assist the development of mathematical ideas, and mathematical ideas are not used to improve the pupils' ICT technique. The presentation of rulebooks is usually good but the standard of workbooks is more variable. When the books are marked they are marked well with corrections and encouraging comments but marking is not consistent and sections remain unmarked. Assessment procedures are good. They are used to provide pupils with a predicted grade for the national tests at the end of Year 9 and again for GCSE. A means of providing pupils with knowledge of their progress in the National Curriculum would enable their achievement to be defined. The analysis of answers to examination questions identifies areas of study in need of further attention.
90. The management of the department is very good. The department has been given clear educational direction. The long-term strategy is to raise standards of high-attaining pupils in Year 9, and in Years 10 and 11. This will feed through into the sixth form, resulting in a further mathematics course in the future. There are many initiatives in the curriculum, teaching and assessment. The standard of teaching is good throughout the department and teachers are encouraged to observe one another's lessons. Monitoring by the head of department takes place, with observations recorded on a formal analysis sheet. The effective handbook describes well the organisation of the department and includes schemes of work that form a satisfactory basis for lesson plans. Information and communication technology is not used in Year 9 or through Key Stage 4. This is an issue raised in the previous report. The other issues have been largely resolved. There is a greater emphasis on mental work, and investigations in mathematics have been included recently with many examples in the schemes of work. The accommodation in five rooms and an office/storeroom is close together and is generally satisfactory but some rooms are too small for large groups. The entire suite is in need of a fundamental refurbishment with access to a designated ICT room. Resources are satisfactory and are used well but the mathematics section in the library is poor.
91. The school has no up-to-date policy to promote the use of mathematical skills in other subjects. The pupils are, however, able to apply their mathematical skills in other areas of study. Science lessons in particular make extensive use of mathematics as a device in handling results of experiments and investigations. Teachers in other subjects use number work and wider mathematical skills where appropriate to enhance pupils' understanding of their subject matter; for example, in scale drawing in art and design and

technology, time scales in history and measurement and timing in physical education. Most subjects use graphs to display and analyse data.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Results at Key Stage 3 were above average in 2001.
- The great majority of teaching is satisfactory and much is good.
- There is a broadening range of learning opportunities for pupils including use of ICT, group work and activities that require thinking skills.
- The pupils have a sound grasp of scientific concepts and are able to apply this in classwork and homework.
- The subject is well led and teaching schemes are being revised to incorporate key skills.
- A good range of learning resources is being built up - particularly those using ICT.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient investigative work at Key Stage 3 to provide challenge, particularly for higher-attaining pupils.
- In some lessons, particularly for the lower-attaining pupils, the work is not sufficiently related to real-life contexts and the pupils lack enthusiasm.
- Teaching schemes do not cover sufficiently the ideas and evidence sections of the National Curriculum.
- The girls are not reaching the same standards as the boys.

92. In the national tests taken in Year 9 (Key Stage 3 SATs) in 2001, the results in science were above the national average and similar to the results in 2000. The results in science were lower than those in English but higher than those in mathematics. Standards reached by boys were higher than those attained by girls. The standards observed in Year 9 are average for the pupils' understanding of series and parallel circuits, the current flow and the voltages across various components and their understanding of food chains and pyramids of numbers. Almost all teaching is satisfactory and much is good. The best lessons are planned well with a variety of activity to which the pupils respond well, making good progress. In one lesson there was very good questioning by a chemistry teacher to develop the pupils' observation, understanding and language skills to accompany a computer simulation of changes of state and the kinetic theory. As a result, the pupils made very good progress. A good feature of another lesson involved the use of an ICT slideshow in physics with animations produced by pupils in the 'Animation Club'. On some occasions, however, there is insufficient challenge for the more able, either because of lack of progression from earlier work or because of insufficient investigative work.
93. At GCSE, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in 2001 was similar to the national average and was similar to the results in 2000. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the most recent year for which the analysis is available, the pupils achieved higher results in science than in the average of all their other subjects. Science results were similar to those in mathematics but were not as good as those in English. The standards observed in Year 11 (the end of Key Stage 4) are in line with the national average. The great majority of teaching is satisfactory and much is good. The best lessons are well planned with a variety of activity, including interesting demonstrations. Teachers are enthusiastic, have high expectations, and maintain a brisk pace. Work is related where possible to real life and the pupils respond well as a result. Teachers in

science make a positive contribution to the development of pupils' language and number skills and their effective use of ICT. In one lesson a bottom set Year 11 class made good progress in developing their understanding of different sources of background radiation and calculating exposure levels for the north of England, using a spreadsheet. A lower set in Year 10 were very enthusiastic and made very good progress in their understanding of the transmission of disease and techniques for tracking the spread of disease. The activity involved a practical simulation. On some occasions, however, the lack of a real-life context for the work is responsible for some pupils, particularly the lower-attaining, lacking enthusiasm for the work.

94. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection. There are thorough procedures for tracking pupils' progress and setting challenging targets. There is also an effective system for observing teaching to improve performance. Good progress has been made in revising schemes of work and in broadening the range of teaching and learning styles, for example to include the use of ICT, group work and thinking skills. Continued staff development is required to share and consolidate this developing expertise, however, and schemes need to be evaluated, as planned, to ensure the optimum range and balance of activities for effective learning. The department is well led and managed but the development plan is not sufficiently detailed and does not include specific action to tackle gender issues at both key stages. The new section of the National Curriculum on ideas and evidence has not yet been incorporated in schemes of work. The department marking policy is not implemented consistently.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Standards of work are high.
- Attitudes and relationships are good.

Areas for improvement

- The curriculum is too narrow.
- There is inadequate use of ICT.
- Assessment data is not used for long and short-term target setting.
- Provision for gifted and talented pupils is insufficient.
- Development planning lacks detail.

95. Standards in Year 9 are average when compared with those achieved nationally. Sketchbooks are fundamental to the work of the department. Experimentation, investigation and a personal response to the environment are well established. Work is based firmly on observation and analysis through drawing and the development of composition, mainly in paint. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to teach the basic skills of art with an emphasis on investigation into different methods of drawing and painting. These younger pupils recognise their teachers' genuine feel for their subject and their high expectations. They respond with good creative effort. They portray words such as springy, twisted or spiky in their drawings. Improvements to pupils' literacy occurred when the teacher insisted on their using subject specific words such as tone and form to discuss their work. The pupils are familiar with the work of a range of European and American artists. Their achievement is satisfactory.
96. The GCSE results gained in 2001 by Year 11 pupils were well above average for both boys and girls and represent good improvement since 2000 and the last inspection. The number awarded A* grades was below the national average in both years. Fewer pupils than average opt for GCSE art. Standards in Year 11 are good but the work seen indicates that 2002 GCSE results will not be as high as those of 2001. Teaching and learning are good and reflect good achievement since Year 9. Pupils have a clear understanding of the rudiments of drawing and develop good technical skills in a range of materials. Work is varied and innovative. Sketchbooks continue to be well used. Teachers make very good use of the time available and limited resources to encourage particularly good creative effort in these older pupils. Standards of colour theory are high and investigations into line, shape and texture are developed into strong paintings and occasionally prints. The continuing study of famous artists contributes to the pupils' cultural development, although few pupils develop personal views of this work. Year 11 pupils respond well to the challenging activity of drawing the texture of a savoy cabbage and green chillies. The girls are generally more thorough than boys and take greater pride in their work. Both girls and boys are pleased to explain their work. Occasionally the level of gossip interferes with concentration and progress. It is commendable that the pupils' work is displayed in corridors and public areas of the school without damage. Standards of work, teaching and the pupils' achievement are good overall. Pupils who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress in Year 9 and good progress in Years 10 and 11. The department does not have a policy for the identification and development of gifted and talented pupils. Homework does not always challenge these more able pupils.
97. The curriculum in art is unsatisfactory. As at the last inspection, there are no opportunities for pupils to use computers and specialist software, while schemes of work lack details for its use. Printmaking, textiles and sculpture seldom feature in the department's work and this prevents the full development of the pupils' talents. Year 9 pupils receive less time for their art lessons than is usual. Assessment information is well used to track the performance of pupils but not for target setting or to modify the curriculum. Pupils are not fully aware of how well they are doing in relation to national standards.
98. The leadership and management of the department are good. The acting head of

department has a clear view of the measures needed to raise standards and she provides leadership which staff and pupils are pleased to follow. The development plan lacks detail and there is need to formalise the monitoring of teaching and learning. The accommodation is unsatisfactory and larger groups are cramped. Learning resources are insufficient to support a broad curriculum. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last report. Standards have risen and drawing skills have improved. The range of techniques and processes available remains limited.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teachers have a good knowledge of their pupils, which helps them to meet their individual needs on a day-to-day basis.
- The pupils' behaviour is usually good or very good
- The impact of ICT, notably computer-assisted design (CAD), is beginning to show in standards of work.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in Year 9 (the end of Key Stage 3) are unsatisfactory overall.
- Whilst day-to-day management of the two main subject areas that collectively deliver the National Curriculum is satisfactory, co-ordination is not.
- Assessment is not used effectively to inform curriculum planning and monitor pupil progress in order to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- Resources for computer-assisted manufacturing (CAM) are inadequate.
- The links with feeder schools, industry and higher education to ensure continuity and progress in learning are inadequate.

99. The standards of the pupils' work observed in Year 9 are below national standards overall, with variations between the subjects. The pupils' previous experience in their middle schools and opportunities to learn and practise the range of design and technology skills are variable. They do not always recognise and use the knowledge and skills acquired in earlier work to inform increasingly demanding design and make activities in new situations.
100. They use a satisfactory range of hand and machine tools safely for planning and making food products and articles using resistant materials. Standards in graphic work are variable and this hinders progress in designing and making. Investigation activities lack depth and rigour, for example when pupils are designing and making a desk tidy in which all of the pupils' outcomes are identical with the exception of the shaping applied to the back. Research, analysis and evaluation are, however, used effectively as methods for learning in food technology; for example, when investigating, making and testing types of pastry. Overall, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory. Teachers evaluate pupils' understanding at the end of the better lessons and revisit any areas of misunderstanding. In a small number of lessons, teachers are over-directive and the focus for the lesson is directed towards the task at the expense of developing learning to the depth and breadth expected; for example, when designing a healthy food menu.
101. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C at GCSE in 2001 was unsatisfactory overall, with wide variations between each of the subjects. In resistant materials and graphics, results were respectively well below and below both the school and national averages. The girls' results were better than the boys' and significantly higher in

resistant materials where they were close to the national average. In food studies and child development (the latter, all girls) results were respectively below and close to the national average. During the last three years there has been a mixed pattern in results across each of the subjects. In food studies, following a significant improvement between 1999 and 2000, there was a decline in pupils achieving the higher grades A*-C in 2001. Results in resistant materials/graphics have remained similar during the last two years, while in child development there has been a steady improvement in both results and the number of entries.

102. In the work seen during the inspection at Key Stage 4, standards were variable. There is still underachievement in graphical skills; for example, in a Year 11 graphics class where the majority of the pupils did not fully understand how to draw an article before cutting out and producing their three-dimensional model. The use of ICT as a design tool is beginning to improve the presentation of pupils' work, for example when drawing the design of a bottle-opener. The recently acquired digital camera in food studies introduces new systems for the pupils to record and evaluate their work. Here higher-attaining pupils consolidate their skill acquisition through good research, organisation and evaluation, and they produce folders of a good standard. In child development pupils have a good understanding of the dietary needs and stages of fine motor skill development in very young children. In these lessons pupils learn how to focus more on direct observation and the communication of their ideas. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to others because they are well supported in lessons, often by specialist teachers who are not only fully aware of their targets but have also incorporated these into the lesson plan. Here lessons are satisfactory or better, being well organised and structured and with a clear sense of purpose and direction to the learning.
103. Where there are weaknesses, organisational strategies do not match curricular objectives and pupils are not given clear targets or assessment guidance for improvement. When, for example, a Year 10 class was designing a child's pull-along toy, incorporating a cam mechanism, many pupils were unsure of the expected outcomes and there was little evidence to suggest that formal assessment informed the teacher's planning or had been shared with the pupils.
104. Design and technology is managed at the school in two separate halves, largely determined by the gender of the teachers and often of the pupils. Day-to-day leadership and management within each of the two departments are satisfactory, but co-ordination between them is not. This is one of the major factors in the unsatisfactory degree of improvement since the previous inspection. There is not a common approach to planning, assessment and the development of the key features of designing and making. Also, there is insufficient monitoring of the quality of teaching and variations in standards have not been tackled. The setting of homework and the regularity of marking the pupils' work also vary. There is effective specialist technician support for work in resistant materials and food technology. Difficulties in relation to specialist accommodation in food studies remain where a single room is shared between two classes that often need access at the same time. Resources for the teaching of control and electronics are inadequate.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The teachers have good subject knowledge and work well as a team.
- The assessment of the pupils' progress is good.
- Less able pupils are identified at an early stage and make good progress.

Areas for improvement

- Some weaknesses in teaching have not been overcome.
- Some pupils in Year 9, coming from different middle schools, lack knowledge of basic geographical skills.
- Some of the more able pupils are sometimes insufficiently challenged.
- Resources in the learning resources centre (library) are inadequate, and there is insufficient independent learning.

105. Standards in Year 9 (the end of Key Stage 3) are average. Teaching in Year 9 is well planned and enthusiastically given. Pupils generally achieve satisfactory standards as a result of effective, well-planned and well-paced teaching. This was particularly apparent in a lesson when pupils made very good progress because the teacher was inspiring and challenging in her approach. Pupils dealt confidently with difficult concepts such as religious and cultural differences. In another lesson, the interpretation of photographs was particularly well presented, enabling pupils to think for themselves and reach a clear understanding of differences between developing and developed countries. The pupils come from different middle schools and some lack basic geographical skills such as Ordnance Survey map-reading skills, and this retards progress.
106. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in 2001 was below the national average, as in 2000. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the most recent year for which the analysis is available, the pupils achieved higher results in geography than in the average of their other subjects. Standards in Year 11 (the end of Key Stage 4) are satisfactory and, as a result of effective teaching, pupils in general learn well. In one Year 10 lesson, however, the lack of careful planning, unclear exposition and the use of worksheets that contained errors prevented pupils from learning effectively and from making the expected progress. In another lesson the teacher's clear exposition and the use of well-chosen examples and activities ensured that pupils responded well and were able to achieve a clear understanding of the physical factors that influence farming in the Lake District and East Anglia. The teachers have good subject knowledge and use good classroom skills to sustain interest and concentration. They monitor effectively the pupils' learning and give good support to slower learners. There is not, however, a sufficiently wide range of teaching methods to develop the capacity of higher-attaining pupils to think for themselves. Most pupils are able to represent statistical information and use graphical techniques to present data. Pupils from a wide range of attainment were able to understand triangular graphs, pie charts and bar graphs. Boys and girls are equally interested in their work and respond well to supportive teaching.
107. The management of the department is mostly effective in the main school. Target-setting for pupils is done well, but marking is erratic, although with much that is helpful. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection. Departmental documents are useful, although the schemes of work lack the precise specification of the progress in knowledge and skills expected across the years. All lessons are now taught by specialist teachers and the range of teaching methods is wider, although not sufficiently so. Assessment and monitoring have improved greatly and are effective in aiding curricular development. Greater use is made of ICT. Learning materials remain unsatisfactory.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The teachers have good knowledge and understanding.
- Relationships with pupils support a good working environment.
- Provision for the personal development of pupils through history is good.

Areas for improvement

- The needs of higher attainers are not met in all Year 9 lessons.
- The analysis of standards at the end of Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory.

108. Standards in Year 9 (the end of Key Stage 3) are in line with national expectations for pupils at the age of 14. This reflects the attainment of the pupils on entry only one term earlier and with varying historical experience. Since then there has been much consolidation of skills as well as good extensions of knowledge. The achievement of most pupils is satisfactory, and the achievement of many lower-attaining pupils is good in relation to their abilities. When higher-level historical skills are developed over the rest of the year, such as understanding different interpretations and explaining conflicting evidence, it is likely that attainment will match that by pupils in the 2001 national tests in their core subjects.
109. In GCSE the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in 2001 was below the national average. This was a little lower than in 2000 when results matched the national average. In the 2000 examinations, the most recent year for which the analysis is available, the pupils achieved higher results in history than in the average of their other subjects. School data show that in the 2001 GCSE results the pupils achieved significantly better in history than in the average of their other subjects. This is because history did exceptionally well in the range of A*-A grades with over 25 per cent gaining one of these two top grades. History is also successful in the full range A*-G as no pupil has failed history for three years. The gender gap in attainment for pupils in the A*-C range is much wider than is the case nationally.
110. The standards observed in Year 11 are average. Pupils are achieving well across the full range of ability in these groups. Year 11 pupils have a sound knowledge of the social and medical context for the cholera outbreaks in Britain in the 1830s and are preparing extended explanations of this in relation to key evidence as their final coursework assignment. Coursework already done on prison reforms, and following fieldwork at Berwick and Jedburgh old gaols, shows that higher-attaining pupils can make significant comparisons, back their work with specific accurate detail, and produce well-organised answers with competent use of IT skills. This work is good in relation to national standards. Year 10 pupils have made a strong start to their course and their expertise in evaluating sources is developing well.
111. Teaching overall is satisfactory in Year 9. In one very good lesson imaginative strategies were used to include all pupils in active learning on the causes of the French Revolution. Pupils were pushed to think well. In some lessons there is a weakness in that the higher attainers are not adequately challenged. Language skills are promoted well in all years. Teaching in Key Stage 4 is good, teachers know their subject well and have high levels of expertise in examination skills. Marking of work is thorough in all years and pupils are involved in evaluating their work. This helps them to be clear about how to improve. In all lessons relationships are good. Moral development for pupils is very good. It arises from both teacher example and expectations, and from the explicit exploration of the ethical and justice aspects of topics as they arise. Pupils behave very well in all lessons, show interest and maintain concentration well. They enjoy history and opt for GCSE in good numbers at the end of Year 9, and for AS history in Year 11.

112. Leadership is good, as is the collaborative approach. The team are working hard to improve teaching and raise standards, and they have identified appropriate goals including those for personal development and enjoyment of the subject. These latter two aspects of learning are areas of distinct improvement. Another improvement still to bear fruit is their attention to the gender gap apparent in GCSE results and their own assessments of other years. Analysis of their data for Year 9 will assist the work on the gender gap in performance in history.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The quality of provision for ICT is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching in discrete ICT lessons is good.
- ICT is used well in Year 9 science.
- Independent learning is developed in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for improvement

- No assessment is made of the varied ICT capability of pupils when they arrive from middle schools with widely different experiences.
- Year 9 pupils do not have planned experience of ICT to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum.
- The ICT standards of pupils are not being assessed and reported to parents at the end of Year 9.
- The provision for Years 10-11 does not allow many pupils to develop their skills systematically to the standard expected nationally.
- Computers provided to subject departments are not always being used, either to support subject learning or to develop the pupils' ICT capabilities.

113. Standards are not measured or reported at the end of Year 9, as data to allow this to happen are not generated through the departments where ICT is being used. Work seen is assessed for subject content, but is not assessed against National Curriculum level descriptors for ICT, except in science where the pupils' work creating posters was assessed against these criteria and the pupils' performance was found to be in line with national expectations. The pupils make use of ICT facilities in other subjects. Work is word-processed in history, food studies and English (where ICT equipment is available) and the Internet is used for research in art, geography, religious education, history and science. No evidence of developing other aspects of ICT capabilities was seen in Year 9 work. Apart from in science there is no programme of ICT skill development, application or evaluation.
114. Pupils in Years 10-11 either complete a Key Skills Level 2 course or follow a GNVQ part one course to either Foundation or Intermediate Level. Twenty-eight pupils studied in the first GNVQ cohort and completed the course in 2001. Pupils who chose this option also had to follow a short course in modern foreign languages, not the full GCSE, so that many regard it as a course for lower-attaining pupils. Allowing for this fact, attainment at Foundation and Intermediate GNVQ was satisfactory with the majority of pupils having credit for units of work. Thirty per cent achieved an award at merit or distinction.
115. Recruitment to the GNVQ courses has now doubled, but they are still seen as an option for lower-attaining pupils. In lessons, Year 10 pupils following the Thomas Telford GNVQ scheme were seen studying available documents to evaluate their suitability for their

purpose and they then created their own documents and tested their suitability for purpose against the same criteria. The most able pupils are currently working at a level equivalent to achieving merit/distinction and those with less ability are working at a level equivalent to a pass or merit on this course. Pupils following the Key Skills course are working at a lower level than expected nationally. Their lack of experience in ICT in Year 9 and the targeting of work in line with this low expectation hindered many. Class-work involves much data or text inputting before higher level skills can be accessed.

116. Teaching on both the Key Skills and GNVQ courses is good overall. In some cases it is very good. In some cases it is satisfactory. Where teaching is very good, for example in a Year 10 GNVQ lesson, the teacher's classroom management helps to create a good working environment, where pupils are encouraged to be confident in their own abilities and work out the answers to their questions. They develop independent learning skills. In all lessons seen, the teachers have a good knowledge of the subject, the examination system and their pupils. With the help of their teachers the pupils make progress in key skills lessons to a point where they can analyse and evaluate their own work, making appropriate changes to improve the quality and layout.
117. The management of ICT is shared between three people. One leads business education courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form with large overlaps on ICT course content. Another has responsibility for ICT in the sixth form. The third person is responsible for ICT across the curriculum in Years 9-11 but himself teaches only in Years 12 and 13, although he has made contributions to the teaching of ICT within subjects, for example in religious education. These management arrangements are confusing. In Year 9 science lessons an ICT specialist delivers the ICT on a carousel basis for small groups of pupils during science lessons. This eight-week course gives pupils some access to ICT skills for use in science. There is no extension to this course, or complementary course to help pupils with ICT in other subject areas. The teaching of ICT in subjects is not monitored by the Years 9-11 co-ordinator, so that he has no idea how much ICT is being taught or at what level. The systematic development of ICT and the use of ICT in subjects are not optional within the National Curriculum. The school is in breach of statutory requirements. Teaching on the discrete Years 10 and 11 Key Skills course is monitored through informal daily contact and the moderation of work produced by the pupils. Teaching on the GNVQ course is monitored formally for performance management purposes and also for moderation of work. The pupils' progress is tracked, and in the case of the GNVQ course determines which tier of the examination the pupils sit. There are regular meetings for ICT across the curriculum but these are not always well attended. There are also regular ICT meetings with middle schools for the development of ICT, but the more urgent need is to assess the pupils' varied ICT skills on admission and to build systematically on those skills, enabling those who have already fallen below the nationally expected standard to make up the ground lost. Overall, there has been insufficient improvement since the previous inspection.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- The pupils have good attitudes to the subject.
- Some of the teaching is good.

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results in Spanish have been unsatisfactory for some time.
- There is insufficient teamwork and sharing of good practice between the teachers.

- Poor timetabling in Year 9 limits progress.

118. In Year 9 all pupils learn both French and Spanish. The standards of the pupils' work are average in French. In Spanish they are below average for this age group but this is a new language for all pupils and the standards are acceptable for enthusiastic beginners in their first year of study. The fact that pupils enter the school with varied experience in French in their middle schools affects the progress of some. The timetable arrangements are also a factor, slowing progress in both languages. Pupils enjoy speaking both languages and are being encouraged to answer at length. Good pronunciation and intonation are promoted. Many opportunities to use the language are provided; for example, pupils had to give a Spanish phrase as they left one lesson. Paired work and group activities build the pupils' confidence, and the videoing of a Spanish café scene was a successful method of ensuring that learning was remembered. Teachers use questioning techniques well. In a French lesson about places in town, the teacher ensured that pupils could recall previously learnt topics and offered comments. Methods to introduce new vocabulary were imaginative and very effective, generating great enthusiasm amongst the pupils. New knowledge was reinforced in so many ways: lip-reading, rap and games. Reading aloud is frequent and is done with understanding in both languages. The pupils readily understand the written texts. Listening is a difficult skill but the pupils are being taught to look for specific details. Teachers actively encourage pupils to tell them what they think an answer needs, so that, with explicit teaching and pupil involvement, confidence is gained. Written work is well presented and marking is helpful and encouraging. Despite the many examples on display, there were few examples in the pupils' books of any writing at length.
119. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades at GCSE has almost doubled in French, bringing the subject in line with the school as a whole. Results were close to the national average in 2001 and the pupils achieved in French similar results to the average of their other subjects. Boys performed slightly better than girls. In Spanish results remain well below average and are a major cause for concern. It is not only when compared with the national results that the Spanish results are poor. The pupils at the school taking Spanish did worse in the language than in the average of their other subjects. In the 2001 examination girls performed better than the boys but the gap was smaller than that found nationally. There was a large proportion of grade Ds in both languages, which need to be targeted early to boost results. Almost the whole cohort studies a language to GCSE level. Given the popularity of Spanish as a new subject in Year 9, many pupils opt for this language at Key Stage 4, but the progress made in the first enthusiastic year is not maintained when the demands of the GCSE examination become evident. The school has not yet weighed the merits of having a second language for all pupils against the problem created for the pupils when year after year their GCSE results are well below what they achieve in other subjects including French. The results in the GCSE short course have also been unsatisfactory and are unlikely to improve on the basis of one lesson a week.
120. In both French and Spanish speaking skills vary. The majority of higher-ability pupils are able to offer detailed answers and manipulate the language using complex vocabulary and a variety of tenses. In a higher-ability Year 10 French class, however, opportunities were missed to insist on accurate pronunciation and full answers. In Year 11 pupils are being well prepared for the orals, and teacher-prepared materials complement the textbooks. The pupils enjoy brainstorming experiences, as, for example, when investigating possible dangers of using the Channel tunnel. In reading and listening pupils are being taught vital examination techniques. This builds up confidence and adds to the enjoyment of their learning. Grammar is taught in context. Writing skills are being well taught. A Year 11 lesson was to go over a mock examination answer in such a way

as to ensure that everyone reached their potential. There were exemplar materials, group activities involving sequencing and work providing different levels of task, ranging from easy to hard.

121. Teaching overall is good, with two excellent lessons. Lessons are well taught as a result of shared objectives, high expectations, brisk pace and interesting activities. The excellent lessons were largely the result of exciting content conveyed with panache that enthused the pupils. There were unsatisfactory elements in a small minority of lessons where there was lack of pace and challenge, particularly with a Year 10 top set. All the teachers take classes in both languages and deliver most of their lessons using French and Spanish. Behaviour in class is good. There are shortages of learning materials and very few independent reading books.
122. The management arrangements for the department are unsatisfactory and are warped by its staffing history. There have, however, been significant improvements in the last few years, and since the last inspection satisfactory progress has been made in most areas. The profile of languages amongst pupils is now higher. Examination results in French are much better. A new handbook has been produced and schemes of work updated. Relations within the department are strained, so that there is little sharing of resources and experience. This is an obstacle to further improvement. ICT is still not used in lessons. Pupils are not much involved in evaluating their own work and setting targets and are insufficiently aware of their own strengths and how to improve. Timetable arrangements and the time allocation for the short course are unsatisfactory.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good, with high expectations of behaviour and performance that enable the pupils to make progress.
- There is extensive practical music making.
- Topics are identified and taught that engage all pupils.
- New, vigorous leadership is bringing improvement.

Areas for improvement

- The provision and use of ICT in Year 9 are inadequate.
- There is no assessment system that uses National Curriculum levels to help pupils in setting targets for improvement.
- The subject has not attracted enough pupils to undertake GCSE and A level courses.
- The accommodation and resources are currently inadequate, although new buildings are imminent.

123. Standards in Year 9 are below average. Despite below average attainment in music on entry to the school, many pupils make good progress as a result of the quality of teaching and high expectations. There is insufficient time in one year, however, for most pupils to achieve their full potential by the end of the key stage. Some able pupils showed good performing skills. In one lesson on the blues a pupil sang a blues song from memory with convincing style and musical awareness. In the same lesson, others played guitars, keyboards and drums, as the whole class performed the 12 bar blues together. Although the task was difficult for some, all showed progress over the course of the lesson. Year 9 pupils may occasionally have the opportunity to use the department computer, but too infrequently for progress to be made. In the work by Year 9 pupils that was seen during the inspection the emphasis was on their performing skills. Insufficient development of the pupils' ability to use musical vocabulary accurately is taking place.

124. In 2001 there were too few candidates taking GCSE music for the statistics to be significant; however, the pupils achieved significantly less well in music than in the average of their other subjects.

125. Standards in Year 11 (the end of Key Stage 4) vary widely as is usual in a small group following a GCSE music course. Overall, standards are average but examples of very good performing and composing were seen. A pupil playing the electric guitar performed a piece by Eric Clapton to a very high standard, with attention to every nuance and with maturity rarely seen at this level. Other pupils were able to use their ICT skills to compose multi-track compositions of a good standard. In a lesson aimed at improving aural skills, pupils matched melodies they heard to the printed notation in order to identify mistakes. This showed that, given well-prepared exercises by the teacher, pupils were able to improve their skills. The overall progress of Year 11 pupils is good. In a Year 10 lesson an able pupil performed his own composition on the piano, demonstrating a good understanding of the effectiveness of key change, the use of tempo and melodic contrast within a framework of traditional harmony. Others in the Year 10 GCSE group show good progress in their composition work, including pieces developed through the use of computer software.

126. The quality of class teaching in all years is consistently good. Some lessons by visiting instrumental teachers were observed, and the standard is sound and sometimes good.

Class teaching is characterised by an emphasis on listening, performing accurately and exercising self-discipline. High expectations are made of work and behaviour. Lessons are well planned, with a variety of activities, giving lessons good pace. This ensures that pupils concentrate on the given tasks. Occasionally, the more able are not given sufficiently challenging activities. Pupils are praised verbally for their work but the giving of more formal rewards was not observed.

127. The same standards are brought to extra-curricular activities, where opportunities are now greater than at the time of the last inspection. There is the nucleus of a choir, who performed well in an assembly, and a jazz band and wind band. The jazz band's awareness of ensemble, even with difficult syncopated rhythms and improvised sections, was excellent. The most recent school production, *Our Day Out*, is a good example of the potential that there is in the school for a fuller role for the arts. The number of pupils receiving instrumental lessons in school is very small and, without a significant increase in numbers, larger ensembles will be difficult to achieve.
128. There have been no pupils following music courses in the sixth form since 1998. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well and also make good progress. More boys than girls find the work difficult but nevertheless the best performances seen during the inspection were by boys. The process of rehearsing music as a class is a challenging and rewarding experience and pupils respond positively by taking a pride in their performances. Their attitude and behaviour in music lessons are always good and sometimes very good.
129. Accommodation for class teaching and instrumental lessons is poor and resources are inadequate. These weaknesses should be remedied by the imminent building programme. The environment is improved by displays of pupils' work, examples of musical vocabulary and photographs of musical events in school. There is only one computer in the department and there is an urgent need for a class set of keyboards with full-sized keys. Acoustic classroom instruments are inadequate to provide the variety needed in composing and performing.
130. Since the last report improvements have been made. Teaching is now good and pupils make good progress. The allocation of time to music in Year 9 has been doubled and is now adequate. The activities of composing, performing and listening are now integrated, and the schemes of work have been completely revised to ensure that the range of experience for Year 9 pupils is widened and meets National Curriculum requirements. There is still a need for the styles of music that pupils experience to be broader, although the short-term measure of using contemporary styles to engage the pupils is sound. This is a subject where all the indicators are of major improvement ahead. Music at the school has begun a renaissance and the department should seize the opportunities provided by the new building to become a vibrant part of school life.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall; lesson planning, lesson preparation and quality of questioning are good.
- Attitudes and behaviour are good overall.
- Leadership and management are good overall.

Areas for improvement

- The changing accommodation for pupils is poor and the showering facilities are very poor.
- The pace and intensity of work in skill practices vary in lessons, resulting in insufficient challenge of more able pupils.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop creativity, inventiveness, improvisation and individualism during practical work, especially in Year 9.

131. Standards in Year 9 (at the end of Key Stage 3) in the lessons observed are average overall in games, gymnastics and dance. In gymnastics and dance few pupils achieve the highest standards. Only a small number show inventiveness, flair and creativity in their balance work and sequences of movement. Pupils are beginning to develop the capacity to think ahead and anticipate the responses of others in games and in partner work in dance and gymnastics. Basic techniques are improving slowly as a result of good teaching, the use of illustrative task cards and the impact of different teaching styles. These are helping pupils to plan, observe, compare and evaluate their movements that at present lack versatility and imagination. In badminton, attainment is average in stroke production, movement around the court and understanding of tactical play. A small number of pupils demonstrate accomplished skills.
132. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in 2001 was below the national average. In 2000 the number obtaining A*-C grades matched the national average, when pupils achieved as well in physical education as they did in the average of all other subjects. A relatively small number of pupils study GCSE, typically some 13 per cent of the year group, including just four girls. In GCSE theory lessons pupils show above average knowledge and understanding of somatotypes and factors affecting performance; their planning, performing, monitoring and evaluation of a health-related exercise training programme are also above average. Pupils have a good understanding of the effects of exercise on heart rate and physical well-being. In core (non-examination) physical education lessons, the pupils work hard and achieve higher than average standards in badminton and in fitness training. The achievement of girls is higher than that of boys in these lessons.
133. Overall the quality of provision is good for the small number of students following AS and A level courses. In 2001, the first year in which the school entered candidates for AS level examinations, a small cohort of five students gained A-D grades and 60 per cent of the group obtained higher A-B grades. Seven students are presently studying at AS and four will take the examinations in 2002. Inspection evidence shows that these well-motivated students in Years 12 and 13 are producing work of above average standard. The students' practical performance shows a good range of skills in different activities and high levels of fitness. Able students in Years 12 and 13 reach high levels of personal performance in soccer, netball and badminton. Written work and observation of lessons reveal that students have above average knowledge and understanding of such topics as sport in society, patterns of recreation, skill acquisition and mental rehearsal,

discrimination in sport and physiological studies concerning the lactic acid system in physical activity. All students in Year 12 have made good progress since they began the course and are achieving well. In discussions, the students make effective use of a wide range of relevant vocabulary, drawing on their own practical experience in games to improve their understanding. The teaching of AS and A level physical education is good. Teachers have high expectations and well-structured lessons result in good learning.

134. Teaching is good across all key stages. Lesson preparation is thorough and the quality of questioning is good. Pupils are well managed. Relationships are good. Teachers involve pupils in an understanding of lesson content by describing intended learning outcomes, giving clear instructions and explanations, and by the use of effective demonstrations. An appropriate range of teaching styles is used and the pupils are required to evaluate their work. The pace and intensity of work in skill practices vary in lessons in Years 9-11 and insufficiently challenging demands are made upon more able pupils. There is almost no use of time-limited activities to generate sustained practices at speed. As a result of the effective teaching, the quality of pupils' learning overall is good. It is better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than in Year 9. Pupils develop their knowledge and understanding about physical fitness and healthy lifestyles effectively. Attitudes and behaviour are good. Some boys at Key Stage 4 are often boisterous in lessons and this detracts from their concentration and learning in badminton and fitness training lessons. Overall, however, they work hard and make good use of opportunities to practise and consolidate their skills.
135. Physical education makes a good contribution to the development of key skills. The department's policies are designed to enhance the pupils' language, number and ICT skills. Pupils on examination courses routinely handle and interpret data. Video cameras and TV monitors are used to record performance and assist evaluation in gymnastics in Year 9, where the pupils also demonstrate good use of technical language in respect of fitness training. Sixth form students have well-developed data-handling and word-processing skills. They also use the Internet to search for information. The written work of these students is good overall, grammar, expression, punctuation and spelling being above average. Discussions with sixth form students and observation of presentations confirm that most are fluent and articulate.
136. The department is well led and effectively managed. Staff responsibilities are clearly identified. The comprehensive documentation guides the work of the department well, so that it runs smoothly and effectively. There have been improvements since the previous inspection. Examination courses have been introduced for 16-, 17- and 18-year-olds. Standards have improved at Key Stage 4. Teaching and learning have improved. There are now good arrangements for the few non-participants in lessons to observe and evaluate lesson content so as to enhance their knowledge and learning. The limited allocation of time for core physical education in Year 11 presents difficulties for the planning of a balanced programme of activities.
137. The changing accommodation for pupils is poor and the showering facilities are very poor. Criticism of this accommodation was made in the previous OFSTED report in 1997 and improvement is long overdue. Development of pupils' knowledge and awareness of personal hygiene suffer because of these poor facilities. Arrangements for liaison with partnership middle schools about curricular content, continuity, assessment and many other matters related to raising achievement at Key Stage 3, which spans the middle and high schools, are poor.

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

In the inspection, thirteen 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 the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	2	50	52	0	2	1	1
Business studies	2	100	76	0	12	2	2
Sociology	1	0	63	0	7	0	1

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	14	71	87	7	43	4	6
Chemistry	8	100	90	38	43	5	6
Biology	5	100	88	20	34	4	5
Physics	16	88	88	25	40	5	6
Science AVCE	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	10
Design and technology	12	92	91	17	30	5	5
Business studies	25	100	92	32	32	6	6
Business AVCE	9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13	10
ICT AVCE	7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	10
Health and social care AVCE	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	11
Art and design	8	100	96	63	46	8	7
Drama	5	100	99	0	38	5	7
Geography	8	100	92	0	38	4	7
History	9	89	88	22	35	6	5
Religious studies	4	100	92	25	38	6	6
Sociology	9	78	86	22	35	4	5
English literature	19	100	95	37	37	6	6
French	4	100	89	25	38	4	6
Spanish	1	100	89	0	39	6	6

General studies	50	84	85	18	30	4	5
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Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ							
Business	2	100	*	0	*	0	*
Health and social care	5	100	*	20	*	0	*
Information technology	12	100	*	50	*	8	*
Leisure and tourism	4	100	*	25	*	0	*

* No national data available.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- There is a shared commitment to improve the examination results.
- The department is well managed.
- Teaching and relationships in the department and with the students are good.

Areas for improvement

- The AS and A level examinations are not as good as they should be.
- There is insufficient use of ICT.
- The students' study skills need improvement, and more independent learning is needed.

138. The results in the GCE A level examination in 2001 were below the national average, continuing the pattern over the last few years with only one student gaining an A or B grade. This reflects poor achievement, given the average standard when the students entered the course. The performance of students has been consistently below that of the performance in other subjects that they have taken. Students study modules in pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics in Year 12 with national examinations at the completion of each module at AS level. The results at the end of Year 12 at AS level were also poor. The study of these modules is continued in Year 13 by students who continue with their mathematics course to A level. There is no difference between the results of male and female students.

139. The standard of work seen is better than recent examination results indicate. There is a shared commitment among the staff and students to succeed and there is clear educational direction. The teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and delivered with increasing confidence at a good pace. Teachers have a very good knowledge of mathematics and they share it with their students in a lively way. For example, students in Year 13, revising for an imminent end-of-module examination in pure mathematics,

choose the topic to be covered. The teacher demonstrates good knowledge of logarithms and structures the students' responses, beginning with the meaning of logarithms and moving on to sketching graphs before describing and using rules of logarithms. Students are involved in discussion at each stage. The final question relies on information from the statistics part of the course. Students do not understand the impossibility of the log of a negative number but they are able to use accurately the rules of logarithms. A lesson dealing with problems associated with the normal distribution of data showed that students who are to resit an AS level module in statistics had gained in confidence. They had a sound understanding of standard deviation, variance, range and quartiles. The students' files showed that the quality of their work had improved and the pace of work was at least satisfactory.

140. Following very poor results in the 2001 AS examinations, Year 12 students are now taught in two groups, based on prior attainment. Each group is of a more uniform ability, enabling the lesson material to be presented in the most appropriate way for the majority of the students. For example, each group uses the stem-leaf technique to analyse data. The knowledge gained by one group is more closely controlled by the teacher than the other group that is given the opportunity to apply wider mathematical skills. Students in both groups are able to examine the data presented and find the mode, median, modal group and range from sorted data. They can also use the technique to compare two distributions of the marks gained by students in two examination papers.
141. The students' attitudes are generally positive in both Year 12 and Year 13. They receive information readily but their response is rather dull. They lack confidence in discussing more challenging ideas. The lessons observed were mostly teacher directed and influenced by the need for final revision sessions before the formal examination at the end of the module. The teachers are aware of the need to develop mathematical skills such as discussing alternative methods of proof of concepts and to encourage independent learning and effective record keeping. The provision for research in mathematics in the library is unsatisfactory. Information and communication technology is used insufficiently.
142. The teaching of the GCSE rest course is good with good guidance on examination technique a strong feature. The classwork is consolidated with an effective homework paper. The students interact well with the teacher and produce work of a standard estimated as at least grade C. The students demonstrate a high standard of graphical work but they rely too readily on calculators to perform basic calculations.
143. The management of the department is very good. The head of department who has recently been appointed has made an immediate impact. The relatively poor results in the last few years at A level and last year at AS level have been acknowledged, and remedial measures put into place to tackle the problem. The teaching staff share the desire to improve further the standard of teaching; they pool ideas and work well as a team.

Sciences

The focus was on biology and chemistry, but physics was also sampled. In physics, examination results were below average in 2001 but were in line with expectations based on GCSE results. Two lessons were observed and both were good. In one lesson Year 13 students were engaged in debate with the teacher who, through questioning relating to Newton's Laws of Motion together with experimentation, elicited the need for a centripetal force when a body is moving in a circle, and then derived an expression for this in terms of angular velocity. This led to students gaining a sound understanding of this topic. Data provided by the

school shows that over the last three years students made satisfactory progress from GCSE to A level in biology, chemistry and physics. Standards seen were broadly average.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Students have a sound grasp of concepts and are able to apply them in answering questions for coursework and in class discussion.
- Overall teaching is good. An increasing range of activities is being used to develop the students' knowledge and understanding.
- Students are confident in making presentations.
- The subject is well led and new learning resources have been developed for both AS and A level, which involve a range of methods to promote effective learning.

Areas for improvement

- Some practical work is insufficiently challenging.
- On some occasions time is spent in class revisiting and teaching basic GCSE level work, when this would be better delegated to students to do independently.

144. The GCE A level examination results in 2001 were below average but the entry was low (5) and the results were consistent with GCSE results. All students entered obtained a pass grade but the proportion obtaining higher grades was below average. In the previous three years results were average or, in 1999, well above average.

145. The standards of work by current students are about average. Work in the students' books and discussion with them show that they are developing an appropriate understanding of topics such as the equilibrium curve for oxygen and haemoglobin and the details of the filtration mechanism of the kidneys. Other examples were seen of high quality work, where students had researched the detailed structure and function of various organelles, such as the mitochondrion, and had made presentations to the class, distributing their research.

146. Students in Year 12 are only one term into their course. Discussion with them shows a sound understanding of recent work on osmosis, water potential and enzyme catalysis. Their current coursework assignment is on enzymes and the standard of work was above average in terms of AS level criteria.

147. Teaching is good overall and the students learn well as a result. Particular features of good teaching include clear explanation using ICT slide shows, setting students the task of researching information, for example using the Internet and CD ROMs, and getting students to make presentations. These activities help students to make sound progress in developing key skills. Another good feature is the use of group work and debate about ethical issues, when students debate "Is it right to sell blood?" for example. In some cases practical work is insufficiently challenging, however. Also time is sometimes spent revisiting GCSE work. This level of work would be better delegated to the students to do independently, especially bearing in mind the pressure of time in a modular course.

148. The students learn well. They have a positive attitude towards biology, are attentive and work productively. They respond well to different learning activities such as research, presentations and group work. Relationships between students and with the teachers are good.
149. The subject is well led and well managed. Significant progress has been made in developing new schemes of work and resources for Years 12 and 13. These include the use of a variety of methods to promote good learning. There are differences in approach between teachers, however, in their outline schemes. A consistent approach is required in order that an accurate overview can be obtained of the overall balance and range of learning opportunities. This needs to be evaluated, as planned, and adjusted to give the maximum impact on learning.

Chemistry

Overall the provision for chemistry is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good. Lessons are well structured and there is a range of activities to develop the students' understanding.
- There are very good working relations between students and teachers. The students are interested, co-operative and keen to succeed.

Areas for improvement

- The work schemes are not standardised and lack detail.
- The most able students are not sufficiently challenged.
- Although targets are set, the assessments do not indicate the levels achieved.

150. For the past three years the GCE A level results have been much the same, the students achieving slightly lower grades (but not significantly so) in chemistry than in their other A level subjects. There is no discernible difference between the achievements of boys and girls.
151. The standards seen in lessons are average for A level groups. In a Year 13 lesson students worked hard to understand the concept of hydrolysis, showing that they could recall knowledge and apply it in a different situation, confirming their grasp of the principles of the subject. In a Year 12 lesson students showed a good understanding of organic chemistry nomenclature and were able to apply their understanding to new problems.
152. The teaching is of a good standard. The courteous and co-operative attitude of the students is a real help in learning and the relationships between students and teachers are very positive and helpful in the learning process. Teachers draw out ideas from students by skilful questioning and the students work in pairs or small groups to share ideas. The students also co-operate well with each other and are supportive of each other's learning. Questioning is, however, pitched at an average level and does not challenge the most able students. Extension work could easily have been added to the lesson seen on alcohols and isomers.

153. Scrutiny of the students' files shows evidence of good marking, in particular checking the accuracy of some of the more important A level notes. The marking did not, however, give any grade assessments to help the students to know the standards that they were achieving on a day-to-day basis.
154. The students are well provided with textbooks, each student having both a working textbook and one for reference at home. Information and communication technology equipment is considered by the students to be good and there is evidence from their files that some students were using ICT to help with their notes, both for word processing and seeking information from the Internet. The laboratories are adequately stocked for apparatus but, with sixth form numbers increasing, further investment will be needed in the near future. In the library there is a good selection of scientific magazines but the reference section is barely adequate to help students with research and wider reading.
155. The work schemes for the science department's A level course adequately cover the syllabus but it would be advantageous if the three styles of work scheme were standardised. The schemes would also benefit from greater amplification to provide more references to books, examples of experimental investigations and further reading, and be more time specific. Co-ordination would also be helped by a formalising of meetings amongst the three teachers of A level. Planning would be helped by a specific budget allowance for the subject and included in the departmental development plan. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Two courses in this curriculum area were inspected: GCE AS/A level courses in design and technology (option C – resistant materials) and in graphical communication. The two courses are reported under the one heading of design and technology, with specific reference made to the separate courses as appropriate.

Design & Technology

Overall, the quality of provision for design and technology is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers have a good knowledge of their students, which helps them to meet their individual needs on a day-to-day basis.
- Students have good relationships with the teachers and each other.
- The impact of ICT is beginning to show in standards of work.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results in graphics have been unsatisfactory.
- Assessment is not used effectively to inform planning, or the monitoring of the students' progress to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- Resources for computer assisted manufacturing (CAM) are inadequate
- Links with industrial and commercial practice and related higher education institutions are insufficient.
- High quality demonstrations of skills and techniques, including examples of innovation and ingenuity, are needed to advance learning at a good pace.

156. Over the last three years the students made satisfactory progress from GCSE to A level in resistant materials and did as well in this subject as in the other subjects that they took. There were no entries in graphical communication in 2001. In the two years before that the students did worse in this subject than in the other subjects that they took, and in 2000 none of the eight students achieved grade A-D.
157. The standard of work by current students varies. At best it is in line with what is expected at this stage of the course. In Year 12, attainment is closely related to the students' previous GCSE performance; however, entry to the courses does not depend on students having previously achieved one of the higher grades A*-C at GCSE. Scrutiny of work and discussions with students reveal that not all students have followed an equivalent course of study at GCSE. Some students, therefore, have an inadequate background of study and lack the necessary standard to succeed, unless they make very rapid progress.
158. In Year 13 graphical communications, the standards of work are generally below what is expected at this stage of the course. Some students lack confidence and show little initiative and are not working at the expected level when designing and modelling individual major and minor projects. Unsatisfactory attendance hampers the progress of some students.
159. In all courses the use of computer assisted design (CAD) and the Internet is beginning to have an impact on both standards of presentation and depth of research. Here design and research skills are developing. There is evidence that students analyse problems to innovate, create and take risks when designing, but not all of them display a satisfactory understanding of construction and materials technology. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, when students were designing and producing an adjustable faced golf club, the understanding of the design process and analytical skills of angles of impact are reasonably well developed, but the students' knowledge of casting procedures and manufacture of moulds is inadequate.
160. The teachers know the students well and teacher-student relationships are good. The better lessons are planned well and are challenging, enabling students to move to a fuller and deeper level of understanding through a series of well-timed teacher interventions. Where teaching is just satisfactory, the method and lesson organisation do not enable students to consolidate information from the previous lessons, and learning remains on the level of factual knowledge. In these lessons students are not motivated by the teaching style, which on occasions moves towards a lecture, for example in a Year 12 lesson on a new module about the production of iron and steel.
161. The links with industry and higher education institutions specialising in industrial design are inadequate. This is needed to ensure that students, including those at Key Stage 4 who are considering the next stage of their education, are well informed about all career opportunities in design and manufacture. In no lessons observed were the students presented with examples or display materials to stimulate creativity and develop greater awareness of design and manufacturing problems.
162. The students' work in graphical communication is generally marked but the quality and usefulness of comments vary significantly from teacher to teacher. In some instances the students do not evaluate their work as they proceed, but rather at the end, testing projects against original intentions. The students make inadequate progress as a result.
163. The leadership and management of both courses are satisfactory on a day-to-day basis. The close monitoring of students' performance, teacher planning and wider dissemination of good practice would raise standards of attainment. Better facilities for

computer assisted manufacturing (CAM) are needed.

BUSINESS

Overall, the quality of provision in the business courses is **good**.

Strengths

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and lessons are carefully prepared.
- The lessons allow learning to take place, enhancing understanding and requiring student participation.
- The great majority of students who start on courses follow them to the end.
- Students have a very positive attitude to learning and generally participate freely.
- The results at A level are above the average for all subjects in the school and also the national average.

Areas for improvement

- Although work is regularly assessed, formal assessment with marks, enabling students to judge their performance, needs to be on a more regular basis during the courses.
- While the accommodation has been improved it is still inadequate for the needs of the courses.

164. Standards overall are currently above the national average and above that for the school as a whole. In GCE A level business studies this has been the case for the last four years. The standards reached by the present students, as seen in their lessons and work, are at a similar standard for both male and female students. When account is taken of the students' GCSE grades at the start of the course they make at least satisfactory progress, and some make very good progress. This progress is similar in the Advanced and Intermediate vocational courses.
165. The standard of teaching is good. The teachers' expert subject knowledge provides a framework within which a variety of activities allow good learning to take place. Lessons are well structured and have a good pace so that the students learn well. This was shown in one revision lesson for AS business studies, when students revisited several numerical aspects about which they were less sure. The teacher's explanation, the examples that the students were asked to do and subsequent questioning increased their confidence. The result of the good teaching is that the students have a very good attitude towards learning and, generally, are very responsive to questioning and group activities. This is achieved despite the accommodation in which the department has to work. While there has been some improvement it is still far from satisfactory.
166. Visits by students to enhance their understanding are integrated within the schemes of work to ensure that they are appropriate and linked to the work being undertaken. There is an opportunity for Year 12 students to take part in Young Enterprise. The standard of achievement by this year's company is very good. This is an area that could be extended with benefit within the school.

167. The leadership and management of the department are good. This ensures that there is a consistent approach to the way in which teachers achieve high standards and assess the students. Whilst work is assessed on a regular basis, with comments provided, the absence of marks, except close to the examination, makes it difficult for students to judge their level of achievement. The students would benefit from a more rigorous approach in this area throughout modules and units. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The teachers' subject knowledge is very good and ensures students are moved on at an appropriate rate and depth.
- The range of courses offered is wide and suits students' aspirations.
- From a low knowledge base at the start of Year 12, students make very good progress on their courses.
- Students have very good attitudes to ICT and they make very good efforts to acquire skills, knowledge and understanding.

Areas for improvement

- Although management of the subject is satisfactory, there is no overall head of department, so it is difficult to undertake the necessary monitoring of teaching.
- Not enough work in ICT is done during Years 7-11 so sixth form students have to learn many basic operations before they can make progress on their new courses.
- Much of the accommodation is cramped and students have inadequate areas for theory work.

168. The range of courses offered to students is wide and matches their needs. Within the courses, students have choices about the number of units that they wish to take. They can opt for three, six or twelve units on AVCE courses, take an Intermediate GNVQ or a commercial network-training course.

169. The results in A level examinations in 2001 show a marked improvement from the two previous years. All seven students gained at least a pass grade and there were three distinctions. The results were good when compared with other subjects at the school and compare favourably with results from similar schools. At Intermediate level, 12 students took the examination, all gaining at least a pass grade and there were six merits and one distinction. Results overall are above average. The entrants are mostly male. The courses are proving popular, as entry numbers are rising, and it is expected that 26 students will take A level in ICT this year. Although there is a good range of courses and units on offer, few girls opt to take ICT.

170. On entry to the sixth form, the standards of some students are low, as they have taken only a basic certificate of competence, and some do not have a formal qualification. Most know the basics of logging on to the network and working with programs, but their skills in solving problems and understanding of how ICT impacts upon society are weak. These students have to work hard at the start of their courses to bring their knowledge up to date before they can make progress on the examination course. Other students are enthusiasts and have good skills. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average overall. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good and the students' attitudes are very good, which brings about good learning. The students'

achievement overall, in relation to their standards when they begin in the sixth form, is very good.

171. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average on the A level course and average on the Intermediate course. Students understand the need for thorough analysis of set problems, know how to approach users of ICT and make sensible decisions about developing systems. They devise logical solutions that are easier to use and professionally presented. They understand the technology, know their programs and understand which are the best for particular operations. The few girls on the course tend to work more slowly than the boys, but are more methodical in approach. The boys are more adventurous, but make more mistakes. Keyboard work is good. Most students know about short cuts to success, and spot errors quickly. The students' skills in explaining their thinking are better developed in Year 13 than in Year 12, as the older ones are more aware of the social and moral implications of using ICT in society. Standards of work from students doing the very demanding CISCO course are above average. They have a good grasp of what constitutes a network and understand about creating, managing and maintaining systems in a variety of organisations. They know the basics about network security and how to check individual files. Portfolio work is variable in quality. Some students keep good, well-organised files, with well-annotated printouts and notes, but others do the basic minimum and their record-keeping is haphazard. Many students taking other subjects, such as history, design and technology and physical education, use ICT successfully for presenting portfolios and searching for information.
172. The overall quality of teaching is good and brings about good learning. In the lessons seen during the inspection, there was no unsatisfactory teaching and eight lessons were graded good or very good. Teachers know the subject and the requirements of the examining boards and plan well. They use and create good quality support sheets, so that students who have weaknesses in literacy and numeracy benefit from additional explanations, and those who are talented develop independence. A strong feature in the teaching is the quality of individual help given during lessons. Questioning is thorough and helps students to organise their ideas and extend them. Students have very good attitudes to the subject and there is mutual trust and understanding between teachers and learners. The students' progress is tracked carefully at all stages of their courses and target-setting is realistic.
173. The teachers have clear roles and responsibilities for different aspects of the courses and meet regularly to plan together and discuss work. There is no overall head of ICT, which means that monitoring of teaching and sharing good practice are limited, and the problem of a few students not completing their courses is not resolved. The department has made good progress since the last inspection, as new courses have been developed, more students take the subject, results at A level are now above the national average and there are more and better computers.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and drama but two lessons of A level media studies were also observed, one in each year of the sixth form. The teaching and the progress made by the students were good. No students have yet been presented for examination at A level.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Standards are very good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- The students are able to develop their work through observation, investigation and personal response.
- Relationships and the attitudes that students have towards the subject and their teachers ensure good progress.

Areas for improvement

- The curriculum is too narrow with insufficient emphasis on non-European art.
- The use of computers and specialist software to develop artwork is inadequate.
- The students do not work with sufficient independence or read about the subject sufficiently.

174. Standards are very good. The A level GCE results in 2001 were well above average and have improved since 2000 and the previous report. These results are amongst the best in the school and reflect good progress from Year 11.

175. Teaching and learning are good. The students' portfolios and sketchbooks give an immediate impression of quality with good investigation into everyday objects, landscape, seascape or industrial scenery, through experimentation with tone, shape and texture. The process of developing ideas through recording from observation and exploitation of materials, usually acrylic paint, is central to the department's activities. The good attitudes, originating in Year 9, are by this age very good indeed, and students and teachers work together in a climate of mutual respect. Challenge is an ever-present ingredient in lessons and teachers use their very good subject knowledge and management skills to conduct high quality individual discussions, tempered to suit particular students and their needs.

176. The students have refined practical skills and are confident drawing with pencil, chalk, charcoal, paint or crayon, collecting information, investigating, experimenting or developing their ideas of pattern, texture and colour into large-scale, energetic, abstract paintings. Most work is based around painting and drawing, and standards in print, textiles and sculpture are below average. There is no evidence of students using computers, scanners, digital cameras or specialist software in art.

177. The students have limited experience of seeing real works of art in galleries or museums. There is much evidence of the influence of a range of European and American artists, although a lack of reading and research prevents students from developing a genuine, personal view of this work. They are more confident in their practical skills and are pleased to discuss and explain their work with good knowledge of what they are doing and how their work will develop. Non-European art does not feature in the students' work. Some students struggle at A level and find independent working

difficult. They are reluctant to express themselves, or experiment and rely too much on their teachers for guidance in the development of their work.

178. The curriculum is unsatisfactory, based excessively on painting and drawing. There is a complete absence of ICT, as at the previous inspection. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department was absent during the inspection but the acting head of department has a clear view of the measures needed to raise standards yet further. There is no formal monitoring of teaching and learning. The learning resources are unsatisfactory and insufficient to broaden the curriculum. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last report. Standards have risen but the range of techniques and processes available remains limited.

Drama

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

Strengths

- The teacher's good choice of stimulus material and contrasting, controversial plays leads to many constructive activities.
- The students' understanding of the characters and themes of their plays is good.
- The students make thorough exploratory notes, which support them well in the examinations.

Areas for improvement

- In the most recent A level examinations students did much less well than in their other subjects.
- Students have had limited opportunities to perform over the years.
- Erratic attendance by a minority of students hampers the progress of the whole class.
- Precise assessment is insufficiently used to help each student to improve.

179. In A level drama and theatre studies there have been very small numbers, never exceeding five, in each year over the previous four years. All students have passed, but in the last three years none has gained grades A or B, and in 2000 and 2001 students did much less well than in their other subjects. Results in 2001 were low compared with the national average for this subject. Data provided by the school shows that over the last three years students made satisfactory progress from GCSE to A level.

180. Standards of work of current students give a better picture than that indicated by the 2001 results, as students are reaching satisfactory standards and are making sound progress. It is a course that is more weighted to the exploration of scripted plays than to students' creation of their own drama, and has been wisely chosen by the teacher as being suitable for small groups. Students do occasionally enter the course with no experience of drama at GCSE. The current Year 13 students gained more A and B grades than C and D grades over the three papers at AS level in 2001. The teacher's good choice of challenging, contrasting stimulus material, her very good, supportive relationship with her classes and her insistence on detailed continuous logbooks lead to the students reaching a good understanding of the characters and themes of their set plays. The students' confidence in making independent judgements is evident in both class discussion and the students' detailed exploratory notes. The subject is providing well for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is, however, insufficient analysis, justification and example in some writing to evaluate performances and make proposals for directing a play for the students to reach the

highest grades.

181. Performance in Year 13 shows research and seriousness of purpose but a limited variety of movement and dramatic techniques and awareness of the audience. Year 13 students find this strand of the course the most difficult as they are a small group with strong opinions; a third of the class is often absent, which hinders decision-making and preparation for performance. Students in Year 12 focused well on their characters, speaking convincingly in role and introducing irony in some amusing parting shots during hot-seating. Students in both years contribute well in class, to which they come well prepared. The teacher could more often give them greater responsibility for leading discussion on the aspects that they have prepared. The students have experience of operating basic sound and lighting.
182. The students enjoy the course, appreciating the teaching and the regular, encouraging feedback. Most are committed to drama in class and to the very recent performance opportunities in school. They visit the theatre, both with the school and on their own initiative.
183. Teaching is satisfactory overall with some very good and good features. There is just one teacher of drama and she has worked hard to establish the GCSE and sixth form courses, attending appropriate briefing by the examination boards. She has, however, been too much on her own. Senior management have observed and approved her teaching. There is now liaison with the music department, but there are insufficient links with the English department for mutual benefit. At present, accurate assessment and using this precisely to help each student to meet the course criteria for an appropriate grade is unsatisfactory. Formal links with another school following the same syllabus or with a specialist adviser are needed for discussing strategies, for advising on assessment, and for making arrangements for cross-moderating practical and written coursework. The present accommodation for drama is unsatisfactory but that is to be remedied in the new ADMIT Centre.

HUMANITIES

Lessons were observed in three of the humanities subjects taught at the school, the fourth being religious education which was inspected separately under the arrangements for voluntary schools.

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- The teachers have good subject knowledge and work well as a team.
- The students have good attitudes to their learning of geography.
- The students' work is assessed well.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results at A level have been consistently below those of other subjects.
- The improvements in the quality of teaching that have been made are insufficient.
- Information and communication technology is taught in a geographical context but does not increase significantly the students' subject knowledge
- The students do not learn with sufficient independence.

184. Data provided by the school shows that over the last three years students made insufficient progress from GCSE to A level. Other data, comparing the results of the students in geography with the average of their other results, shows that they did not achieve as well in geography. The pattern of comparatively low results is well established.
185. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is variable. Some is good and some is unsatisfactory; on average it is satisfactory. The strength of the teaching lies in the very good relationships between staff and students and in the teachers' knowledge of their subject. When the teaching was good the students were challenged and encouraged to think. In one lesson the teacher led informed and reflective discussion on development problems in Nepal. The correct use of geographical terms was expected. All students contributed well and showed that they understood the concepts. In another lesson the students dealt adequately with issues about city centre development and government policy, but the more able were not challenged. In another lesson little or no expectation was apparent of the need for the students to do further reading or research on the concepts of regeneration and soil erosion. The main weakness in teaching lies in the failure to challenge students of all abilities so that they can reach the higher levels. The students in some lessons, therefore, make unsatisfactory progress.
186. The students have good attitudes but average and below average achievement from some of them is accepted. In one lesson the students left the teacher to do all the work and thinking, offering few observations. There is no tradition of independent and individual research in geography. This is in part the result of teacher verbosity.
187. Assessment and monitoring of the students' work are good. Target-setting for students is done well, but marking is inconsistent in quality. Some improvements have been made since the last inspection. The department now has two specialist teachers, the range of teaching methods is wider and use is made of ICT with a room adjacent to the geography rooms. The improvements have not, however, been sufficient. Information and communication technology is not much used as a means of studying geography and the wider range of teaching methods is not embraced uniformly by both teachers. Some of the work is insufficiently demanding and independent study is insufficiently promoted.

History

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

Strengths

- The knowledge and understanding of the teachers are very good.
- The quality of teaching is very good overall.
- The students are actively involved in their learning and quickly become independent.

Areas for improvement

- New strategies for AS history are still being developed.

188. Standards in A level history in 2001 were in line with the national average in terms of average points scored. Two of the nine entrants achieved grade A; none gained B. The students' results were a little higher in history than in the average of all their other subjects. Data provided by the school shows that over the last three years students made satisfactory progress from GCSE to A level in history. Twenty-two Year 12 students were entered for AS history in 2001 and 13 of them attained in line with or better than their prior attainment, and these students are continuing the course to A level in the current Year 13.
189. Standards observed in Year 13 are average but include several higher-attaining students who respond particularly well to the challenging tasks that are set for all. In one Year 13 lesson students were introduced to the Dreyfus Affair and its significance for the Third Republic in France. They were able to work in pairs to draw out the significance of a variety of written sources of evidence and to decide their relative importance. Most were able to make good connections to previous knowledge of tensions in French society and had a sound grasp of concepts such as anti-clericalism. The higher-attaining students were more perceptive in their evaluations and were able to refute each other in discussion, but all were able to speak out confidently in response to questions. They are making steady progress in understanding this period of history.
190. In Year 12 students are nearly all committed to continuing to A level and they are making good progress for this stage of the year in response to expert teaching. Their abilities cover a wide range, and standards are broadly average. Good progress was demonstrated in a debate which one group presented to the other group on whether The Terror, as an aspect of the French Revolution, could be justified. All the students in the presenting group had prepared well, and had worked well collaboratively to cover different aspects and arguments. The students were able to make sustained presentations, demonstrating good levels of understanding and background reading, although the girls were nervous and spoke too quickly, reading rather than addressing an audience. Those listening were able to ask pertinent and perceptive questions, understanding the range of historical arguments on this topic to an acceptable level for this stage. Most of the students were also sensitive to the moral dimension in the debate.
191. History leads to good standards in basic skills. Students in both years gain from the specific drive on high standards in written communications and the use of appropriate vocabulary. They also use ICT skills well in researching and presenting their coursework assignments. The completed assignments seen from last year's Year 13 show that the students can independently identify issues, modifying them in the light of study, presenting extended explanations, and drawing conclusions. Students make rapid progress in independence because the teaching styles are very effective in encouraging this, and Year 13 students are prepared to use libraries in Newcastle to supplement the books in school. Most are hard-working and well motivated but there are two students

with serious attendance problems. The school is prepared to keep them on the register, but their progress is unsatisfactory.

192. Teaching is very good overall, and it is enabling very good learning in the best lessons. The teachers' subject knowledge is very good, as is their expertise in teaching in ways that demand active participation by the students. Lessons are generally lively and creative. The good quality of debate in the Year 12 lesson was made possible by skilled teaching earlier in the week, and by giving the students thorough guidance. Teachers provide good quality resources with particular attention to ensuring that students meet a range of historical argument on every topic. The bibliographies seen on some essays indicated that most students are reading critically and beyond the basic requirements. The resources given to students include handouts prepared by former students to accompany presentations. The current students value these as giving very useful overviews of topics.
193. Last year the teachers were disappointed with the AS results. This year they have adopted new approaches to improve them. There are two groups rather than one in Year 12; the work is divided into smaller manageable units with frequent assessments that involve the students in evaluating their own progress. Marking is thorough with useful comment and the students feel confident enough to seek additional support when drafting essays, as they do in Year 13. Also the challenge is carefully stepped to include all, and then the intention is to build on progress gradually. At this stage of Year 12 these approaches are working well in the lessons seen. These developments are important improvements. With reflection, they may usefully be adapted in Year 13 in order to raise achievement there, especially for weaker students.
194. The subject leadership is good for this level and, as in the main school, is successfully collaborative. The students believe that the subject is well managed and they are very confident that they are well taught. Curricular planning is thorough, as are assessment procedures. The curriculum is enriched well by visits out; for example, to hear sixth form lectures at Durham University. In recent years approximately half the Year 13 students have progressed to higher education courses related to history.

SOCIOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in sociology is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Some aspects of the teaching are good.
- The students have positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- A level results have been consistently unsatisfactory.
- Some of the teaching is unsatisfactory.
- There is no established co-ordinator for the subject and the school has had difficulties in staffing it.
- There are no monitoring and assessment procedures.

195. A level results were below average in 2001, with similar results in 2000. For the last three years the results have shown insufficient progress from attainment at GCSE, and the students have done worse in sociology than they have in their other subjects. AS results in 2001 included a high proportion of pass grades, with a quarter of candidates achieving grades A-B. The standards of work seen are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory in terms of gains made in relation to predicted grades and in relation to other school subjects.
196. In both Years 12 and 13 the students' independent study skills are weak. They examine evidence, including statistics, individually and in groups, but their learning is only productive when frequent questions direct them to relevant points. They lack confidence and their learning relies upon questions from teachers. This occurs in some of the teaching; in a Year 12 tutorial questions direct students to references in sources and this builds self-confidence to enable them to identify the characteristics of different research methods. Often the level of challenge in questions is not sufficient to carry the students' learning forward. In a Year 12 lesson students are questioned about images of class and in a Year 13 lesson about images of criminal stereotypes. In both cases there is a lack of challenge, with students expressing opinions based on general knowledge. Students find difficulty in generalising their learning from the knowledge gained, for example in drawing conclusions about the limitations of certain research methods from particular case studies. In lessons in both Years 12 and 13 the students were questioned about the details of case studies to enable them to identify the limitations of participant observation as a research method. In such lessons good subject knowledge ensures an adequate level of challenge in questions put to students, but in other lessons discussion remains at the level of the students' own general knowledge, so that learning is not taken further.
197. The students' recall and use of terms previously learned are weak. In the more effective teaching, questions about subject terms reinforce understanding and ensure that learning takes place within a sociological framework. In a Year 13 lesson students are questioned closely about the appropriateness of longitudinal research methods so that they become familiar with the term. In less effective teaching there is an inappropriate emphasis on a "social issues" approach that relies too much on the expression of personal opinion without the use of appropriate terms or indeed any specific subject knowledge. Students write about different sociological perspectives, for example in their study of religion. Students with special needs write confidently about the characteristics of functionalism and Marxism as views of society. Higher attainers write about the functions of the family and critically assess the view that the family is universal. In the work seen, however, the students do not readily apply their knowledge to a particular question. Their skills in structuring essays, including defining terms in the question set and writing a reasoned conclusion, are not well developed. Work is not always regularly assessed and marking is not sufficiently analytical to show students how to improve.
198. Skills in interpreting evidence, for example in statistical sources and in case studies, are not well developed. In some lessons time is not well used; in a Year 13 lesson the time allocated to a study of sources about criminal types was insufficient to enable a writing task to be completed. Learning is more effectively consolidated when there are opportunities for writing and discussion throughout the lesson with resources that are challenging. In a Year 13 lesson detailed case studies had questions posed alongside each section of writing and during class discussion students made notes in response to each question. In contrast, the use of over-simplified resources does not take learning forward and is a feature of some lessons. In a Year 12 lesson students spent time unproductively studying pictures of individuals and then gave their responses in the form of opinions. Students display positive attitudes and readily engage in group and paired

activities. In a Year 13 lesson they collaborated well in groups to produce images of criminal stereotypes.

199. The coverage of the subject during the inspection was by several teachers as the best arrangement that the school could make following the departure of the principal sociology teacher at the end of the previous term. Some of the teaching was good, combining secure knowledge, sound planning and a high level of challenge in discussion and the resources used. In some teaching knowledge is not secure and there is a lack of challenge in discussion, methods and resources used that makes both teaching and learning unsatisfactory overall.
200. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory, with no established co-ordinator in place following a period of significant staff change. Monitoring and assessment procedures are not in place and the students' learning needs are not consistently identified, with no planning in place to meet needs.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

Students in the sixth form are enjoying the popular, recently-established media studies courses for AS and A2 levels. With good teaching they make good progress in thinking about the conventions of different media and in gaining a sound knowledge of media terminology. Their analysis is reflective, though not always penetrating. In a Year 12 class several students explained themselves well in an astute discussion about sources of humour in sitcom and how these have changed over the years. Students write fluently, though there are some spelling errors and occasional slang, and source materials are not regularly acknowledged.

English

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

Strengths

- Students' achievement is good; they make good progress during the course.
- Students work hard; they have a good grasp of concepts and write accurately and fluently.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and their marking is thorough.
- Relationships are very good between students and between students and their teachers.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- The students need to develop further their independent learning skills and extend their range as private readers.

201. Results at AS and A level in 2001 were good and above national averages. Data provided by the school shows that over the last three years students have made good progress from GCSE to A level. Students often achieve their best results in English literature. Although girls performed better than boys in 2001 this has not been the overall trend in recent years, when boys have performed as well or better. The quality of work seen during the inspection confirms these high standards. The students' attainment is above average, particularly in the accuracy of their written work. They quickly develop a fluent prose style, and their essays are well structured and thorough. By their second year almost all students have acquired a confident, mature voice. Some excellent Year 13 essays on *The Rover* were seen in which the most able students used ambitious vocabulary to express their ideas and their use of quotation was impressive. In essays on *Amadeus* even the least able students were able to express their ideas clearly and

make valuable comment on the play's dramatic impact. Students across the range of ability make good progress both at AS and A level. Students work hard and enjoy the subject. They engage well together in paired and small group discussion. In some teacher-led class discussion, however, the students' responses were brief and undeveloped, and many students were passive listeners. One lesson seen was dominated by the ideas of a confident few. More opportunities are needed for students to become responsible for presenting their ideas in a more sustained way, without relying on their teacher to extend their answers.

202. The quality of teaching is good, with some very good features, and students learn well as a result. The teachers have very good subject knowledge. This enables students to draw upon a wide range of texts, although, currently, there are no texts from other cultures being studied. The skills of close textual reading are well taught, and this is reflected in the quality of the students' written responses. Marking is very thorough and students understand both what they are doing well and what they need to do to further improve their standard. The students benefit from an ethos of learning and high expectations of success. Relationships are very good. The teachers' planning is good and includes a range of activities. The students are given regular opportunities to work in small groups and form independent views of their texts. In one very good lesson expert questioning required the students to articulate their initial hypotheses about Keats' *Ode to Autumn* and then led them systematically towards developing their own understanding.
203. The department is well led and managed. Students benefit directly from the energy and commitment of the head of department. Departmental documents are thorough and there is careful analysis of examination results. The students are closely monitored, and ambitious targets are set. This is a successful department where teachers work hard. Monitoring of teaching takes place but there is awareness that more needs to be done to share ideas and extend the best classroom practice. In the last report there was praise for the department and its achievement at post-16 level. This high standard has been maintained. An area for improvement identified was further development of students as independent learners. Although regular opportunities for group discussion are already in place, the department is aware that more needs to be done to extend the students' research skills and develop their private reading beyond the requirements of the syllabus. Initial planning for these is already in place.

Modern foreign languages

French and Spanish are taught in the sixth form. Lessons were observed in Spanish where the standards were satisfactory, but A level examination results have been consistently unsatisfactory in Spanish for some time. French was the subject for specific inspection in the sixth form.

French

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

Strengths

- The teaching is mostly good.
- Marking of work is thorough and diagnostic.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of higher grades in examinations is low and the school needs to develop strategies to increase them.
- The provision of authentic reading and listening materials is insufficient.

204. Low numbers were entered for the AS and A level examinations in 2001, which make comparisons difficult. The AS level results were disappointing given high prior attainment. At A level, only one student gained a grade B, though all students were successful. The numbers choosing to study French is now increasing and includes a high proportion of boys. There are a number of dual linguists and several intend to use languages in their careers.

205. Standards during the week of the inspection were good. The Year 12 students have not found the gap between GCSE and AS level too demanding. This is proof of the thorough teaching lower down the school. Homework, student preparation and research proved vital in the lessons observed and the students were fully prepared. In a Year 12 lesson on drugs every student was fully involved and able to express him/herself confidently when asked, for example, how to explain ways in which the law relating to drugs has changed. Discussions and the level of self-expression were at a mature level. The students were able to express their ideas clearly and coherently. When words were unknown, alternatives were used. Students were keen to check if words and expressions were appropriate. Lessons are carefully sequenced so that a topic is fully researched and discussed. By the end of the drugs lesson, everyone had a good idea of the pros and cons of drugs and their use. All had sufficient knowledge to enable them to write in detail on the topic. There was a similar type of lesson in Year 13 on religion. Personal experiences were used by the teacher, giving examples of the level of language required. Questions were very skilfully used to elicit as much information as possible and to make the students think very hard. The students are able to understand French on tapes and are taught examination techniques to help with answers.

206. Written work shows that the demands made and the amount of individual work done are good. Files contain notes, new grammar and consolidation exercises. There were many examples of reading materials used for the various topics. The resources were working documents, highlighting essential information required in answers, together with exercises on comprehension. Students are taught how to skim and gist-read, which can save time in examinations and helps to build up understanding. Files contain written work that the teacher had marked to include comments on strengths and ways of improving. A wealth of useful vocabulary and expressions, often with examples of usage, provides further evidence of the intensity of the course. The teaching is good and some very good teaching was seen. Lesson preparation is thorough, expectations are high and there is constant challenge. As a result, the students are confident in their learning and seek to improve. A regular visit to the cinema out of school enhances the language learning experience. Work experience abroad is a further enhancement.

207. There has been improvement since the previous inspection, but not enough. More liaison between the teachers is needed. There is a shortage of up-to-date authentic

materials, such as newspapers and magazines, which are very expensive. The teachers do purchase these themselves on a regular basis. The use of the Internet is encouraged as a research source.