

ERRATUM SLIP

St Alban's Catholic High School

Unique Reference Number: 124864

Contract Number: 249603

Date of inspection: 10/02/2003

Reporting inspector: Sylvia Richardson

INSPECTION REPORT - the following paragraph should read as follows:-

Dates of inspection: 10 - 13 February 2003

INSPECTION REPORT

ST ALBAN'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Ipswich

LEA area: Suffolk

Unique reference number: 124864

Headteacher: Mr Dennis McGarry

Reporting inspector: Mrs Sylvia Richardson
1038

Dates of inspection: 10 - 13 February 2002

Inspection number: 249603

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11-19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Digby Road Ipswich Suffolk
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr Erica Joslyn
Date of previous inspection:	March 1997

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1038	Mrs Sylvia Richardson	Registered inspector	French	Characteristics of the school Teaching Curriculum 11-16 Leadership and management of the school
8992	Mr Julian Vischer	Lay inspector		Care, welfare and guidance Partnership with parents Behaviour, attitudes and personal development
12121	Mr Jack Mallinson	Team inspector	English	
32167	Mr Mark Sumner	Team inspector	Mathematics	
13067	Mr Alan Quinn	Team inspector	Biology	
15977	Mrs Maggie Holling	Team inspector and sixth form inspection co-ordinator	History	Curriculum 16+ Leadership and management of the sixth form
22590	Mr Robert Castle	Team inspector	Geography	
17015	Mr Lawrence Denholm	Team inspector	ICT Psychology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Alban's Catholic High School is a voluntary aided comprehensive school, which is a designated specialist technology college. Pupils come from all over Ipswich and district, as there is no other Catholic secondary school in the region. The school received school achievement awards in 2000 and 2001 and was designated a beacon school in 1998, re-awarded in 2002. At the time of the last inspection there was no sixth form, but the school now provides education from 11-19 for boys and girls, with 126 in the sixth form. There are 801 pupils on roll, a significant increase since the time of the last inspection, although still smaller than average. Those that stay on at school after the age of 16 mostly complete a two-year course. There are very few pupils with a mother tongue other than English. The vast majority of pupils are of white UK heritage, and English as an additional language is rare. The attainment on entry of pupils in the current Year 7 is above average, with a smaller percentage of the pupils than average having statements of special educational need, mostly for dyslexia. Attainment on entry in other year groups has varied from year to year, with an average intake in Year 11 last year. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. Very good teaching and learning, combined with very good leadership, ensure that the school provides very well for the needs of its pupils and students. Results are above average in national tests and examinations throughout the range of subjects, and in many, are well above average. The school is cost effective, despite the fact that there is a small subsidy from the main school into the sixth form. It provides very good value for money overall.

What the school does well

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Pupils achieve very well. Results in national tests and examinations are well above average. In particular, achievement in mathematics is excellent.
- Pupils' and students' attitudes to their work are very good. They work hard and support each other very well.
- Leadership is very good overall. The clear vision, sense of direction and high quality of planning provided by the headteacher and governors have ensured that, despite massive changes over the last five years, the school remains calm, purposeful and effective.

What could be improved

- There are no significant areas for improvement. The school's improvement plan considers the future needs of the school carefully, the priorities reflect the findings of the inspection and result in challenging targets.

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 1997. Since then, improvement has been very good. Progress has been very good in achieving good results in national tests at the end of Year 9. Pupils make very good progress in lessons. Standards in those subjects identified as weaker in 1997 are now at least good, for example, in languages and ICT, where GCSE results have steadily improved and are now above the national average. The personal and social education (PSE) curriculum is well planned and well delivered. The curriculum now provides adequate, though not generous, time for subjects that previously suffered from a lack of time. The introduction of a sixth form, the growth in the school's population and the addition of new accommodation have been very well handled. Opportunities to develop the curriculum have been taken, although there is still capacity for more vocational provision, especially in the sixth form. The school exceeds its performance targets year on year. The school has the management and teaching capacity to maintain its present improvements and further develop itself in the coming years.

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
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	NA	A	NA	

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

The school's results are well above the national average at the end of Years 9, 11 and in the sixth form. All subjects are performing at least above national averages and most well above. Results are also well above average when they are compared with similar schools. Particular strength lies in mathematics throughout the school, where standards are well above average. This is in large part due to a culture of achievement and success encouraged in the school and particularly well reflected in the mathematics department.

The improvements in the school's performance over the last three years were at a faster rate than nationally, with the result that the gap between the school's average performance at GCSE and A level and the national averages is now greater than in 1997. The school set challenging targets at all levels and exceeded them consistently. In routine work, teachers' high expectations are a driving force which helps pupils and students to improve their work, and these expectations are particularly evident in pupils' literacy and numeracy throughout the main school, and in ICT, applied well in the sixth form in geography, mathematics, statistics and psychology. A significant minority of higher attaining pupils successfully attains GCSE higher grade passes in Year 10 and occasionally in Year 9, enabling them to progress on to more advanced work whilst still in Years 10 and 11. The results of pupils with special educational needs exceed expectations when viewed in the light of earlier achievement.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils' attitudes to their work and concentration on it contribute to their good results.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good in class and good around the school. Pupils co-operate well with teachers and with each other and are courteous to all the people they encounter.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils work well together and relate very well to their teachers. These very good relationships are an integral part of the school's ethos, fulfilling school aims well.
Attendance	Attendance is well above average and pupils are very punctual to lessons.

The school is orderly and safe. Pupils feel secure and free from bullying or other forms of harassment. They show maturity and courtesy around the school and assist each other as much they can. Year 11 and sixth form students are attached to Year 7 classes to help new students settle when they arrive. As many students can be the only ones from their particular primary school, this is particularly important, and students comment that it helped them well.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is very good overall. It is much better than at the time of the last inspection when a significant minority of lessons was unsatisfactory. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in this inspection and much was good or very good. Some lessons were excellent. These lessons were in subjects as varied as history, mathematics, French and psychology, and in many subjects there were lessons which were very good, sometimes with aspects which were excellent.

Teaching is good overall in English and very good in mathematics. Expectations of what pupils and students can achieve are high, especially in mathematics. Many teachers contribute to pupils' and students' standards of writing. Key technical vocabulary is stressed in lessons, and pupils' understanding of grammar improves as they progress from Year 7 to Year 9, building upon earlier work in the National Literacy Strategy. Numeracy is encouraged in a number of lessons, such as geography, ICT and psychology, in addition to the very good work undertaken in mathematics. In science, teaching is good, resulting in a good response and high levels of interest from pupils and students.

The school plans well to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and English as an additional language. In some subjects, some teaching is in single sex groupings to endeavour to meet the different needs of boys and girls and ensure that pupils make good progress, whatever their gender. This has resulted in some narrowing of the performance gap between boys and girls. The teaching for pupils with special gifts and talents, for example by planned acceleration in some subjects, enables them to be appropriately challenged by more complex topics and methods of learning. This very good overall picture of teaching is matched by very good learning. All pupils make at least satisfactory progress and most make good or very good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The introduction of a wider range of subjects in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, including vocational courses, is underway.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils are making good progress and are well supported in class.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very small number of pupils with English as an additional language is achieving standards as good as those of their peers.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Teachers take the time to introduce opportunities for pupils to reflect on all four elements and are confident in dealing with spiritual development. There is a wide range of cultural activities although life in multi-cultural Britain is not generally a focus.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The guidance and support that pupils receive helps them achieve the school's aims and work well.

Parents who attended the parents' pre-inspection meeting were full of praise of the efforts of the school. Communications are good and parents are welcome in school. The curriculum has been broadened in

recent years and meets the needs of pupils. Extra-curricular opportunities are good, and the out-of-class activities such as theatre visits supplement the programme well. Procedures for child protection and ensuring students' welfare are very good. Health and Safety procedures are very good because they have been thoroughly thought through, are very well organised and regularly reviewed. Student's personal development is carefully monitored.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher sets a purposeful tone for the school and expresses its values clearly. His leadership is excellent. He is very well supported by an able and well-informed leadership group and by good heads of department.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. They are committed to the school and involved in helping to steer it. They take their duties of oversight very seriously and are heavily involved in monitoring its effectiveness.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. All staff participate fully in performance management; reviews of departments and of the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school involve outsiders to give a 360 degree perspective.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The ways in which the school has set priorities for improving its resource base have resulted in imaginative development of accommodation and learning resources.

The school is fully staffed with well-qualified and appropriate teachers. Although it has experienced some staffing turbulence in the last two years, it has been less badly affected by recruitment problems than many schools. It operates a well-thought out retention policy enabling staff to grow into their jobs and achieve promotion within the school wherever appropriate. The school's approach to staffing is an example of its effective leadership. The school has appropriate systems in place to achieve best value and to compare its effectiveness with other schools.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has high expectations of what pupils can achieve pupils make good progress at school the teaching is good the school helps pupils to become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the range of activities outside of lessons working closely with parents the information about progress the amount of homework

The inspection team agrees with parents' positive views of the school, and in particular with their appreciation of its ethos and combination of care and good educational opportunities, in and out of lessons. The range of educational activities is good. The inspectors do not agree that more formal consultations with staff should be created, as the school welcomes informal opportunities to work with parents. Reports are much improved for the current school year. The amount of homework set is appropriate, although some parents were concerned about it – parents' views differed as to whether it was too much or too little.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form was established for the first time in 1998. There are now 126 boys and girls on roll and the sixth form has grown steadily in popularity during its four-year history. About 65 per cent of the school's own pupils now stay on from Year 11 into the sixth form, with a further 20 per cent going to college or some other form of further education. The sixth form is housed in newly built accommodation and offers a wide range of academic and some vocational courses at GNVQ, VCE, AS and A2 levels. Sixth formers come from the same broad catchment area as the pupils in the rest of the school. There is a small number with special educational needs. Most students stay for a two-year course in the sixth form.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very successful. Students learn very effectively and achieve results in the A2 examinations which are above average in all subjects except mathematics and psychology, where results are well above average. Teaching is very good across all subjects. Leadership and management are very good, providing direction and purpose and a strong commitment to high achievement and success. The sixth form caters well for the needs and aspirations of all of its students. Given its current stage of growth since being established in 1998, it is cost-effective.

Strengths

- Students achieve very good results, and do particularly well in mathematics and psychology.
- Teaching is very good and enables students to acquire good learning skills and make very good progress.
- Leadership and management are very good. The head of sixth form gives clear direction and has a strong commitment to the success of this new sixth form.
- Students are confident, mature and highly motivated independent learners. They thrive in a climate of achievement and success and rise to the challenges set for them by their teachers.
- The monitoring of attainment and progress is very good and the school provides appropriate guidance and sensitive support.

What could be improved

- The strategy for supporting the most gifted or talented pupils, which is successfully underway, could be further developed.

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	Very good. Results in 2001 were well above national averages. Teachers have high expectations of their students who are highly self-motivated
Biology	Good. Above average standards have been maintained over the last two years. Teaching is good and students are well motivated.
ICT	Very good. Very good teaching, committed students and high quality work are all factors now producing 100 per cent pass rate in AS level.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Health and social care	Good. Students achieve their predicted grades or better. Teaching is good and motivates students to do well. The course offers a useful basis for further qualifications.
Geography	Good. Results are slightly above average with continued improvement in the most recent examinations. Teaching and learning are good.
History	Very good. Teaching is very good and enables students to become confident independent learners. Examination results are slightly above average.
Psychology	Excellent. Teaching and resources are excellent. Coursework is consistently very good as are results in both AS and A2 level.
English literature	Very good. Students make good progress and consistently obtain results in A level above the national average. Teaching is very good and leads to high achievement.
French	Very good. Results are improving steadily and standards in class are above average. Teaching is very good overall and students respond very well to it.

In the other subjects sampled as part of this inspection, teaching and learning were consistently good, and standards were above average.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Support for sixth form students is very good. Progress is monitored effectively and good guidance is given on subject and further education choices as well as in terms of personal support. Students appreciate the wide-ranging induction programme.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. There is a strong commitment to establishing a climate where all students can succeed. Performance of students is monitored and analysed and the resulting data is used to help students set targets for improvement. There are good systems in place for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Since the inception of the sixth form, the governing body has provided very effective leadership and support.

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"> The choice of courses suits their talents and aspirations They are helped to study independently Teachers are accessible if they require help with their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The range of activities and enrichment opportunities available to them Having more account taken of their views and being treated as responsible young adults.

Students' responses to the questionnaire were less positive than the views they expressed in formal discussions with the inspectors. The inspection team agrees with the students' positive views of the school and in particular, the ways in which they are supported by their teachers and helped to become

independent learners. Inspectors do not agree with the view that students are not treated appropriately as young adults, as they have many opportunities to take responsibility and mature during their time in the sixth form. The number of activities and enrichment opportunities is good, taking into account the range of non-classroom activities which are regularly provided, despite the limitations imposed by the widely dispersed catchment area that the school serves. The school is responsive to students' views whether expressed formally through the school council or informally.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Teaching and learning are very good

1. Teaching is a strength of the school. At the time of the last inspection, although much was good and some teaching was very good, there was no indication of the flair seen in some classes during this inspection. There was no unsatisfactory teaching: in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, teaching was at least satisfactory and the majority was good or very good. In English, for example, the bulk of the lessons were well taught and there was some very good teaching, often going beyond the requirements of the syllabus and supporting the development of pupils' and students' critical skills. Very good learning and attitudes to the subject matched this. In mathematics, although only a small amount of teaching was seen in Years 7 to 11, it was very good overall. In the sixth form, there were some examples of excellent teaching which encouraged real scholarship. Science teaching was also good. Very detailed planning enabled pupils and students to grasp challenging concepts, particularly in the sixth form. Year 12 students developed their knowledge, skills and understanding very well.
2. Surveys of pupils' and students' work show well-developed and well planned programmes of study which meet the needs and aspirations of learners and promote the efficient acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding in all subjects. Teaching makes provision for pupils to learn at different rates, and ensures that the highest attaining pupils, for example, can accelerate their studies, leading to early success in GCSE examinations in statistics, German and French. Provision is also made for appropriately qualified pupils to take AS and even A levels early.
3. The result of this careful planning is that pupils aged 11 to 16 are secure in what they know and confident in asking questions to clarify their work. Coursework shows the effect of systematic checking on pupils' progress, and of praising pupils for drafting and redrafting their work, resulting in a better quality of work overall. It also ensures that most pupils participate in lessons, although there is some reticence to answer questions in class when visitors are present.
4. The clear interconnection between teaching and learning is generally well understood by both teachers and pupils. Pupils are encouraged to discuss the objectives for a particular lesson, so that they understand what is an acceptable effort in the context of that piece of work.
5. The best teaching for 11-16 year olds was conducted in an orderly and mutually respectful atmosphere. Teachers pay careful attention to stimulate and maintain pupils' interest in the work underway through
 - effective demonstrations
 - use of overhead projectors, to give clear visual references
 - use of computers and electronic whiteboards, to add a dimension of research to pupils' learning
 - skilful questioning, to deepen pupils' understanding of the topic and gave them opportunities to feel secure in their understanding.

The result is very good progress.

6. For example, in a lower attaining mathematics set in Year 9, where pupils were learning how to construct and use pie charts, the guidance given ensured that all pupils ended the lesson understanding how to make the calculations and check their accuracy and how to draw and represent the outcomes. Very good relationships between the teachers and pupils help to reinforce the learning and in part account for the sustained motivation and good achievement of lower attaining groups in topics, which they find difficult.
7. A large Year 8 ICT class studying web page design in a well equipped ICT base similarly were fully engaged in their work and made good progress. The progress here was in part a result of a lesson plan which gave particularly good opportunities for pupils to work one-to-one with the

- teacher. This promoted pupils' own diagnostic skills, and prevented anyone in this mixed class from becoming 'a passenger'.
8. In a Year 9 drama class, similar very productive relationships helped pupils to use role-play to draw together some complex ideas on characterisation. Pupils feel confident to undertake critical discussions about each other's work. They gained real insights into certain dramatic effects and impact, such as the use of space and positioning. All pupils participated fully, and the preparations undertaken in this drama lesson will have served to extend and deepen their understanding of 'West Side Story' and 'Romeo and Juliet' which they were about to begin to study in their later English classes.
 9. In a Year 9 French class, very good planning underpinned the lesson's success. Most of the exchanges between teacher and pupils were in French, with English used where appropriate to check on grammatical understanding. The topic had been built up over a period of weeks and skilful use of a range of methods ensured that pupils were confident at all stages of the new learning. When new grammar was discussed, the explanations were lively and stayed with the pupils, for example, they had their own definition of the imperfect tense, the 'wazzing and whirring', which they could apply effectively in speaking. Interesting and stimulating teaching ensured that all pupils made good progress and enjoyed the lesson, achieving well above average standards in speaking and listening.
 10. Teachers use some very effective techniques to ensure pupils' understanding of the technical vocabulary they need to express complex ideas. In a Year 11 top ability English class, exciting opportunities were created for them to extend their vocabulary and develop their ability to select more sophisticated alternatives as part of their work on poetry. Small group discussions were animated and comments shrewd. A thoughtful, lively, good-humoured and co-operative atmosphere was creative and purposeful as well as enjoyable and influential for pupils' learning. The teacher offered many stimulating ideas, challenged the pupils' own ideas, but did not dominate discussion, with the result that pupils took real responsibility as partners in their own learning and progress was very good. In particular, progress in speaking was notable. This was a case when differences between the reactions and learning of boys and girls were unimportant and both contributed to the learning very well.
 11. There was no unsatisfactory learning. Pupils make at least satisfactory progress in all lessons. In a few lessons, the levels of stimulation and interest were lower than in the majority of lessons and pace was slower, though still satisfactory. In some of these lessons, the teacher's presence was dominant, limiting the amount of individual responsibility required from pupils. However, pupils' good learning habits and good behaviour enabled them to take advantage of what was offered and to extend themselves.

Pupils and students achieve very well. Results in national tests and examinations are well above average. In particular, achievement in mathematics is excellent.

12. The school sets itself targets for 14-year-old pupils which are well above the national average and, in 2001 and 2002, these were exceeded. As pupils' attainment on entry was average in the current Years 10 and 11, the school has again set challenging targets for 2003 and 2004 to maintain the trend of improvement evident over recent years. In 2002, 85 per cent of pupils attained level 5 or better in the national tests for English. In mathematics, targets were exceeded by 3 per cent and were well above the national average. Science results were also above average. In 2002, mathematics had 21 pupils reach level 8, a very high percentage, which assured the school's place in the top 5 per cent of all schools nationally in terms of performance in mathematics at the age of 14.
13. GCSE targets in 2002 were appropriately lower, following the school's detailed analysis of pupils' earlier learning. Standards of attainment on entry in this year group were lower than in other year groups. Appropriate targets were met and exceeded: the target was that 60 per cent of all pupils should achieve five higher-grade passes (A* to C) and the school achieved 65%. The target for the average points score achieved by pupils was also exceeded.

14. The needs of pupils with different levels of earlier attainment are well met. Lower attaining pupils attain well, as shown in the 2001 GCSE results when all pupils got at least 7 A*-G. This reduced in 2002, although all pupils achieved at least one GCSE pass at grades A* to G. Almost all achieved 5 passes at grades A* to G. There were no non-entered pupils at all. The highest attaining pupils have the opportunity to accelerate their studies in the subjects in which they excel, enabling them to take extra courses and gain more GCSE passes overall by the time they are 16.
15. Pupils' achievements go beyond their examination results, and there is considerable emphasis in the school on opportunities for pupils to develop a sense of responsibility and self-reliance in their work. This stands them in good stead in a range of activities to which pupils commit themselves whole-heartedly. It also enables them to make good use of the learning offered, even when they are less stimulated by the work itself.
16. There are some very good examples of sustained efforts by pupils that bring rewards. For example, in business education courses in Year 10, pupils have exercised their independence and responsibility to set up good business links. They have, for themselves, arranged visits to places of work, and with their subject teacher and their form tutor, are devising questions to which they must seek answers.
17. Pupils make very good use of computer facilities available to them during the lunch hour, when a supervised room of thirty computers is consistently full and very responsibly used. The atmosphere within which pupils feel able to sustain the momentum of their work without being described as 'swots' is contributory to their very good achievement.

Pupils' and students' attitudes to their work are very good. They work hard and support each other very well.

18. Behaviour in all classes was at least satisfactory. In the vast majority, it was good and often it was very good or excellent. Pupils behave well because they are clear as to why they are at school and they enjoy being there. Their response to a culture which gives them trust and respect is to work hard and to be confident in their work.
19. Pupils are attentive to their teachers and to each other whenever opportunities occur for presentations or the expression of opinions. When working in groups, pupils chat unselfconsciously about their work. They are keen to present findings, for example, in a Year 11 science lesson, when they recorded findings very carefully and completed group-based investigations thoroughly. A Year 9 mathematics lesson revealed the pupils' determination to get things right. In a Year 11 technology lesson in the resistant materials course, pupils were industrious individually and in groups, responding well to the pressure to complete coursework for the GCSE examinations. They shared equipment amicably which they all needed to use to meet deadlines, and queued sensibly and safely for supervised use of a band saw.
20. Lessons that contain opportunities for discussion stimulate pupils to reflect upon their work. In a drama lesson in Year 9, pupils participated well and made sensible suggestions about how to position themselves. In this as in other lessons, pupils learnt from each other's views. They generally become more confident when asked to speak about their work, though in some lessons, particularly with older pupils, they are reticent about answering if there seems to be a risk of not being absolutely right. In discussion with inspectors, however, they made it clear that they understand the need to answer questions in class and that this is part of their learning.
21. In a French lesson that was particularly well taught, a Year 9 French class of able linguists was very responsive in a difficult area of language. Their excellent attitudes to the subject contributed well to their learning and they persisted in tackling the challenge until all had understood. They clearly enjoyed the challenge and the activity that the teacher had devised. They respected their teacher's expertise and intentions and he in turn responded with well-thought out suggestions which they appreciated; he gave praise and pupils supported and praised each other.

22. High levels of motivation are a feature of a majority of classes. A Year 8 ICT group were enthusiastic and lively about a particular task, but not noisy or distracted because they wanted to create something worthwhile by the end of the lesson. In a Year 11 history lesson where progress was good, pupils achieved well and applied themselves throughout the lesson because they recognised the quality of the teacher's planning and input and high expectations. Pupils' responses in many very effective lessons are directly linked to the teacher's high expectations of what they can achieve as a partnership in teaching and learning.
Leadership is very good. The clear vision, sense of direction and high quality of planning provided by the headteacher and governors have ensured that, despite massive changes over the last five years, the school remains calm, purposeful and effective.
23. The school is very well led at all levels. The tone of the school is set by the headteacher whose personal philosophy of education and strong belief in continuing to develop the school as a self-evaluating and high achieving institution underlies its development and future planning. His leadership team, whose members all have clearly defined roles in which they have been encouraged to develop their expertise, supports his excellent leadership very well. The leadership team supports the headteacher well and interprets his vision for the school into practical, effective strategies for managing change.
24. In particular, the leadership of the headteacher is excellent. He has welded together a cohesive team of teachers whose management of the school is clearly delivering its objectives across the board. Standards are high and the ethos of the school is supportive to and appreciative of everyone's contribution to the distinctive aims and values that it promotes.
25. Since the time of the last inspection, the school has faced many significant planning challenges, any one of which could have adversely affected the school's character and rate of success. These changes range from the introduction of a sixth form to the increase in school size as a result of steady growth in popularity overall. However, none of these has de-railed the school, because it has planned very thoroughly at each stage of its development, in advance of action, and has maintained and developed the confidence of parents. It has also closely monitored the effects of changes and acted quickly to deal with any potential problems, such as those relating to shortages in accommodation.
26. Subjects are generally well led and there are examples of outstanding departmental leadership. Several subjects are very well managed by talented heads of department who lead by example: heads of all the core subjects, for example, monitor closely the work of their departments, foster very good team spirit and participate openly and frankly in debate about the school's development. Some heads of department have a countywide reputation in their subjects and assist other schools to find equally effective solutions to the challenges of teaching and learning. Departments have embarked upon a system of subject reviews which are rigorous and revealing, assisting their planning for the future.
27. The senior leadership's work and that of the governors is well supported by key heads of department and other managers in the school. Good departmental management, for example, results in effective monitoring of teaching and learning as part of a school-wide approach to self-improvement. Subject leaders have a clear sense of direction and support the school's aims and values, which they generally incorporate well into their schemes of work and lesson plans.
28. Good middle management has been in part responsible for the ways in which change has effectively been managed over the last five years. The moves of subjects into new accommodation has resulted in better departmental cohesion and helped to create the ethos which is distinctive from subject to subject. It has also helped to deal with criticism from the time of the last inspection, for example in languages, which are very well led and managed and where standards have improved considerably.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

29. There are no significant areas for improvement in the 11-16 school. The school's Improvement Plan is well founded upon rigorous self-evaluation. It considers the future needs of the school carefully, the priorities reflect the findings of the inspection, and result in challenging targets. Assuming that the school fulfils its priorities as well in the forthcoming three-year cycle as it has done in the last, there is no reason to add other action points from this inspection, although in the sixth form, there is one point for further improvement.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

Sixth form

30. The strategy for supporting the most gifted or talented pupils, which is successfully underway, could be further developed, by:
- identifying more quickly their areas of strength and challenging them further in those areas from the outset of their time in the sixth form

(See Paragraphs 44)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	31
	Sixth form	43
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		36

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	6	12	12	0	0	0
Percentage	4	19	39	39	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	7	14	11	11	0	0	0
Percentage	16	33	26	26	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	675	126
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	53	3

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	10	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	63	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.5
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
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	2002	63	76	139

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	58	58
	Girls	64	63	62
	Total	113	121	120
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (86)	86 (79)	86 (83)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	42 (68)	72 (66)	56 (59)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	53	55	59
	Girls	69	64	73
	Total	122	119	132
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (81)	86 (87)	95 (76)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	49 (45)	73 (70)	55 (52)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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
	2002	57	66	123

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	31	54	58
	Girls	46	65	66
	Total	77	119	124
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	65 (77)	97 (99)	100 (99)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	47.1
	National	39.8

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate	
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	32	75
	National		NA

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13) IN 2001

		For candidates entered for GCE A / Advanced GNVQ examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	25	29	54
	Average point score per candidate	19	19.5	19.3
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4

		For candidates entered for GCE A examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	25	29	54	2	2	4
	Average point score per candidate	19.5	19.5	19.5	15	10.5	12.5
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
749	69	2
0	4	0
18	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
12	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	1	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	1	0
15	2	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	52.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	342

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	25.9
Key Stage 4	21.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	2,761,231
Total expenditure	2,488,760
Expenditure per pupil	3107
Balance brought forward from previous year	77320
Balance carried forward to next year	52,891

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	8.45
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	10.75
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
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	801
Number of questionnaires returned	475

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	33	53	10	4	0
My child is making good progress in school.	42	50	6	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	56	7	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	57	14	4	2
The teaching is good.	33	59	4	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	46	20	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	52	38	7	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	34	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	48	19	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	44	46	4	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	48	5	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	16	40	24	4	15

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

31. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is above average, since students are generally expected to have obtained five or more higher grade GCSE passes. Results in mathematics continue to be well above average and build on the good progress made in Years 7 to 11, when all pupils are entered for GCSE and all pupils get at least an A*-G grade. A large number of students opt to study mathematics in the sixth form and there is high representation of A and B grades in final results. Standards in English Literature at A2 and AS are very high. Results in A level (A2), measured by the percentage of A and B grades, have been above or in line with the national average in the last three years; and no student has failed. Results in the AS examinations have been equally impressive, particularly in 2002 when all candidates obtained grades A or B. Results in A2 English have improved each year since candidates were first presented for examination. Entry is larger than in some subjects, and some weaker candidates, who might otherwise not obtain a place in an A level course, have succeeded in gaining D grades.
32. Girls are doing better than boys in English. There is little difference in mathematics – although fewer girls opt for it. All students make good progress in English in the sixth form, though those who enter with lower qualifications still lack fluency in their writing. Some remain unclear about how to incorporate quotation and how to begin and end essays appropriately. Overall, there is good added value in English, as students perform better at A2 than their GCSE performance would predict.
33. Other subjects generally achieve results that are at least in line with national averages and many are above. The GCE A level results in 2001 in biology, for example, showed attainment overall to be above the national average but the percentage gaining grades A and B was in line with the national average. The average points score was also above the national average. These results have been maintained in 2002. Boys gained a significantly higher average grade than the girls did in 2001 in biology. French, which was achieving lower results at the time of the last inspection, now routinely achieves at least average standards and current students are attaining well, producing work which is above average for their stage in their courses. Results are well above average in psychology and ICT, and in the GNVQ courses in health and social care, results are average.
34. The sixth form was established only in 1998. Since that time, the proportion of students staying into the sixth form has risen, and few students leave their courses before completion of a two-year course. The staying-on rate now compares well with the national average.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

35. Throughout the sixth form, students show interest in their work and are highly motivated to succeed. They develop very well, responding well to challenge, help and support each other and become progressively more confident in discussing their work. Students' own values reflect the hard-working and compassionate ethos of the whole school. Very good attendance supports students' development and learning.
36. Students' interest in their work is well exemplified by their use of computer technology. Their recently built sixth form centre is well equipped, but there is high demand for available computers for research and for extra routine work during breaks, lunchtimes and after school. In similar vein, the voluntary work undertaken by students following the GNVQ course in vocational settings goes beyond the requirements of the course. Discussions about their work often continue after the lesson has ended – this was the case in a number of sixth form history and French lessons.
37. Occasionally in class, students' desire to do well results in reticence to answer questions – they want to know they are right before they commit themselves. In general, this is not due to any lack

- of confidence in themselves or in their teachers, but in the desire to reflect further on the work. This does not therefore reduce their effectiveness as learners.
38. Sixth form students make a considerable contribution to the life and ethos of the school. They work with younger pupils with apparent pleasure, helping them to settle in to secondary school or to express their opinions cogently in a formal setting. They address assemblies, providing a role model of care and concern. They raise charitable funds, organising a significant range of activities in which they themselves become heavily involved and where their enthusiasm involves others. Some of these activities are very light hearted, but many have serious and life changing responsibilities and effects. All are well managed by the students themselves, indicating the frames of reference they have developed and their commitment to the school and its values.
39. Students are serious in their approach to their work and their behaviour offers very good role models to younger pupils, as does their commitment overall.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

40. Teaching is always at least satisfactory in the sixth form and is very good overall. It is good in all subjects. In mathematics, history, English literature, ICT and French, it is very good and in psychology, it is excellent. At its best, there is very good planning, with purposeful mature relationships between teachers and students, who benefit from their teachers' expertise, insight and enthusiasm for their subjects, and a high degree of focused challenge. The result is that learning is very good. Throughout the sixth form, the best teaching, and there is a great deal which is very good, with several examples of excellence, shares certain characteristics:
- Good use of questioning to enable students to deepen their understanding and to explore new territory
 - Helpful marking that supports students' own efforts to improve their work. In English, for example, marking leads to students developing the habit of redrafting.
 - Challenge, extending students' expectations of their own achievements
 - Enjoyment, motivating students to continue to make serious efforts with their work
 - Reinforcement of the school's culture of success – students are made to believe from their earlier experiences in the school that they can achieve well, and this experience is re-emphasised as they move through the sixth form
 - Very good teacher knowledge of their subjects and enthusiasm for them
 - Expectation that students will work independently.
41. Personal development and independence is encouraged, and research is a tool regularly used by teachers to promote independence. However, although students have very good opportunities for debate and developing their own criteria for judgement, some opportunities are missed to make greater use in lessons of students' already well-developed interpersonal skills by involving them in discussion of controversial or sensitive subjects. In French however, at both AS and A2, students were expected to express their own views on such subjects through their study of moral issues such as cloning and world population explosion.
42. Students bridge the gap between GCSE and AS level efficiently, and in science for example, a Year 12 biology group was able to take part in practical interpretation of challenging concepts through model making in the context of the structure of DNA. In French, a small group of Year 12 AS students was able to structure a presentation on the topic of tourism and the protection of the environment, including accurate use of technical vocabulary. Students could take questions from their teacher and their peers to deepen their knowledge of the topic and stretch their ability to respond at speed in French to challenge. They had clearly moved a long way from the requirements of GCSE in a relatively short time. By the time they reach Year 13, they use all the appropriate learning aids to accelerate their learning, for example, in a mathematics lesson solving differential equations, students made good use of a computer spreadsheet.
43. Teachers make extensive use of the ICT resource across the curriculum. In mathematics, ICT opportunities are built into the schemes of work, and there is evidence of good use in coursework. Good use is made of ICT in the teaching of modern foreign languages, where pupil skill in the use

of the internet - as well as imaginative staff use of the resource - are both flagged as significant factors influencing learning. In psychology, groups of pupils used MS Power Point software to make presentations to the class, while teachers in ICT make extensive use of presentation software in the normal course of lessons both to convey information and to reinforce learning. ICT staff have developed innovative teaching materials and make good use of on line assessment and recording.

44. The only area of teaching which is relatively less good – although satisfactory - is that involving extension work for the highest attaining students. Whilst a small number of younger, pre-16, students have opportunities to take examinations early and progress to more advanced courses more quickly, there are generally few planned opportunities for the 16 to 18 year old students to enjoy the same provision. Individual subject teachers take opportunities when they present themselves, but departments as a whole do not yet have a consistent approach to provision for the highest attaining students.

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

45. The school appeared to have a rare opportunity in establishing a new sixth form to be innovative in planning its curriculum. In fact, the curriculum has been limited in the first four years by the constraints of size, so innovation has not been uppermost in planners' minds. Only now, as the sixth form approaches 150 is there the prospect of greater flexibility. Nonetheless, there is a broad range of academic subjects with adequate access to choices for the two years of sixth form. Vocational courses in business and health and social care are well established, and the sixth form development plan indicates that appropriate further development is envisaged, enabling the school to meet students' needs well.
46. The sixth form has been well supported in terms of the provision of general enrichment: general studies, extra-curriculum opportunities, links with major local companies British Telecom, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and Willis.
47. Key skills and literacy are well-promoted in Year 12, in dedicated key skills lessons. Literacy is more broadly developed in other lessons where technical vocabulary is emphasised and students become used to employing appropriate and often sophisticated vocabulary to help to develop their work. Number, ICT and communications are taught as separate elements in the planned key skills programme. All are taught to levels 2 and 3 of the Key Skills requirements, the equivalent of GCSE and A level.
48. The school has broadened the base of the curriculum as numbers have grown. For example, it has worked effectively with another local school to provide AS and A2 in sports studies for a small number of students. Other arrangements with three other schools are planned for the forthcoming school year, again broadening opportunities to meet all students' needs. All such developments are well planned and well researched before courses start.
49. Psychology was not offered when the sixth form opened, but since its introduction has contributed greatly to the 6th form curriculum. There are effective schemes of work clearly related both to the structure and attainment objectives of the specification. In staff training and development, good use has been made of opportunities presented both by the examination board and by the Association of Teachers of Psychology. The decision to offer the subject at AS and A Level reflects good strategic thinking on the part of the school, and a commitment to the needs of the growing number of pupils entering 6th form. Psychology is an excellent subject for 6th form, bridging Arts and Sciences and presenting students with new challenges and a new methodology of learning.
50. The sixth form curriculum is broad and balanced, giving opportunities for all. It draws on a minor subsidy from the main school. This is to be expected, as the sixth form is still building up its numbers. This cross-subsidy is already reducing as the size of groups grows, although there are still a number of very small groups in certain subjects. This is a deliberate curriculum decision by

the governors to sustain such groups, in order to make a comprehensive offering to Catholic students aged 16 to 19. There remain a number of small groups in languages, music and technology. However, Year 11 students expressing their intentions for their sixth form courses indicate that all subjects will be better subscribed in 2003, with the result that the school's planning to build up the cost effectiveness of their provision from 16-19 is vindicated.

51. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good. In English, for example, speakers visit the school, talking most recently about Shakespeare's tragedies. Students have visited a local theatre workshop to study King Lear, the Wolsey Theatre to see Faustus, and to the theatre in Reading to see King Lear.
52. The spiritual dimension of students' personal development is generally well covered. In English, for example, the study of Blake's poetry and of King Lear give many opportunities for students to reflect on their own values and frame of reference, leading to consideration of moral issues. In the discussion of Blake's poetry, the outcome was an in-depth discussion of how his response to his 'experience' included a strongly moral view of the world he lived in. Psychology contributes also to understanding the moral and spiritual dimensions of human experience, paying close attention as well to ethical issues in experimental procedures.
53. Cultural development is less well provided for, although opportunities are taken when they arise; for example, some discussion of the issue of race came out of discussion of 'Othello' in a sixth form lesson.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

54. Educational and personal support and guidance for students are very good. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are good. The quality of advice offered to learners and the effectiveness of careers' guidance for future courses are good. The steps taken to ensure students' health and safety are very good.
55. All parents of Year 12 students who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire stated that their daughters or sons were happy at St. Alban's. The great majority of students in both years feels the same and would recommend others to join the sixth form. This must reflect the very good way in which students are helped to settle in to the sixth form. Throughout their stay in the sixth form students are made to feel that they have an important role to play in the life of the school as a whole as well as in their studies. The school day begins well with a sixth form briefing. This not only fulfils the statutory requirement to which the school as a whole is bound, an act of collective worship, it also establishes a tone of positive relationships within the sixth form. It helps foster that sense of involvement by inviting students to participate fully in organising the session and in making the necessary announcements themselves.
56. The school encourages sixth formers to be involved in the rest of the school, as school council members or as mentors for the new students in Year 7. A particular strength is the encouraging support sixth formers give younger students. Sixth formers participate in supervisory duties such as in the dining hall at lunchtimes when the sittings of the various classes have to rotate. They are expected to contribute to the community, for example by fund raising or visiting local primary schools, which they do very well.
57. The sixth form operates a strict attendance code, about which some students have complained, but which nevertheless ensures that punctuality is valued. Study facilities are abundant enough to ensure that all students have equal and satisfactory access to computers and other learning materials. Behaviour procedures too are good and operate on the same principles as the rest of the school. This supports the sixth formers in their duty as good role models. Sixth formers also benefit from the very good procedures for health and safety that operate throughout the school.

Assessment

58. In mathematics students' work is very well assessed with much individualised support. Work is helpfully marked and informal targets set. In English, marking is very thorough. There are weekly review meetings in ICT for teachers to share assessments of students' work. Monitoring of performance in history and in French is very good. Marking is up-to-date and thorough with useful diagnostic feedback that enables students to improve their work.

59. Ongoing assessment in health and social care encourages pupils to overcome their weaker areas. Supportive comments and individual record cards contribute to an open approach to self-improvement. Staff meet regularly to review the effectiveness of the course and students' response to materials provided. Student evaluations are used to guide curriculum and teaching.
60. Record keeping is good and the subject leader has access to school's data to indicate progress and possible underachievement. Students are encouraged to make rigorous self-assessments. Two sorts of target are set for many students: skills and grade targets. Data-collection on the whole is good and this assists teachers to ensure that students' progress is adequate.

Advice support and guidance

61. There is very good advice and guidance available to students. A short term problem occurred last year which affected students' views of the quality of their guidance at that time, but this has been rectified. Advice and guidance on university entrance requirements is plentiful and clear. Students benefit from the university and careers visits to the sixth form. Although students who responded to the questionnaire were not all positive about the careers' advice, the school tackles this well. At key points in the sixth form, students are given good guidance and support about opportunities in higher education, future careers and employment. The annually reviewed personal, social and health education syllabus, with its emphasis on careers' guidance, contributes strongly to this especially in Year 12. Parents are invited to attend sessions for drafting UCAS forms. Valuable specific advice is given to those students applying to Oxford or Cambridge. All students fill in destination sheets and thereafter receive good support in their choices, from form tutors and from the careers' advisers in the main part of the school. The availability of the latter is however limited. Although the library is well stocked with careers brochures and prospectuses most students avail themselves of the ready access to the Internet that the school provides.
62. Many subject teachers provide reliable advice to supplement that provided by the careers education and guidance provision separately made. This is appreciated by students, and as in the case of psychology, is influential in helping students who plan to use the subject in their future university courses.

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

63. Parents' and students' views of the sixth form are very good. Those who attended the pre-inspection parents' meeting believe that their children are well supported academically and personally. The students themselves are generally enthusiastic about the ethos of the sixth form and about the opportunities it creates for them. Inspection evidence supports the parents' and students' views of the partnership between parents, students and the school, supporting sixth formers' work, which is very good.
64. There is generally good communication with parents about students' progress. This is part of the welfare, care and guidance offered for all year groups. There are regular opportunities for meetings between parents and sixth form staff, and for students to have individual guidance sessions with staff.
65. At meetings with members of the sixth form council and other sixth formers, they expressed high levels of satisfaction with the school, which they described as having provided them with much greater individual care than they felt their friends received. The sixth form teachers, led by the head of sixth form, provide very good links for students into school policy making, and their voices are heard and heeded.
66. There had been some student concern over one-short term and external problem with access to advice and guidance, but this has been rectified by the school. Another concern about the opportunities for studying at home when not in lessons is still ongoing, but the school's approach to study time is sound, and it provides very good study facilities to support students when they are not in lessons.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

67. The sixth form was established in 1998, after the last inspection. It is very well led and the challenges of the introduction of the sixth form have been very well managed. It provides a successful and fulfilling environment for the students, who progress to further and higher education with very secure foundations as a result of their time in the sixth form. The school has been able to manage such challenges effectively because of the mutual trust and respect evident within the senior management team which enables its members to become confident in their own areas of expertise and provide leadership to the rest of the staff. This atmosphere of trust, challenge and shared objectives pervades the school and is influential with pupils and students, helping them to commit to its values and live up to its expectations. The outcome after five years is a successful unit providing high standards of academic success, extending students' life chances and helping them to mature as responsible citizens.
68. The governors give very effective support. They have been fully involved at all stages in deciding upon priorities for the sixth form as it has grown over the last five years, and continue to monitor the school's development consistently. They provide a strong sense of educational direction and priorities as well as reinforcing the school's accountability to its Catholic community.
69. To a considerable degree, the even, high quality of teaching can be put down to the determination to monitor what goes on in classrooms and thereby set the sixth form off on a strong footing. This effort has been successful. All teachers have been seen teaching at least twice a year for the last three years, and there have been regular departmental reviews, where clear expectations were defined and followed up. The monitoring of performance is matched by a high degree of care for staff which has helped to retain staff at a time when there is a national trend of high turnover of post-holders and difficulties in recruitment.

Resources

70. The school plans well to use resources in students' interests. Resources are generally good and very good in the new science facility. Equipment and accommodation for science are very good. The sixth form centre and the science block benefit from PCs with open access; there is an interactive whiteboard in one laboratory. Sixth formers are very appreciative of the library, although it is not accessible at break or before school. Subscriptions to specialist magazines complement a growing departmental library of books and resource materials supporting subjects such as history, geography and psychology. This also provides extension material for the most able students, helping them not merely to do more work but to extend their understanding of the links within subjects and across other areas of experience. Stock in the main library still needs some additions before it is fully relevant to the academic needs of sixth formers, although there is a special section for literary criticism for A level English students.
71. The school has invested extensively and wisely in ICT resources. Very good use is made of interactive whiteboards and computer projectors in many areas. There is good provision for computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing, as well as extensive IT provision in the mathematics and business areas of the school. There is some provision in art, music, languages and media but the quality - and extent - of this has yet to match that available elsewhere in the school.
72. There is now a well developed network infrastructure and robust systems, a developing intranet and increasing quality of on-line resources, a good start to computer based assessment and reporting systems and high numbers of staff who are ICT competent. Although there are some gaps at subject level, this does not obscure the excellent progress that has been made and the substantial foundations in ICT teaching and resources on which the sixth form continues to build.

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

In the inspection, nine subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. In particular, lessons were seen in business, design and technology, key skills, German, chemistry, physics, statistics, further mathematics, music and art.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001. The good standards evident in results in 2001 have been maintained in 2002, but the figures for 2002 have not been used here because of the absence of validated comparisons with performance nationally.

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	9	100	87	67	43	8.6	5.80
art	9	100	96	44	46	6.44	6.57
biology	13	100	88	36	34	5.83	5.25
chemistry	6	83	90	17	43	3.67	5.90
religious studies	8	100	92	25	38	4.89	5.84
English literature	19	100	95	32	37	5.22	5.91
French	3	100	89	33	38	6	5.59
geography	18	94	92	33	38	6	5.74
history	11	82	88	36	35	6	5.45
media studies	15	93	NA	0	NA	3	NA
music	2	100	93	50	35	7	5.74
physics	6	83	88	33	40	5.33	5.67
design and technology	7	100	91	0	30	4	5.38
theatre Studies	6	100	NA	33	NA	5	NA
German	2	100	91	50	40	6	5.81
government and politics	1	100	NA	100	NA	8	NA
further mathematics	2	100	NA	100	NA	10	NA
business Advanced GNVQ	3	100	NA	67	NA	9	NA
general studies	51	92	85	31	30	5.20	4.91

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and social care	5	100	na	20	na	0	na

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

The previous inspection took place before the establishment of the sixth form. There is therefore no basis upon which to comment upon improvement over the time since that inspection. Nonetheless, where there is evidence of a trend emerging, this receives comment as appropriate.

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Lessons were sampled in chemistry and physics as well as in mathematics and statistics in both Years 12 and 13. Standards were good overall and teaching and learning effective.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Attainment in AS and A2 levels is very high.
- There is consistently good teaching from knowledgeable teachers who plan well.
- Attainment and expectations reflect the culture of achievement promoted in mathematics.
- Students' individuality, confidence and independence are actively developed.
- There are good relationships in all mathematics lessons which facilitate good learning.
- Leadership and management of mathematics are very good.

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant areas for improvement.

73. The results of examinations at the end of Years 12 and 13 are well above national averages. They are well above average for similar schools and have been consistently high for each of the years for which the sixth form has produced results. More boys than girls take mathematics in the sixth form but, when girls do take the subject, their attainment is in line with that of boys. Standards of work seen during the inspection are consistent with the examination results. They are well above course expectations. Achievement is good in Years 12 and 13, with students making good progress from the high standards they have attained prior to entry to the sixth form. Presentation of written work is very good as are attitudes to homework. Attainment is high because the standard of teaching is high, use of facilities is good and because students exhibit an exemplary attitude to their studies. In a lesson on the step method of solution of differential equations, spreadsheets were used to speed up the routine mechanical processes of calculation. This allowed students to concentrate on the core analysis processes, and their high self-motivation resulted in them making rapid progress in their understanding.
74. Students are invariably impeccably behaved, and they show an intelligent interest in all aspects of their studies, with the result that they make good progress when tackling new topics. Teachers use the positive atmosphere created in mathematics lessons to actively develop students' individuality, confidence and independence. Students need no encouragement to discuss their work, either with their teachers or with each other. In a Year 13 class, students started work on their A2 level coursework on mathematical modelling. Discussion of the various problems to which the modelling techniques were to be applied, both with their teacher and each other, enabled them to make a good start to their projects. Similar activity and discussion enabled them to make good progress in all their lessons. Students are encouraged to work at their own pace and they do this readily, consistently rising to the challenges laid before them. In a Year 12 statistics class, students had made good progress assessing the 'readability' levels of two differing texts of their own choice and were at various stages of theoretical development. Teaching of key skills is good, with clear communication encouraged and high levels of application of number and information technology proficiencies.
75. Teaching is always at least good and at times it is excellent because it allows students to develop their understanding rapidly and accurately. Teachers' planning is good, they use ICT resources well to promote rapid learning, and show a very good knowledge of their subject.

Examples of these attributes were seen when a Year 12 class investigated exponential functions, using a computer based graphical package to study the gradient function, and when a Year 13 class studied the step method for the solution of differential equations. A brisk pace is maintained in all lessons and the curriculum is given full and balanced coverage. Marking is mostly good, with the best marking including useful comments to help students improve their performance in the future. Relationships with students and the atmosphere of achievement and high expectation created in mathematics classrooms are key strengths of the department, because they result in the creation of a very positive learning atmosphere in mathematics classrooms in which students can thrive.

76. Management of the department is very good. The mathematics' teachers form a cohesive team, developing their teaching and sharing good practice. The Head of Department monitors teaching and learning through lesson observations and the collection of books. High expectations are evident throughout the work of the department. The provision of resources, including ICT resources, is good and these are well used by the mathematics teachers. High standards have been established in the subject and are effectively being maintained.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Attainment has been above average over the last two years
- Teaching is good
- Resources, including ICT, are well used and the department is taking full advantage of their good accommodation.
- Leadership and management of science are good.

Areas for improvement

- Lesson plans do not yet sufficiently consider students' learning processes.
- There is insufficient support for lower attaining pupils.
- More encouragement to pose more questions and seek clarification, explanation and consolidation of work covered in lessons to enhance learning further.

77. The GCE A-level results in 2001 showed attainment overall to be above the national average but the percentage gaining grades A and B was in line with the national average. The average points score was also above the national average. These results have been maintained in 2002. Boys gained a significantly higher average grade than the girls did in 2001 but as yet there are no validated figures for comparison in 2002. In relation to GCSE results, those taking A-level in 2001 made good progress.
78. The standards of work seen in Year 13, in lessons and in samples of written work, are above course expectations overall. Students' knowledge and understanding are being developed through some very effective teaching. In a lesson on the eye, basic knowledge from GCSE was quickly developed into knowledge and understanding of the complex mechanisms that control how the eye transmits images and colours to the brain. This was achieved, using students' existing knowledge as a platform on which to build an understanding of the new concepts, by a series of well-structured, logical questions, backed by good supporting notes, demonstrations and materials. The coursework seen showed above average attainment but included examples of very high standards of work, for example in a study on neurones. Overall the strengths lie in planning, handling variables and the implementation of the practical work but there are some relative weaknesses in analysis and interpretation.
79. Students in Year 12 are achieving standards above the expectations of the course overall. Through well-managed and structured teaching, they have made rapid progress since GCSE and now handle new and more difficult concepts with a good deal of confidence. In a lesson on the replication of DNA they were able to show they had grasped the key points by successfully demonstrating and explaining the process with plasticene models. Coursework showed some high level skills in the implementation of practical work, gathering and representing data,

interpreting results and evaluating outcomes. Planning is generally good but there are some inconsistencies in fixing dependent and independent variables. Analysis skills are less well developed in some students. A project on “Xenotransplantation” demonstrated very well developed skills in extracting information and communicating scientific ideas. It also raised some interesting ethical and moral issues.

80. The quality of teaching overall is good. Of the four lessons observed, two were very good and two were judged to be good. The teaching is characterised by the very good subject knowledge, clear exposition and delivery, high expectations, many aspects of the lesson planning, the effective use of homework to enhance learning and the productive use of resources, including ICT. The use of questions to challenge students to think for themselves and work from first principles also consolidates learning. The teaching could be improved further if all lesson plans included the specific learning objectives to be reached and the timing of each phase of the lesson. On one occasion insufficient time was left for a review of the key concepts from the lesson. In some lessons the content is very dense and risks overloading the class. Thought should be given to optimum learning conditions. Smaller parcels of information with regular breaks for informal assessment could be built into lesson plans, for example. The quality of marking students’ work is satisfactory. Most assessed work is effectively marked with useful, diagnostic comments sometimes added but there is inconsistency in practice. Some lower attaining students are less well directed and advised than others through the marking and grading of their work. They need more support in keeping their files in order, taking notes effectively and completing unfinished work.
81. Over time the large majority of students acquire the essential skills, knowledge and understanding required and they apply them effectively in written work and tests. Their productivity is good. They are well motivated, co-operative and interested in the subject but are often passive recipients of much of the material taught. In order to improve and consolidate their knowledge and understanding they need to be encouraged to engage more with the teacher. They make good use of the opportunities for independent learning through the research work undertaken in coursework, projects and fieldwork. Opportunities to practise the Key Skills are integrated into the schemes of work; communication, ICT, problem-solving and handling numbers. Students are largely competent in these areas and use them effectively in their work, although, surprisingly, a class in Year13 was slower than expected in calculating volumes and areas of simple shapes. In Year 12 students appear less confident with some aspects of chemistry that are an essential part of biology.
82. The high standards achieved result from the subject being well led and managed. There is a strong determination to improve standards further. The development plans and schemes of work support this. Assessment data is effectively used to review the curriculum and teaching strategies regularly and to monitor students’ progress. The schemes of work contain as yet little reference to spiritual and cultural aspects and these are not yet well exploited. Above average standards have been established in the department and these are being maintained year on year, to date.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Classes were seen in both Years 12 and 13, and a significant amount of work was also surveyed to obtain a good picture of students’ ability to apply their skills in ICT across their work in other subjects, as well as in ICT itself.

Information and communications technology (ICT)

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communications technology is **very good**

Strengths

- Results are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are very good, and teachers bring high level practical and programming skills to support students’ work.
- There are increasing opportunities for students to apply their ICT skills in a range of other subjects.

- Improved hardware, robust networking and good technician support.
- Leadership and management of ICT are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Eventual broadening of the current ICT curriculum

83. In all the examinations that have been taken to date, students have achieved their target grades, despite the fact that none of the groups taking the subject so far have any formal background in ICT in Years 10 and 11. The 2002 AS and A Level results in ICT continued a strong upwards trend. From the fourteen candidates entered, there was an excellent overall pass rate. All students passed the AS examinations with half of those passes being at Grade A or Grade B. Almost all A2 students passed the examination, with over half of those passes (above the national average) being at high grades. Students currently on the programme are working to comparable standards.
84. Year 13 students are not only skilled users of ICT applications, but can write coherently on the use of ICT in business and make good use of diagrams and flowcharts to organise information about the impact of ICT on information flow in organisations. Year 12 students have made very good presentations using MS Power Point, and printouts of their slides - suitably annotated - form part of their coursework submission. There is particular attention to design and layout. Database projects follow the scenario presented by the examination board, and display good levels of skill and knowledge. Students understand the nature of entities and attributes in database design and can apply this understanding (as well as the rules of normalisation) to the design of tables for their projects.
85. Teaching is very good. Staff use the very well equipped ICT rooms to students' best advantage, and all staff possess good subject knowledge and ICT competence, with the ability to deal quickly with any issues that arise in terms of software and technique. Lessons in ICT are well prepared, and form part of a coherent, well planned structure. The best teaching resources are excellent. Feedback from teachers is particularly helpful. Well designed mark sheets are effectively used to support learning, guide students through their coursework, set targets, record and monitor performance. Students report high levels of satisfaction with this: it helps keep them on track.
86. Strategic management of IT provision and resources is beginning to secure coherent practice, improved curricular offering and continues to draw on the expertise of a teaching team who offer a range of complementary skills in the subject. Personal and structural support contribute to keeping this motivation. There are a number of factors which ensure the continuing effectiveness of ICT teaching and learning in the sixth form:
- well-developed schemes of work.
 - oversight of the development of Intranet.
 - website provision.
 - application of the training budget to secure an appropriate mix of skills.
 - help to other departments to secure ICT components in their schemes of work.
 - training key staff in the use of the system.
87. Weekly review meetings - as well as day-to-day contact over current issues - ensure that assessment is scrutinised regularly.
88. Management of the department is very strong, with a focus on achievement and a perceptive overview of the needs of cross-curricular as well as discrete ICT provision. There are practical applications too. In the excellent kits which have been designed and assembled in school to teach ICT control technology, as well as the on line interactive systems for testing and recording student work, established first in Years 7 to 9 but now used also - and to excellent effect - in the sixth form. This was not computing merely for the sake of it: questions were challenging, and students were forced to draw on their learning for suitable responses - which are then encoded and recorded for analysis and tracking.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Classes were seen in Years 12 and 13. Some groups visited an off-site placement, which the inspector was also able to visit, to see students applying their studies in a relevant setting. Both the GNVQ Intermediate and AVCE courses in health and social care were inspected. AVCE started in 2000 and Intermediate in 1998 as part of the vocational provision provided in the sixth form. The number of students taking the courses is small but the GNVQ Intermediate numbers have increased this year.

Health and social care

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **good**.

Strengths

- Students are keen to learn and take pride in their work
- Teaching is good and lessons are effective and well planned
- Effective monitoring and feedback to students about their progress
- There is very good leadership of the subject

Areas for improvement

- The provision of curriculum links with the relevant external agencies.

89. Overall results are in line with national averages. The first results for AVCE were in 2002 and most students achieved their predicted grades. On entry to the course, the attainment of these students was below the level required for entry to other Advanced level courses and the grades achieved represent good progress. Students now enter the AVCE courses with five or more A*-C grades in common with other Advanced level courses.
90. Students currently in the second year of the AVCE course are predicted to achieve above average grades and this is supported by the standard of work seen during the inspection. Current coursework shows good gains in knowledge and understanding when compared to work from the previous year. The standard of work for Intermediate GNVQ is average. The very small number of students with special educational needs were making good progress because they received specific support from the learning assistant who provided a high level of individual help.
91. Teaching and learning are good and supported by a range of challenging teaching and learning styles. In an AVCE lesson, students were able to observe first hand early years provision by visiting and questioning staff in a local nursery. The teacher then facilitated learning through teamwork and discussion as students reported back the observations and evaluations of what they had seen. Students demonstrate high levels of critical analysis - for example in an AVCE lesson students analysed the effectiveness of health promotional material. Students at all levels talk enthusiastically and in a confident and knowledgeable manner about the work in their portfolios. Year 12 AVCE students responded well to questions about the development of the Welfare State and Intermediate GNVQ students recalled accurately the stages of child development and had a good understanding of the importance of individual health plans.
92. The theory and practice of health and social care are well related during the course. For example, during a discussion with Year 12 AVCE students, they described working with a social worker on role-play exercises to understand better about client rights. There is no provision for students to undertake work experience as part of the course but many of them work in health and social care settings on a voluntary basis.
93. Students manage their learning well and are encouraged through regular formal evaluations and informal discussions with staff to identify their strengths and areas for development. Students are well informed about the standards required to achieve the different levels of accreditation and teachers give good written feedback on how their work can be improved.

94. The teaching accommodation and resources are very good. The majority of lessons take place in designated rooms in the sixth form block so enabling students and teachers to build an attractive learning environment with relevant up-to-date books and other resources including Internet access.
95. Leadership and management are very good. The recently appointed teacher in charge of health and social care and her team share a common purpose and they work together constructively. They share their different curriculum expertise well when planning schemes of work and resources. Targets are demanding yet realistic and there is careful tracking and monitoring of student achievement. Professional development of staff is good and staff regularly standardise their work to maintain standards. There was no reference to health and social care in the last inspection report so it is not possible to assess progress since the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

Classes were seen in geography and history at both AS and A2 levels. Both subjects are popular, with significantly larger groups of students in each than in most subjects in the sixth form.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards and examination results are continuing to improve; they are slightly above average.
- Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and high expectations of their students. Teaching is good so students achieve well.
- Students have very good, positive attitudes to the subject and the teacher/student relationships are very good: both enhance learning.
- Teachers make good use of fieldwork, thus increasing access to first hand experience.
- Leadership and management of geography are good.

96. The school has offered geography at A-level since 1998 and it is very rare for a student not to complete the course. At present 19 students study the subject in the sixth form of whom 9 students are studying it at A 2 level. Over the last three years the numbers of students studying A-level geography has increased. In 2001 standards in GCE A-level were slightly above average; the provisional A2 results for 2002 show further improvement. The AS results in 2002 similarly show a significant improvement, as the vast majority of students gained A or B grades. The numbers recruited to take AS and A2 in 2002/03 has stabilised at about 10 students; the work seen in classes shows that standards are continuing to improve. There are no significant differences between male and female performance.
97. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are currently above average and this represents a good level of achievement. Students have good positive attitudes to geography although they find the work challenging. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students had to analyse data related to different global companies, such as Shell, Nestle and AOL Time Warner. The majority of students coped well with the analysis. Students show a good knowledge of most of the topics that they have studied, such as urbanisation in both more and less economically developed countries. They cogently discuss and argue a range of topics; this is well exemplified in a Year 13 lesson on globalisation. Students' work shows good knowledge of river and coastal environments and their management. This work is well referenced to fieldwork in North Norfolk.
98. Year 12 students are achieving standards above average for students at this stage. This represents a good level of achievement. Students make effective use of past work when introduced to a new topic. A strong feature of students' work is the brainstorm activity at the beginning of a topic. It enables them to identify clearly what relevant knowledge they already have, for example, of coasts and their associated features. Students' files contained good quality sketch maps and cross sections drawn by students; these were successfully labelled, with many carefully annotated. Students' files are well organised and their written work is good; the majority

of work seen is very well presented with great care and attention to detail. Students have good knowledge of the physical aspects of rivers and drainage basins. They relate this successfully to the hydrology of a river, analysing well information from charts. Literacy and numeracy support learning; students keep a glossary of technical vocabulary. Numeracy is frequently practised: for example, triangular graphs are used related to soil analysis and there are many opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills of computing to enhance their work. However, a few opportunities are lost to extend students' numeracy and literacy further.

99. Both teaching and learning are good. Teaching is consistently good and students learn quickly as a result. Students appreciate the quality of teaching they receive from all their teachers and indicate that they find the course demanding. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; they present information very clearly, which results in students acquiring very good knowledge, skills and understanding. This was well demonstrated in a Year 13 lesson where a teacher was able to let students debate multi-national companies and the benefits and challenges they bring to different countries. The teacher's very good knowledge and application enabled good steering in order to reach a successful outcome. All teachers are very enthusiastic about the subject and this is conveyed to the students and reflected in their positive attitudes.
100. Fieldwork is good; it gives well-planned first hand experiences enabling students to learn techniques of gathering information and analysis. Teaching is almost always demanding, although in a double lesson it does not always ensure that a sufficient amount of work is covered. Good challenging questions develop students' understanding. For instance, in a Year 12 lesson good teaching ensured clear understanding of technical vocabulary related to rivers and river basins.
101. Students work hard in lessons and willingly answer questions. Often the two-way questioning develops into a debate as in the Year 13 lesson on the ethics of big companies like Nike and Coca-Cola. Students successfully supplement schoolwork with independent work at home. The marking of students' work is good; it usually indicates where students have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve. Students acknowledge that they receive good oral feedback. Students make good use of computers in both presentations of work and investigation. They make good use of digital cameras in their fieldwork.
102. Leadership and management of the department are effectively shared between two part-time teachers. There is a clear commitment by the team to improve standards for all students. They work together giving clear continuity and progression from the Year 12 course into Year 13. Teachers have a good knowledge of the new course structure. Adjustments, made to the course for 2002-03, are already impacting positively on standards. Assessment, monitoring and tracking the progress of students are good and are also contributing to the improvement of standards.

History

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

Strengths

- Students consistently achieve high standards. Results at A2 level are above average.
- Teaching is very good and often excellent. All areas of teaching are very strong. Teachers are enthusiastic, well prepared and set very high expectations of students.
- Learning is very good.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are outstanding. They are highly motivated and enjoy the subject.
- The AS and A2 courses are well structured to take account of students' learning needs and teachers' strengths.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Clear direction and purpose and very good relationships underpin the well-established climate of success.

Areas for improvement

- Planning for the teaching and use of the key skills, though already successfully under way, would benefit from further attention.

103. The GCE A level examination results for 2001 were above national averages with an average percentage of A and B grades. The results in the most recent examination in 2002 exceeded these with an increase in the percentage of A and B grades that is likely to be above the national average once comparative data is available. The school's performance data indicates that the majority of students exceed their predicted grades. There is no difference in the attainment of female and male students.
104. The standards of work seen in Year 13 are above average and achievement against prior attainment is very good. The majority of students are making very good progress. They have gained a very good breadth and depth of knowledge of the Civil War period in seventeenth century Britain and through discussion, debate and analysis of key sources have gained a very good understanding of the events and personalities of the period. Students' research skills are especially well developed through wide reading and investigation of a historical question of a subject of their own choice which forms part of the A2 examination. They have a good grasp of historiography and can discuss different interpretations of history confidently and at length when explaining their own conclusions.
105. Students in Year 12 are mainly achieving as expected and some students are exceeding this. Standards of work seen are above average. Most students keep well-ordered and thorough notes supplemented by appropriate reading. The majority is gaining a good breadth and depth of knowledge of the period of the Russian Revolution. In one lesson, presentations about different sections of Russian society at the time of the 1905 Revolution, showed that the majority of students were able to use dates, terms and vocabulary appropriately indicating a good understanding of the topic. The historical skills of analysis, interpretation and synthesis are developing well.
106. Teaching is very good and in half the lessons seen it was excellent. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and lessons are presented with enthusiasm and rigour. In the excellent lessons an element of scholarship served to inspire and challenge students further. Teachers set very high expectations of students and challenging historical questions. This engenders enthusiastic and lively discussions, which are a feature of the majority of lessons. Work is marked against examination criteria and students are given helpful feedback on how to achieve the next level. Though extensive web site references are given and students are expected to use these and other ICT resources this is not planned as an integral part of lessons. Little attention is paid to enabling students to develop numeracy skills, although communication skills are well developed through appropriate emphasis on reading, discussion and a range of writing tasks
107. As a consequence of this very good teaching students have high levels of interest and motivation and by Year 13 have developed an impressive array of learning skills. They apply themselves conscientiously and understand that they are expected to read widely and challenge each other and the teacher. In explaining their views they are mature, articulate and polite. Because of the way they are taught students soon become confident young historians. The degree to which they work co-operatively and help each other is outstanding. For example, in a lesson in Year 13 where students worked in pairs interrogating and advising each other about their personal research. The contribution of the subject to students' personal development is very good.
108. Leadership and management are very good. In response to the school's aims and values, a climate of hard work and success has been established in which the students are able to thrive. The work of the department is regularly monitored and evaluated by the senior management team and points for improvement are addressed diligently. The AS and A2 courses are carefully selected and well structured to take account of teachers' strengths and students interests and aptitudes. There are very good assessment procedures in place. Teachers know their students well, set targets for improvement based on a range of performance data and the diagnosis of students' individual learning needs is excellent. The sixth form classroom is enhanced with good quality displays and the courses are very well resourced.

Psychology

The subject attracts substantial numbers of students: results are excellent, it is extremely well taught, there is evidence of good coursework and students respond well in imaginative and enthusiastic lessons.

Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is **excellent**.

Strengths:

- Excellent teaching;
- Very good examination results at AS and A Level;
- Student enthusiasm and commitment to the subject;
- Range and quality of coursework from students in both years;
- High numbers suggest an excellent match to the needs and interests of students.
- Leadership and management of psychology are excellent.

Areas for improvement:

- Development of library stock for 6th form work

109. During the three years that psychology has been offered, growing numbers have been matched by year on year improvements in the quality of achievement. The 2002 AS and A Level results in psychology continued the upwards trend. All of the nineteen candidates entered for AS level passed and three quarters of those passes were at Grade A or Grade B. From an entry of seventeen at A Level, the pass rate was high with over half of the passes (well above the national average) being at grades A and B.
110. Students currently on the programme are working to comparable standards. The quality of the coursework submitted for scrutiny was consistently high. In one lesson, groups of Year 12 students gave very good presentations on a number of controversial topics, including the effectiveness of regimes in prison, the rights and wrongs of smacking children, and the effect of media portrayals of violence on social behaviour. All of the presentations applied insight from their study of the subject, relating conclusions to the main research findings in the area. Year 13 students are confident in discussion, drawing on wide reading and making good references to key areas of research in the arguments they advance. On the subject of the famous Milgram experiment, one student described it as "a seminal study in terms of what it revealed", offering not just an eloquent but a very lucid critique of the issues it posed.
111. This is a completely new subject for students in Year 12. They welcome the stimulus and challenge it offers: both boys and girls work enthusiastically on individual tasks, in small groups or in full class discussions with the teacher. Students are familiar with key psychological and methodological issues. These include the design of statistically valid experiments and observations using the concept of null and alternative hypotheses, and insights into the way particular situations affect observed behaviour. Students' files are generally well maintained, many of them containing a mass of useful material abstracted from relevant websites, and form not only a strong record of their work but an invaluable resource in learning and revision.
112. The teaching seen was excellent, and would not have been out of place in a good university seminar. But as well as this excellent input, there was an astute sense of the students' interest and pace, knowing when to listen as well as when to intervene, drawing extended ideas from the students and helping them with excellent and perceptive recapitulation of their arguments. Numbers of students are now applying - and being accepted - to read psychology in very good university departments.
113. Teaching is grounded in excellent subject knowledge, thorough preparation and good rapport with the students. Pace and variety is achieved by using a range of strategies (individual work, group discussions, challenging questions to help recapitulate work learned previously). There are scrupulously maintained records of homework and coursework attainment, supported by good use

of target setting and tracking. Teaching strategy created activities which were equally challenging to students across the ability range.

114. For Year 12 students - even at this early stage - there was evidence of a good approach to the subject showing an understanding of the way psychological theory grows from the experimental testing of hypotheses, and showing an ability to apply critical analysis to the different models of psychology. In the classroom, behaviour is very good - although some students are somewhat too passive to gain all the benefit they need from A Level studies, lacking a degree of assertion and self motivation. There are affable and open relations between students and their teacher: students report considerable interest in psychology, talk positively about their response to the subject and understand its application to a range of careers.
115. Ethical issues in psychology (consent to experiments, for example, or the extent to which it is acceptable to deceive subjects in the interest of an experiment) are clearly articulated and students are able to apply those insights in mature discussion. Students make good use of the school's ICT provision. Much course work is word processed, and there is good use of graphical display facilities of spreadsheet software to include well-designed graphs, tables and diagrams. A strong background in biology helps some students.
116. There is excellent planning of psychology courses with effective subject schemes of work. Resources and accommodation are very good. With a total of four groups at AS and A Level, the school has been able to allocate a room to psychology. Attractively furnished, this offers an excellent base. There is good reinforcement of learning through reference to current issues in newspapers and magazines, encouraged also by use of wall displays - advertisements, newspapers, university posters and the like.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

Lessons were seen in English language and literature, French, drama and German. In all these subjects, standards and learning were good, with teaching which was overall very good. Students' motivation and interest were sustained and their preparations for examination were thorough.

English

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

Strengths

- Teaching, which is very good
- The commitment of the whole department to support students and to raise standards
- The success of the department in attracting and retaining students throughout the two year course
- Extra-curricular activities
- Very good leadership and management

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to improve drafting and presentation
- Help for students in drawing conclusions from their analysis of texts.

117. Standards in English literature are very high. Results in A level (A2), measured by the percentage of A and B grades, have been above or in line with the national average in the last three years; and no student has failed. Results in the AS examinations have been equally impressive, particularly in 2002 when all candidates obtained grades A or B.
118. Those studying literature have good knowledge of the texts, understanding of character and plot, the devices which make drama come alive, and the technical aspects of poetry. They make good use of some critical writing, such as that of Bradley and Leavis. They widen their own personal reading, and have to write comparative essays on the authors they choose. They respond well in class when given the opportunity, though some appear inhibited in discussion with each other. When speaking to the teacher they often make perceptive, even exotic, suggestions, showing that they have pondered the text deeply. For instance when studying the opening section of *Dr*

Faustus the students showed awareness of the historical background in explaining why Faustus might utter his blasphemies in Latin, and one group was unusually imaginative in suggesting how Mephistopheles might make his first appearance. Their writing shows consistent progress from Year 12 into Year 13, the quantity of research increasing, and their prose style growing in confidence. Among the weaker students, the writing seen in some essays remains clumsy, with students unsure how to incorporate quotation, or how to conclude an argument.

119. In the language course students are confident in their use of technical terms such as *semantic field* or *denotation*. They acquire increasing skill in analysing various types of writing, ranging from studies of Billy the Kid to the lyrics of Oasis, showing how writers adapt their style to the likely audience. They learn how the English language has changed over time, and the influence of childhood on language development. They write their own short stories, many of which are fluent and imaginative. However some essays fail to show the effect of the technical devices which the student has identified, and become, at worst, a mere list of such devices.
120. Progress is good. Examination results show that students are achieving well in relation to earlier attainment, compared, that is, with their results in GCSE and the AS examinations. This is due to students' own hard work and the extensive support given by teachers. Students are given targets, some suggesting the skills they need to polish, others being the exam grades they should be aiming for.
121. Teaching is very good. Teachers know their subjects well, prepare thoroughly, and explain forcefully. Teachers give time to talking individually to students, explaining how they might improve. Marking is especially helpful, one of the reasons why students make such good progress. Teachers use imaginative ways of introducing a topic and stimulating interest. For instance, before the students had looked at a poem by U A Fanthorpe, the teacher gave the class some of the key words used in the poem and invited them to suggest what sort of a poem it might turn out to be. Their ideas, depending on the words chosen for each group, varied widely, illustrating the complexity of the poem. Relations with students are excellent thus encouraging response and increasing motivation. Some minor issues for improvement emerged during the inspection. If more essays were word-processed they could be redrafted more successfully. There were times when some silent students should have been invited to speak, and other times when the teacher could profitably have allowed the whole class more time to think and comment on each other's ideas.
122. The curriculum is appropriate. It has been widened in the last couple of years by the introduction of the language course. Students are encouraged to develop their skills in speaking and listening. The literature course in particular extends their cultural awareness. The style of teaching gives some scope for beneficial social interaction, but could develop still further the skills of working together in small groups, listening sensitively to other people and learning from what they say.
123. There was no sixth form at the time of the last inspection, but overall improvement throughout the school has been good, due in large part to the leadership of the head of the department who has encouraged an active team spirit among all her colleagues. She has been responsible for the successful development of the Literature course and the introduction of Language. She has overseen a continually rising standard of attainment in the A level courses, and has co-ordinated a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

Modern Foreign Languages: French

One German lesson was seen in Year 12, where standards were above average in speaking and listening, and students were beginning to use the language creatively to express their views on socially relevant issues.

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

Strengths

- Results at AS and A2 levels, which have been average
- Teaching, especially in terms of the maintenance of French as the teaching medium

- The students' determination to communicate effectively in French
- The use of up-to-date and relevant social themes to sustain students' interest and motivation
- Very good leadership and management for languages.

Areas for improvement

- Students speaking French with authentic accents
- Recruitment of more students into AS and A2 courses, especially more boys.

124. French recruits only small groups in each year, and most students are female. There is no difference between the performance of girls and boys. Results are improving steadily and standards in class are above average, although A level results over the last three years have been broadly average. Over the last three years during which candidates have been presented for examination, results in A level (A2) cannot be compared reliably with national averages as numbers have been very small. However, all candidates have passed their A level (A2) examinations and several have gained A or B grades.
125. In Year 12, grammatical accuracy is above average for this stage of the course. Students can use reflexive verbs in a range of tenses, and are familiar with idiomatic uses of verbs. In Year 13, when lessons are conducted entirely in French, standards in speaking are above average. The highest attaining students are well above average. Students' concentration on their speaking is leading to very good progress through a complex unit on the world population explosion and its likely impact on economic patterns. The fact that superficial responses are not acceptable in this rigorous approach to the topic ensures that students deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding throughout the lesson and associated homework. They grapple successfully with the challenge of statistical analysis to understand the impact of birth rates on populations in different parts of the world.
126. Students use a wide range of relevant technical vocabulary to develop mature arguments and to present a case in well-chosen themes, involving growing understanding of the social context of France today. The highest attaining students studying on the AS course argue issues coherently and with confidence. Other students, although less fluent, have just as much to say and are just as well prepared to answer questions. The main limitation to their fluency is the tendency to translate from English to French, leading in some cases to a rather stilted sentence construction. Nonetheless, they convey their meaning effectively and undertake debate with their teacher and with each other. They also manage to sustain an impressive degree of concentration throughout the lessons, with the result that the amount of work completed and the subsequent experience of successful learning ensures that a momentum is maintained through all activities.
127. Teaching is very good, and sometimes excellent. It regularly demonstrates real flair, for example when it assists students to refine their ideas through the use of skilful question and answer and occasionally, through deliberate provocation – playing devil's advocate. By working round the subject matter, students are encouraged to develop their active vocabulary and to use a wider range of tenses and sentence structures. The result is that by the end of each lesson, they have shared and developed their knowledge of appropriate language for the particular social context, learnt a new range of vocabulary and structures and can move on with greater confidence. Important grammar points are picked up along the way so that students can increasingly use subordinate clauses effectively. Because relationships are very good, students can joke with the teacher, accept challenges and the routine of high expectations of their hard work and continue to express evident enjoyment. They become party to the rigorous expectations and express similar expectations of themselves. They are mature enough to act as critical friend within the small groups studying at each level. They analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each prepared presentation, a powerful learning tool.
128. Activities are changed appropriately within lessons to ensure that students can practise all the different language skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing. Homework is challenging but most appropriate. It requires them to apply the learning completed in class to a new context and new vocabulary, so that progress is reinforced.
129. Work is well marked, with appropriate attention to the detail of grammatical accuracy. Lesson planning provides students with opportunities for consideration of a range of writing including dialogue, poetry and extended literary passages. There are also opportunities for students to reinforce their accuracy by using computer programmes which give them extra practice beyond the lesson.

130. The leadership of the department is very good and an atmosphere of enjoyment of communication is embedded into the work of the sixth form. The department is well managed and has undertaken significant self-evaluation to improve consistency in its work. Languages are sufficiently well resourced to support the general planning in the subject. Progress since the time of the last inspection has been very good.