

INSPECTION REPORT

THE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Handbridge, Chester

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111449

Headteacher: Mrs V Ratchford

Reporting inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas
3390

Dates of inspection: 11 - 13 February 2003

Inspection number: 249609

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 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Old Wrexham Road Handbridge Chester
Postcode:	CH4 7HS
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Alec Dignon
Date of previous inspection:	24 November 1997

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	13
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	19
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	20
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	21
PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	27
RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	27
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	28
TEACHING AND LEARNING	29
CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	30
THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	32
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	33
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	35

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Catholic High School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school. The school is about the same size as most other secondary schools and the number of pupils (936) has risen by almost 22 per cent over the last four years. There are more pupils in Years 7 and 10 than in other years, where there is a broadly equal distribution of pupils, and there are slightly more girls than boys in the middle years. The number of students in the sixth form (166) has increased by 44 per cent since 1999 and is now about the same size as other sixth forms. Females outnumber males in the sixth form by about 14 per cent. The school provides for pupils across the full attainment range. Attainment on entry has risen over the past four years and is average, overall. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, at 13.7 per cent, is about average, although the proportion with Statements of Special Educational Needs (3.5 per cent) is above average. The school has a designated unit for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, and pupils with these difficulties constitute the highest level of need. The special needs of other pupils include specific learning difficulties (dyslexia), emotional or behavioural difficulties, or autism. Less than two per cent of pupils have other than white United Kingdom backgrounds. Seven pupils are from homes where English is an additional language and there are none in the early stages of learning English. The languages spoken are mainly European. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, at 13.8 per cent, is about the same as the national average. The school was designated a Beacon School in 1999 and awarded Science College status in 2002. The school has Artsmark and Sportsmark awards and has twice received School Achievement awards for outstanding examination results.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an outstanding school. Teaching is very good and pupils attain well above average standards at all ages. The excellent leadership of the headteacher and senior staff, with very good support from governors, has gained great respect from parents and the local community. Resources are very well managed. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve very well. Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average and very high in comparison with similar schools.
- Teaching is very good, enabling pupils to learn very well.
- Pupils concentrate very well on their work and their behaviour is very good; relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers are excellent.
- Excellent leadership, with strong support from governors, ensures that the school has a distinctive ethos based on a firm commitment to Christian principles.
- Very good academic and personal support and guidance make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.
- A very good curriculum and a wide range of extra-curricular activities enrich pupils' learning opportunities.

What could be improved

- Some aspects of the accommodation.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection in November 1997. The very good quality of teaching has helped not only to maintain well above average standards but also to show a year-on-year improvement in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations that has been above the national trend. Parents recognise the school's strengths and continued improvement and there is a high demand for places. Three key issues for action were identified in the last report. These related to full compliance with National Curriculum requirements in design and technology, and information and communications technology (ICT) and to a lack of continuity in the ICT curriculum. These issues were

tackled systematically and successfully. Leadership of the headteacher, the senior leadership team and governors shows very good capacity to take the school even further forward.

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	A	A	-	

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Note: National comparative data for advanced level examinations is not yet available

From entry to the school in Year 7, girls and boys of all social groups and academic potential make very good progress and achieve well. Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science have been consistently well above average and rising at a faster rate than results nationally. In 2002, the results were well above average in comparison with all schools and in the highest five per cent nationally in comparison with schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. The performance of boys and girls is very similar.

Achievement is very good through Years 10 and 11 and this is reflected in the results of GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11. These results have been consistently well above average in comparison with all schools and, in 2002, the results were in the highest five per cent nationally in comparison with similar schools. Results were average or above in all subjects, other than drama where results were significantly below. There are no significant differences between boys' and girls' results. The maintenance of such impressive standards overall is very difficult to accomplish, but the trend in results has still been rising faster than the national rate of improvement, yet at a much higher level. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well and almost all attain at least five A* to G grades in GCSE examinations. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those with English as an additional language, achieve standards that are consistent with those of their peers.

Inspection evidence shows the standards of work of pupils presently in Years 7 to 11 to be well above average and consistent with the results obtained in external tests and examinations. The targets set by the school to be achieved in examinations are set precisely and were met almost exactly both in 2001 and 2002.

In the sixth form, students regularly attain well above average standards. In 2001, the results of both male and female students were well above average. Students of all attainment levels achieve well and results are generally above those predicted on entry to the sixth form. In 2001, students attained well above average results in economics and English literature. Results in English language and history were very high and in the highest five per cent nationally. They were above average in general studies and average in art and design, chemistry, geography, mathematics, physics, and in AVCE health and social care. In biology, business studies, French, music, physical education, Spanish and AVCE leisure and recreation, the numbers were too small for comparisons with national averages to be made. Comparisons of the school's 2002 results with the results obtained in 2001 show that, with increased numbers of students entered for the examination, standards have been broadly maintained. Year 12 students achieved well in AS-level examinations in 2001 and 2002. Almost all passed the examination and nearly half gained grades A or B. Students were able to continue to study at A-level with confidence.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
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Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They are keen to learn and participate very well in extra-curricular activities.
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Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils are helpful and considerate to others. There are very few instances of inappropriate behaviour and the number of exclusions is well below average for a school of this size.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships among pupils and between adults and pupils are excellent, and based upon mutual trust and respect.
Attendance	Attendance is consistently good in comparison with national averages.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 are very good, with occasional examples of excellence. In the sixth form, teaching is very good, overall, and in a significant proportion of lessons excellent. The school provides very well for the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and the few from ethnic minority backgrounds. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is very good. Literacy and numeracy are well taught and with appropriate emphasis in all subjects. Teachers expect pupils to achieve their best and they do so, by responding very well to the good teaching, and much very good teaching, that they receive. Teachers manage their classes very well with the help of the respect that arises from excellent relationships. Pupils learn successfully by working hard, concentrating in lessons and consulting their teachers freely when they need help.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. Pupils have good choice of subjects at all ages. The range of extra-curricular opportunities is very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Effective support enables pupils to achieve very well. Support with reading for pupils in the lower years considerably assists their understanding and progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few pupils with English as an additional language have no language difficulties that require additional support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. Concern for the spiritual and moral development of pupils permeates the total life of the school and has a significant impact on their achievement and personal development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides very good care for pupils. The rigorous use of assessment helps to ensure that pupils of all ages and backgrounds are well supported to achieve their best.

The school has extended the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 to provide alternative programmes for pupils less suited to GCSE courses. The curriculum includes a very good personal, social and health education programme. Increasingly effective use is being made of assessment information to monitor

and support pupils' progress, including the monitoring of the progress of different groups of pupils. The curriculum complies with all statutory requirements.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher and senior leadership team provide a clear vision for the future development of the school. School management is very effective.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is very effective. Governors work closely with the school. They ensure there is a clear sense of direction and that there is a climate in which all can achieve.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has introduced rigorous systems to evaluate its performance. As a result, senior managers and governors have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. All results are carefully analysed and used to set targets for further improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used very well. The school seeks best value when making spending decisions and the educational outcomes of such decisions are evaluated.

Leadership of the school is highly effective and staff at all levels have an exceptionally strong commitment to the school and its pupils. Increasingly rigorous monitoring of the school's work has brought about sustained improvement since the last inspection. The school is developing well as a self-evaluating organisation and the enthusiasm of both staff and pupils for learning makes this a lively learning community. Financial planning is very good. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. There is a general shortage of teaching space and several teaching rooms are too small for the number of pupils they accommodate. There are not enough science laboratories, the ICT rooms are too small and ventilation inadequate, and the drama studio is too small. The school toilets, including those used by staff, are unacceptable and require much improvement. Parts of the school are in urgent need of refurbishment. The unsatisfactory nature of the accommodation is no reflection of the high morale and achievement that are characteristics of the school.

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 their children and is enabling them to be mature and responsible. • Their children like school and are making good progress. • The good teaching and behaviour. • The very good leadership and management of the school. • They are happy to approach the school with problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework. • More information on progress. • They would like the school to work more closely with them.

The responses of parents to the pre-inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive and confirm the high degree of parental support for the school. Inspectors agree with all of their positive comments. However, they do not agree with the criticisms of some parents. Clear information on pupils' progress is provided through informative reports and parents' evenings. The school works well with parents, and responds readily to their concerns. Homework is set regularly and is usually interesting and challenging so that pupils extend their learning well.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

THE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The number of students in this sixth form has risen from 122 in 2001 to its present number of 166. In Year 13, female students outnumber males but in Year 12 numbers are similar. There are very few students of minority ethnic origin or who have English as an additional language. There are none in the early stages of English language acquisition. About three-quarters of pupils from Year 11 continue into the sixth form. This is above the national average. Some students transfer to other colleges where more vocational courses are available, and the remainder enter employment or other training. A small proportion of students join the school at the beginning of Year 12. Standards of attainment on entry to the sixth form are well above average overall, so most students take four AS-level subjects in Year 12 followed by at least three A-level subjects in Year 13. A significant number of students follow courses leading to the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE).

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is highly successful and cost-effective. Students achieved results in 2001 that were well above average and those standards were maintained in 2002. The sixth form caters well for its students through a wide range of academic and vocational courses, leading to GCE AS-level and A-level, AVCE and to intermediate General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ). It also provides a rich environment for personal development. Teaching in the sixth form is very good and students learn very effectively as a result. Leadership and management are excellent and the sixth form provides very good value for money.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning in the sixth form are very good and promote very good achievement.
- Educational experience is enriched by an exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Very good support and guidance, together with the very effective use of assessment, underpins students' achievement.
- Leadership and management are outstanding and promote highly effective teamwork and a clear commitment to continued improvement.
- Students' attitudes and personal development are excellent. The distinctive nature of the sixth form ethos prepares them very well for their future lives with a strong set of values.

What could be improved

- Some aspects of the accommodation.

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	Good. A-level results in 2001 were average. Standards observed during the inspection were above average. Teaching is good; teachers have very good subject knowledge and establish very good relationships with students. Opportunities for independent learning are limited.
Chemistry	Very good. Examination results in 2001 were average. Teaching is very good: teachers have very good subject knowledge, which is used well to

	challenge students and encourage independent learning.
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Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Design and technology	Very good. Comparative judgements of examination results are not possible because of the number of candidates. Students' attainment is above expectations: they make good progress and have excellent attitudes to the subject. Teaching is very good.
Physical education	Very good. Since 2000 the numbers of students have been too small to make comparisons of performance. However, AS-level results in 2002 were very high and the results of the few students entered for A-level were above expectations when compared with their level of attainment on entry to the course. Teaching and learning are very good.
Health and social care AVCE	Very good. The number of students in 2001 was too small to make comparisons with national averages. Students' attainment is continuing to improve as a result of the very good, and sometimes excellent, teaching.
Art and design	Very good. Examination results in 2001 were average overall. Teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and they encourage students to work independently.
History	Very good. Examination results in 2001 were high. Teachers are skilled and demonstrate an excellent understanding of how students learn. The seminar style of teaching is underpinned by exemplary learning materials that do much to prepare students to confront controversies in history.
English literature	Very good. Examination results in 2001 were well above average and better than expected, given GCSE results. Teaching and learning are very good and students are expected to develop their own opinions and ideas.
French	Very good. Due to the small number of students it is not possible to make comparative judgements on results. However, the best students regularly attain the highest grades. Teaching is very good and teachers have very good subject knowledge. Students are well informed about their progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are provided with very good quality support and guidance in Years 12 and 13. Information about sixth form courses is good and students are well prepared for the requirements of AS-level and A-level courses. Students are well informed about opportunities beyond school and about career options.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management in the sixth form are outstanding. Improvement planning is very good. Students' performance is monitored thoroughly and appropriate steps are taken to identify and overcome weaknesses. Governors play a very effective role in the leadership of the sixth form.

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 range of courses allows them to follow those that are well matched to their talents and career aspirations. • They are taught well and challenged to do their best. • They are helped and encouraged to study and research topics independently. • Teachers are accessible if they have difficulties with their work. • They enjoy being in the sixth form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many feel that they are given insufficient advice about careers and the subjects to study in the sixth form. • Some feel that they are not well informed about their progress. • Some feel that the school does not provide a good range of activities and enrichment courses. • Some feel that the school does not provide sufficient support for those who have personal problems.

Nearly all students responded to the questionnaire. Discussion between inspectors and a significant number of students, both formally and informally, indicates that students are very positive about the sixth form, the range of subjects offered and the support they receive. The strengths identified are justified but the concerns expressed by some students are not. Although the teaching programme and the demands of examinations mean that free time is limited, there are many enrichment activities, both within and outside school hours, in which students can become involved. Students' progress is well monitored by their teachers and they have regular opportunities to discuss progress with their mentors, who make considerable efforts to provide help and support for those who have personal problems. The school offers a number of opportunities for students to discuss career prospects with tutors and external agencies, together with a good range of literature about opportunities beyond school.

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

Pupils achieve very well. Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average and very high in comparison with similar schools

1. National Curriculum tests taken in the last year of primary education, at the end of Year 6, show that pupils enter in Year 7 with standards of attainment that, although wide ranging, are average overall. Pupils make very good progress through Years 7 to 9 and achieve very well in the National Curriculum tests taken in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9. Results in these tests have not only been consistently well above average over the past four years but have also risen at a faster rate than results nationally. In 2002, the results were well above average in comparison with all schools and in the highest five per cent nationally in comparison with similar schools, based on pupils' entitlement to free school meals. The school has been notably successful in promoting high attainment amongst boys and the performance of boys and girls is very similar. This is in contrast to the national picture, which shows that girls achieve better results than boys. Boys in the school attain results in the National Curriculum tests that are better than those achieved nationally by either boys or girls. Attainment at the end of Year 9 in all other National Curriculum subjects is well above average, with little difference in most between the performance of boys and girls.
2. Standards are well above average at the end of Year 11 and the school is consistently successful in the GCSE examination. GCSE examination results have been consistently well above average in comparison with all schools and, in 2002, the results were in the highest five per cent nationally in comparison with similar schools. The maintenance of such impressive standards is very difficult to accomplish, but the trend in results has still been rising faster than the national rate of improvement, yet at a much higher level. Comparison of the results obtained by these pupils with the standards they attained at the end of Year 9 in 2000 shows that achievement was well above expectations.
3. GCSE examination results are well above national averages in almost all subjects. In 2002, particularly notable success was gained in English, mathematics, science, art, design and technology, French and Spanish, where results were significantly above average. Results were average or above in all other subjects, apart from drama, where results were significantly below. Action has been taken to raise standards in drama and inspection evidence indicates that standards are rising to be comparable to those in other subjects. There are some differences in the performance of boys and girls overall, but analyses show that these differences are not significant. Unlike the national picture, the performance of boys in the GCSE examination is almost equal to that of girls. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well and almost all attain at least five A* to G grades in GCSE examinations. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those with English as an additional language, also achieve very well and achieve standards that are consistent with those of their peers.
4. Achievement in lessons is very good and pupils attain standards that are above and often well above average in almost all subjects. These standards are underpinned in Years 7 to 9 by the effective implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. The majority of pupils enter the school with a good basic knowledge of language. Close links with the primary schools, together with the attention given to the development of pupils' literacy skills in all subjects, ensure that this knowledge is built on successfully. Particularly close attention is paid to the strengthening of the literacy skills of pupils with special needs, who make rapid progress in the development of these skills in Years 8 and 9 as a result. Speaking and listening skills continue to improve as pupils move through the school. Pupils listen to the views of others and become increasingly able to express their viewpoints with confidence. Throughout Years 7 to 11, pupils make good use of collaborative work to extend their oral skills. They are interested in their work and ask many questions to clarify their understanding and ideas.

5. Reading and comprehension skills are well above average and pupils read and interpret texts accurately and with understanding. They are encouraged to read for pleasure and many speak enthusiastically about books. Regular practice across a range of subjects leads to pupils becoming skilled readers by the end of Year 11. They are able to understand texts and to identify different layers of meaning. In English, history and geography, for example, pupils are required to read a wide range of source material and to make accurate notes and use summarising techniques. Writing skills are improving because of the emphasis on the analysis of a range of texts. This enables pupils to recognise the features of different styles of writing and to employ them in their own work. The focus on correcting spelling in most subjects is helping pupils to improve their writing further.
6. Overall, pupils' numeracy skills are well above expectations. Oral and mental starter activities are consistent features in mathematics lessons in Years 7 to 9 and increasingly seen in lessons in Years 10 and 11. These activities are very effective in increasing pupils' confidence and understanding with numerical work. Most pupils, in all years, display a good level of competence with number calculations. They work in fractions, decimals and percentages with relative confidence. These skills are enhanced further by work from other subjects. For example, in food technology pupils measure accurately and weigh quantities using the appropriate units. In science pupils make full use of a range of diagrams and graphs to depict data collected from experiments and to calculate averages. Pupils confidently use calculators for more difficult calculations.
7. Standards of attainment in ICT have risen since the last inspection and are consistent with expectations at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11. By the end of Year 9, pupils use computers with confidence and are able to apply their computing skills well to support their learning in other curriculum subjects.
8. Very good teaching, together with the careful analysis of performance and a sharp focus on examination requirements, is underpinning the continuing rise in standards. Subject reviews provide the leadership team with a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and enable additional support to be provided to tackle any underachievement. These systems underlie the very good progress pupils are making.

Teaching is very good, enabling pupils to learn very well

9. The predominantly good teaching noted in the last inspection report has improved even further, and there is more good, very good and excellent teaching. The overall quality of teaching and learning is now very good. In Years 7 to 11 teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons observed. The quality of pupils' learning reflects the good quality of teaching and this is directly linked to their very good achievement at the end of Years 9 and 11. The school is successful in meeting the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and the few from minority ethnic backgrounds.
10. One of the many strengths in teaching is teachers' effective use of their very good subject knowledge to develop pupils' understanding. This, allied to very good lesson planning, ensures that pupils learn in a carefully structured way. These features are evident in many English lessons. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, pupils made rapid progress in their coursework on 'Great Expectations' because the lesson was well structured to build carefully on their previous learning. In this lesson pupils demonstrated their advanced literacy skills as they used and explained terms, such as 'oxymoron' and 'juxtaposition', fluently. Similarly, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson on vectors, the teacher's very good subject knowledge and lesson planning enabled links to be made with related topics. This reinforced pupils' learning. In design and technology, the teacher's very good subject knowledge and planning ensure that pupils build systematically on their existing skills: in an excellent Year 7 food technology lesson pupils sustained intense concentration as they made Shrewsbury biscuits. In physical education, teachers make very good use of their subject knowledge to challenge and raise the levels of pupils' performance. This was seen in a Year 11 trampolining lesson where pupils' confidence in

performing a range of trampolining techniques improved as they responded to the guidance of the teacher.

11. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and, in most lessons, adapt work very well to meet their needs. Teachers expect pupils to achieve their best and they respond accordingly. This makes a significant contribution to the standards achieved. For example, in an excellent Year 7 French lesson pupils made rapid progress in sentence construction and the development of oral skills because the lesson was conducted almost entirely in the foreign language and at a challenging pace. High demands were made on the pupils, who sustained intense concentration as they responded to the questioning and guidance of the teacher. The impact of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy can be seen in lessons throughout Years 7 to 9 and, increasingly, in the upper years. Teachers provide clear explanations of learning objectives at the start of lessons and, in order to consolidate learning, review the progress made at the end. This practice helps pupils both to structure their learning in lessons and also to place this learning within their developing knowledge and understanding of the subject as a whole. This was seen in a very good Year 11 science lesson where pupils gained a greater understanding of covalent bonding - the union of two atoms by the sharing of a pair of electrons, one from each atom - because of the skilful way in which the teacher built on the previous work on ionic bonding. This incremental development of pupils' knowledge and understanding is a consistent feature in the good and very good teaching observed in almost all lessons.
12. Allied to teachers' high expectations are very good control and management skills. These are built on mutual respect and help to create a purposeful learning atmosphere in lessons. Pupils respond well to such environments and the excellent relationships provide pupils with the confidence to contribute with enthusiasm to lesson activities. This can be seen in the best lessons in the consistency with which teachers challenge pupils to think and is a consistent feature in the good and very good teaching observed. This level of challenge is also evident in the teaching of pupils with special educational needs. The quality of teaching by special educational needs teachers is very good and learning support assistants contribute well to pupils' learning. Pupils with special needs are fully included in all lessons. Their contributions are valued and they make very good progress as a result.
13. The consistently very good quality of teaching encourages pupils to enjoy their learning. They develop an enthusiasm for the subject that teachers themselves exemplify. As a result, by the time pupils are in Year 11, most have developed the very good learning habits that underpin the well above average GCSE examination results.

Pupils concentrate very well on their work and their behaviour is very good; relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers are excellent

14. Pupils' attitudes to school and learning are very good and make a significant contribution to the very good progress they are making. The overwhelming majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, enjoy coming to school and arrive in a positive frame of mind. Pupils are keen to do their best and speak highly of their teachers. Both pupils and parents are very loyal towards the school. Relationships among pupils, and between adults and pupils, are excellent and based upon mutual trust and respect. Pupils attend regularly and usually arrive in good time for their lessons. This helps them to make the most of their time at school.
15. Teachers lead by example. Because they share a wholehearted commitment to their pupils and a desire for them to do well, the staff provide a supportive and mutually respectful working environment. Pupils are aware of this and are keen to seize opportunities as and when they arise. They are well motivated and enjoy being challenged, and this is helping them to make very good progress in their work. This is seen in the best lessons in Years 7 to 9, for example, where the impact of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy can be seen. Pupils clearly enjoy the challenge of the rapid starter activities that are a feature of these lessons: they are keen to do well and concentrate on the tasks set. They listen attentively and assimilate new information and ideas quickly. Pupils are keen to help each other in lessons and are considerate towards others who may be experiencing difficulties. They respond well to the enthusiasm of their teachers and are

willing to check and improve their work, as in a very good Year 9 art lesson where pupils were working collaboratively on installation art and the work of Tracey Emin.

16. Pupils work well in pairs and groups, collaborating effectively and responding well when given the opportunity to show initiative. They make considerable efforts to succeed and, by the time they are in Years 10 and 11, they are developing well as mature learners. This was seen, for example, in a very good Year 11 English lesson where pupils demonstrated their ability to work effectively without close supervision by the teacher as they discussed the meaning and structure of the story 'The Darkness Out There' by Penelope Lively.

17. The very good climate for learning is created by a number of factors, and particularly by teachers' high expectations and the excellent relationships they establish. The high quality of the relationships is seen in most lessons; it provides pupils with the confidence to ask questions and enables teachers to concentrate on teaching, for example, in a Year 8 geography lesson where all pupils responded to the teacher's skilful questioning and made good progress in learning as a result. Pupils have many opportunities, individually and in groups, to review evidence and identify key facts, for example in English, history, French and science. Their discussions strengthen both their understanding of the subject and also their language skills. Pupils are willing to help each other to solve problems. This was seen, for example, in a Year 7 ICT lesson where the sharing of ideas helped pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding of the use of spreadsheets.
18. The very good attitudes of pupils are demonstrated in the way in which they respond to the school's high expectations of behaviour. These are clearly understood and behaviour is very good. Pupils are very courteous, keen to be helpful to visitors and show much respect to each other and to their teachers. The school is a very orderly community and conduct around the school is very good as pupils move between lessons. Pupils show care for the school environment: there is no evidence of any graffiti in the buildings and the main corridors remain litter-free all day. Pupils respond well to the efforts made to support those with behaviour difficulties. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour, although rare, are dealt with effectively. In the last school year fixed-period exclusions were well below average for a school of this size and there was only one permanent exclusion. Pupils interviewed during the week of the inspection reported that they were unaware of any instances of bullying.
19. Pupils say that the school is a friendly place and parents say that their sons and daughters enjoy coming to school. Boys and girls from all backgrounds work well together and willingly share materials and ideas. Pupils with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds mix well and join in all activities. Pupils show respect for each other's beliefs and express their opinions without fear of ridicule. They take responsibility and they help in the classrooms and around the school when asked to do so, for example, in helping incoming Year 7 pupils to settle in and to find their way around. Pupils conform to the school's expectation that racist or sexist behaviour and language will not be tolerated and the result is a lively but very harmonious community.

Excellent leadership, with strong support from governors, ensures that the school has a distinctive ethos based on a firm commitment to Christian principles

20. Much of the success of the school derives from the inspirational leadership of the headteacher. This is well recognised by parents, governors, staff and pupils. The headteacher has successfully established a devolved style of leadership that actively promotes the potential of all staff in this area. As a result, the school's management structures are based on co-operation, with staff joining together to share ideas and make decisions. This sharing of leadership roles and responsibilities is very much part of the distinctive ethos of the school and consistent with the Christian principles that permeate all daily activities and guide all planning. Central to the aims of the school is the all-round development of pupils within a Catholic Christian framework. This commitment influences all of the school's activities and is much in evidence in the general school ethos. Pupils are educated in an environment based upon clear values and principles. These values and principles influence every aspect of school life and pupils feel secure, valued and respected. There is clear recognition by the school that the spiritual and moral development of pupils has a vital impact on their progress, attitudes and achievement. This aspect of pupils' personal development is exceptionally well co-ordinated and there are numerous and valuable examples of opportunities for reflection and discussion of spiritual and moral issues in all curriculum areas. This is a great strength of the school and a significant contributory factor to the success that pupils achieve.
21. In pursuing the aims of the school, the headteacher receives excellent support from other members of the senior leadership team. Since the time of the last inspection the team has been

extended and restructured with three assistant headteachers having been appointed to join the head and two deputies as members of the team. These appointments have been made wisely, as has the restructuring of roles and responsibilities, so that all make significant contributions to the leadership and management of the school. All members of the leadership team have clear line management responsibilities for subject departments or pastoral managers, whom they meet on a regular basis to review progress towards targets. Formal departmental reviews are becoming firmly established and form part of the school's strategy for continued improvement through self-evaluation. The school's strategies for evaluating performance are very good and underpin all improvement planning. The effectiveness of these strategies is seen in the ways in which educational provision has continued to improve since the last inspection. All of the issues identified for action in the last inspection report have been tackled vigorously and successfully. The quality of teaching has improved, because the leadership team is very supportive of staff and has created systems that recognise the central importance of the quality of teaching and learning to ensuring pupils' success.

22. The inclusive ethos of the school is reflected in the ways in which the leadership team has been active in adopting worthwhile initiatives to improve the learning and experience of pupils with very varied needs. The most recent of these is the successful application for Science College status, which the school was awarded from the start of the present school year. Initiatives for gifted and talented pupils, support for those with special educational needs and care to ensure that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds fulfil their learning potential ensure that pupils' very differing needs are well met.
23. The school has made very good progress in the collection and use of assessment information. The assistant head with responsibility for assessment has established a comprehensive database, and detailed analyses of performance in National Curriculum tests and external examinations are carried out. This information is used effectively to monitor the progress of pupils and to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching. The information is presented to heads of departments, who use it well in the planning of teaching and learning. Very good use is also made of the information to identify pupils who might be in danger of failing at an early stage, and additional support is provided. The use of assessment information in this way makes a significant contribution to pupils' achievement.
24. The professional development of staff is managed effectively by an assistant headteacher. The very good quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection is a very positive indicator of the effectiveness of staff development. Many of the development activities are in-house and the quality and impact of this provision are impressive. Numerous different activities take place and involve large numbers of staff, many of whom have led in-house training. This provides staff with good opportunities to exercise their leadership and organisational skills. The continued improvement of teaching and learning remains a key priority in school planning shows. This shows that there is no complacency in this school, even though standards are consistently well above average. The particular needs of newly qualified and newly appointed teachers are identified well; they receive very good support and recognise it as such.
25. Governors have high expectations and are very supportive of the school. They are conscientious in carrying out their responsibilities. They are very involved in strategic planning and financial management. They have a very good sense of best value in spending. This is seen not only in their application of best value principles in obtaining tenders for service contracts and goods, but also in their appreciation of the need to ensure that spending is linked to educational priorities and leads to benefits to pupils. Governors fulfil all statutory responsibilities. They are vigilant about health and safety, and excellent arrangements for child protection are in place. They work closely with the headteacher and senior staff and are committed to helping the school to do its best for the community it serves.

Very good academic and personal support and guidance make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development

26. The very good academic and personal support the school provides for pupils are important factors, not only in the academic success that pupils achieve but also in the highly positive way in which they respond to what the school has to offer. Concern for the care and support of pupils is at the heart of this school and begins at the time of transfer from the many primary schools from which pupils are drawn. Although most pupils entering the school in Year 7 come from five main partner primary schools, others are drawn from primary schools serving villages outside the immediate Chester area. Every effort is made to ensure that all pupils are well supported at the time of transfer. Parents and pupils alike say that the transfer arrangements are very effective and that the school has very good induction procedures for pupils and their parents.
27. Continuity in pupil care is a feature of the pastoral system, which is based on the role of form tutors and year heads, who develop a very good knowledge of individual pupils and their particular social and educational needs. Heads of year play an important role in ensuring continuity in care, and provide good support for form tutors. They meet regularly with the tutors to discuss and monitor individual pupils' academic and social progress. This knowledge underpins the provision for pupils' personal development, which is a strength of the school. Although the form tutor is the first point of contact with home, heads of year are also in close contact with parents when pupils need additional support. The 'Pupil Planner' is a very effective way of communicating with parents and of harnessing their support in the day-to-day monitoring of homework, effort and behaviour. As a consequence, all pupils are provided with very good support as they move through the school. The quality of this provision makes a significant contribution to pupils' progress and achievement. The school's very good links with the local employers and with institutions of further and higher education ensure continuity at the time pupils leave school.
28. An increasing strength of the school is the attention paid to the analysis of examination and test results and the use of this information to set targets and monitor pupils' progress. The system is based on the transfer of information from the primary schools. This information, together with information obtained through the school's own initial assessment procedures, is used to set pupils' targets for performance in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9. Effective use is then made of national pupil performance information, made available by the DfES through the 'Autumn Package', to set targets for performance in the GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11. The school has rigorous procedures for monitoring pupils' progress towards these targets and pupils are left in no doubt about the progress they are making. Over the five years from Year 7, form tutors and subject teachers develop a very good knowledge of the pupils for whom they are responsible and provide a very effective early warning system of any potential underachievement so that additional support can be given. The value of this is that pastoral and curriculum teams work closely together to support pupils' progress. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting were particularly appreciative of the support their children get. They feel that the clarity of the information they receive gives them a very good understanding of the progress their children are making.

A very good curriculum and a wide range of extra-curricular activities enrich pupils' learning opportunities

29. The curriculum for Years 7 to 11 is very good and provides pupils with a wide range of options in Years 10 and 11. A school priority in planning is to ensure that provision is wholly inclusive. The school takes considerable care to ensure that learning experiences are available to meet the needs of all pupils. Careful attention is paid to the allocation of pupils to teaching groups and these groupings are flexible enough to ensure that girls and boys, from all ethnic backgrounds and with differing levels of attainment, are provided with equal access to the learning experiences available. Pupils with special educational needs identified by the school receive a curriculum that extends their learning well. Good support is provided to individual pupils to enable them to make the most of their learning opportunities. The curriculum is closely monitored to ensure that access is fairly provided. The strengths in the school's curricular provision have been recognised in the award of Beacon status, which the school has held for the past four years. Through its Beacon activities the school has built up strong partnerships with 13 local high schools and its partner primary schools. These partnerships have fostered the sharing of curricular expertise and

the strengthening of curriculum continuity with the primary schools, particularly in the areas of modern foreign languages, special educational needs, literacy and numeracy.

30. A very good personal, social and health education programme, which is taught from Years 7 to 11, enhances the curriculum. The programme is well structured and covers issues of central importance to pupils' lives in modern society. Through the programme pupils learn more, for

example, about prejudice in the ethnically diverse society in which they live. The programme also covers education for citizenship, and many topics relevant to the development of responsible citizenship are introduced in a carefully planned and coherent way.

31. The religious life of the school and religious education are at the heart of the curriculum. There is a thoughtful programme for assemblies and worship, which is centred on a theme for the week. During the week of the inspection the assemblies observed provided pupils with a reflective and uplifting start to the day. Owing to the lack of suitable accommodation it is not possible for all year groups to have a daily assembly. On the days when a year group does not have an assembly, pupils have prayers in their tutor groups. These occasions provide pupils with an appropriate opportunity for considered reflection. Pupils have opportunities to attend Mass, prayer and liturgy groups and to participate in residential retreats. All subjects make significant contributions to pupils' spiritual development and there are strong links between spiritual themes and the planned curriculum. All teaching reflects the aims and mission of the school and so promotes pupils' spiritual development across the curriculum.

32. There is a clear framework of values, based on the religious principles of the school, which is reflected in the daily life of the community. The code of conduct is known to all pupils and regarded as fair and appropriate. Staff provide excellent role models and pupils understand what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and of respect and consideration for others. The work covered in many subjects plays a significant part in the provision for pupils' moral development. They are provided with numerous opportunities to study the religious impact on moral behaviour and to explore their own moral codes. This helps pupils to form a more secure base for their own value systems.

33. Pupils' learning is considerably enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities and the school is a hive of activity at the end of the school day. Pupils can, for example, engage in a wide range of sports and games. The school holds the Sportsmark award in recognition of the quality of its work in this area. The school also holds the Artsmark award in recognition of the quality of provision in the arts. Pupils have numerous opportunities to engage in musical activities and they perform to a high standard. Many perform in the school choir, concert band and orchestra, and the swing band has obtained national recognition. There are many educational visits available, including residential courses and fieldwork in Anglesey and residential retreats. Many departments provide opportunities for pupils to extend their experience in their subjects, and there are regular theatre visits in English and drama, and visits to France and Spain by the modern foreign languages department. Parents and pupils recognise the richness of the programme of extra-curricular activities. They much appreciate the high commitment of staff in providing these worthwhile experiences.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Some aspects of the accommodation

34. The high popularity of the school is reflected in the rising numbers of pupils on the school roll and the increasing numbers of students in the sixth form. Senior managers and governors have worked hard to secure the funding necessary in order to ensure that the accommodation is adequate for the increase in numbers and significant improvements have been made in a number of areas. There are new computer suites, for example, and three new science laboratories are being built as part of the school's new Science College programme. However, the overall quality of

the accommodation remains unsatisfactory. There is a general shortage of teaching space and several teaching rooms are too small for the number of pupils they accommodate. For example, even when the new science laboratories are completed there will still not be enough laboratories for the number of science classes with the result that some science lessons will have to be taught in classrooms. The preparation room facilities are also inadequate for the number of laboratories served. The rooms in which the computers have had to be located are too small and ventilation is inadequate. As a result, the rooms become overheated, particularly when large classes are being taught, and the conditions uncomfortable for teaching and learning. Similarly, the art rooms are too small for the size of some teaching groups and restrict teaching and learning strategies and, in particular, work with larger objects. The unsatisfactory nature of the accommodation is no reflection of the high morale and achievement that are characteristics of the school. Nevertheless, the accommodation is restricting progress in some areas. In drama, for example, the new head of department is vigorously tackling the issue of low attainment in the GCSE examination. However, she is impeded by the poor accommodation. The dedicated studio is small and lacks specialist lighting and effective blackout, and the second space is the assembly hall, which is cavernous and noisy. Neither of these spaces produces an environment in which the best drama can flourish.

35. Teachers try hard to brighten the learning environment and the walls of corridors and classrooms contain very attractive displays that celebrate pupils' work and the extensive range of activities in which pupils participate. Senior managers and governors have also contributed to the improvement of the environment by allocating resources for the painting and redecorating of corridors and classrooms. However, the buildings are in urgent need of improvement. Parts of the school are very worn and many narrow corridors and stairways become congested as pupils move between lessons. Sensible behaviour by pupils, together with diligent supervision by staff, ensures orderly movement around the school. The school toilets, including those used by staff, are unacceptable and require much improvement. The generally tired nature of the school buildings does not reflect the respect that pupils show for their environment, or the efforts of the site management and school cleaning staff to maintain them in a state of cleanliness. However, both pupils and staff are deserving of a quality of accommodation, which matches the very good quality of learning that they achieve.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

36. In order to improve the quality of education provided, the governors, senior leadership and staff of the Catholic High School, with the help of Cheshire Local Education Authority and Diocese should:

- (1) Continue to argue the case for improvement to the accommodation, particularly with regard to:
- the number of science laboratories and preparation room facilities;
 - the ventilation in the computer rooms;
 - the accommodation for drama;
 - the toilet facilities for staff and pupils.
- (paragraphs: 34, 35)*

Sixth form

- (2) In addition to the aspects of the accommodation identified for improvement in the main school, the case for improvement to the accommodation for the sixth form should be pressed with regard to:
- the provision of quiet areas for private study;
 - the teaching rooms for art;
 - the teaching rooms for health and social care;
 - students' access to specialist design and technology rooms and equipment;
 - a dedicated classroom for physical education theory lessons.
- (paragraphs: 79, 101, 109, 113, 120)*

There are no other issues that do not already feature in school improvement planning. The school strategic development plan for the period from 2002 to 2005 includes as key priorities to maintain the continuing rise in standards:

- further improvement in the use of assessment information for target setting, monitoring and evaluation;
- continued improvement in teaching and learning;
- the broadening of the curriculum for the 14 to 19 age range;
- the continued strengthening of the support provided for pupils and students;
- the further professional development of staff.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	47
	Sixth form	39
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		86

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	3	21	19	4	0	0	0
Percentage	6	45	40	9	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	5	25	8	1	0	0	0
Percentage	13	64	21	3	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	770	166
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	121	9

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	33	2

Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	91	2
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English as an additional language

No of pupils

Number of pupils with English as an additional language	7
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Pupil mobility in the last school year

No of pupils

Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	17

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.8
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.2

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	69	94	163

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	59	60	61
	Girls	83	69	73
	Total	142	129	134
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87 (85)	79 (72)	82 (81)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	50 (40)	58 (50)	46 (44)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	58	56	61
	Girls	85	72	76
	Total	143	128	137
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (90)	78 (75)	84 (73)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	42 (41)	51(51)	49 (50)
	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	72	74	146

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	45	71	72
	Girls	52	71	72
	Total	97	142	144
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	66 (62)	97 (94)	99 (96)
	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	50.9 (48.8)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	20	34	54
	Average point score per candidate	230	230	230
National	Average point score per candidate	* (18)	* (17.5)	* (18)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	20	32	52	3	12	15
	Average point score per candidate	220	218	220	204	198	200
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

*National comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available. 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
907	47	1
9	2	0
9	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
4	0	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)	58
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	291

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.4
Key Stage 4	20.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
	£
Total income	2,375,172
Total expenditure	2,415,250
Expenditure per pupil	2,669
Balance brought forward from previous year	98,123
Balance carried forward to next year	58,045

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	13.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	18.5

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	936
Number of questionnaires returned	221

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	52	4	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	52	44	4	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	42	54	1	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	52	12	1	2
The teaching is good.	46	49	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	50	11	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	34	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	25	3	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	38	48	8	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	66	29	2	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	52	43	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons	45	45	7	0	3

Figures may not total 100 because of rounding. The questionnaire gives the views of parents with children in Years 7 to 13.

Other issues raised by parents

- At the meeting before the inspection, parents expressed strong support for the school in all respects.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

37. When students begin sixth form courses, they have usually attained well above average results in the GCSE examination. In matching courses to students' needs, overall GCSE performance, as indicated by a student's GCSE point score, is taken into account. This system provides the basis for the very good advice students receive about which courses are most likely to suit their talents and for the challenging targets set for them. As a result, students make very good progress during Years 12 and 13. Students who enter the sixth form with well above average GCSE grades continue to sustain these high standards and in 2001 the A-level examination results were well above average overall at the end of Year 13. This has been the situation since the last inspection. Consistent with the national picture, female students attained slightly better results than males, although the average point scores of both groups were above the respective national averages by similar amounts. Students with special educational needs or with English as an additional language achieve at least as well as their peers. Students from different ethnic backgrounds also achieve equally well.
38. At A-level in 2001, students attained well above average results in business economics and English literature. Results in English language and history were very high and in the highest five per cent nationally. They were above average in general studies and average in art and design, chemistry, geography, mathematics, physics, and in AVCE health and social care. In biology, French, music, physical education, Spanish and AVCE leisure and recreation, the numbers were too small for comparisons with national averages to be made. Nevertheless, results in these subjects were good, with over half of the students obtaining grades in the higher A or B range and almost all obtaining grades in the A to E range. The lack of national comparative data at the time of the inspection and changes to the method of calculating average point scores make it impossible to compare the school's 2002 A-level results with national figures. However, comparisons of the school's 2002 results with the results obtained in 2001 show that, with increased numbers of students entered for the examination, standards have been broadly maintained. The very good results obtained in English literature, English language and history in 2001 were again obtained in 2002 and similar proportions of students obtained the higher A or B grades in most other subjects. All students gained passes in the A to E range in art and design, biology, chemistry, drama, electronics, French, geography, ICT, music, physics, psychology, physical education, Spanish and in AVCE health and social care, leisure and recreation, and travel and tourism. Underpinning the maintenance of these standards is the very good use the school makes of analyses of examination results to identify strengths and weaknesses, and set challenging targets. These analyses show that, when students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is taken into account, achievement in the 2002 A-level examinations was well above expectations.
39. AS-level results for Year 12 students in 2002 were very good. Almost all students passed the examinations, and just under a half attained grades A or B. As a result, students were well equipped to continue their studies to A-level. Achievement across the many subjects examined in the AS-level examinations in 2002 was good overall.
40. In work seen during the inspection in the nine subjects inspected and reported on in depth, students were attaining standards that are above and well above course expectations, in response to the high expectations of teachers. In no subject were students attaining below what might reasonably be expected at this stage of their courses, based on earlier evidence of their attainment in GCSE examinations. In mathematics, where results have not matched those of other subjects over recent years, standards and achievement have improved and are now above course expectations. This is due to students' higher standards of attainment on entry in Year 12 and to action taken by senior management that has resulted in an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Achievement in chemistry, physical education, health and social care, art and design, history, English literature and French is above expectations. In chemistry students

are skilled at finding solutions to problems and in exploring possible alternatives. Students' achievement in design and technology and in health and social care is

enhanced through the school's close links with business, industry and the support services. In history and English literature, students analyse sources of evidence very well and evaluate these effectively.

41. Achievement in the performing arts is above expectations. In art, for example, students display a high level of observational drawing skills and their sketchbooks show much creative imagination. In music, Year 13 students are very capable in composing, exploring and experimenting in a range of styles, as well as in their instrumental accomplishment. Students achieve well in French and use the language confidently. They demonstrate good knowledge of vocabulary and language patterns.
42. Students communicate clearly, both orally and in writing. They use their mathematical skills competently in subjects such as science, design and technology and geography. Students use computers with confidence to word-process their work and search for information on the Internet. The key skills course provides students with the opportunity to further improve their communication, application of number and ICT skills. These skills are well developed and students are able to meet the challenges of their chosen subjects.
43. The number of students continuing from Year 11 into the sixth form is high. Virtually all students remain for the full length of their courses. A very high proportion of students, over 90 per cent of the total in 2002, continue on to further or higher education, with many securing places at the most prominent universities in the country.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

44. Students have excellent attitudes to their work and to the school. They are very well motivated and fully involved in their studies. They respond very well to the challenges they are set, and enjoy the very many opportunities the school provides for them to show responsibility. They are keen to take part in all aspects of school life. They are encouraged to think for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning. In addition to their set work, students are motivated to do additional research during their own time. The students' very positive experience of learning leads to a high percentage continuing their studies into higher education.
45. Students' behaviour is excellent, both in the classrooms and in the common room. They are ambitious and very keen to learn: exclusion is not an issue in the sixth form. Students listen to their teachers and to the opinions of their peers. They enjoy class discussions and are very confident when offering their views. They respond well to the opportunities to work independently, and show great appreciation for the support their teachers provide. They are aware of their position within the school and fully understand the importance of being good role models for the younger students.
46. The personal development of the students is excellent. They are confident and mature young people, who express their views articulately. They enjoy the work they do with younger students and with the wider community. They work with Year 7 and Year 8 pupils, helping with reading and mathematics. They provide a drop-in centre for any students who may have problems, and they also regularly help during tutor time. They give valuable assistance to Year 11 pupils who may be thinking of joining the sixth form and give up much of their spare time to help with charitable events. They make a significant contribution to the life and ethos of the school as a whole.
47. Relationships within the sixth form are excellent. Students know they are valued as individuals and appreciate the very genuine interest that their teachers have in them and their work. The very supportive and encouraging atmosphere within the sixth form contributes significantly to students' personal development. They become very confident young people who are well prepared for their future life when they leave the school.

48. Attendance in the sixth form is good. Regular attendance makes a significant contribution to students' progress and achievement. Punctuality is good.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

49. The overall quality of sixth form teaching is very good. Teaching was identified as a strength in the last inspection report and has improved further since that time. Almost all teaching is good or better and some teaching is excellent. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. The very good teaching that students regularly receive meets their needs very well and students of all levels of subject competence and from all ethnic backgrounds learn successfully and achieve well. Of the nine advanced courses reported on in depth, teaching is very good in chemistry, design and technology, health and social care, art and design, history, English literature and French, and good in mathematics and physical education. All sixth form subjects are consistently well taught, often with some lessons of excellent quality. Excellent teaching was seen in art, chemistry, English, French and music.
50. In all subjects, teaching has a very positive impact. It enables all students, including the few with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds, to learn well and achieve what they should. Students are expected to concentrate on their subjects and work hard, in and out of lessons. A significant feature of students' learning in most lessons is their interest in, and active engagement with, the ideas of the subject and their willingness to explore these with the encouragement and support of teachers. Key skills are effectively taught and applied in all subjects. Teaching is effective in enabling students to apply ICT well in all their subjects. Students are confident users of computers when working independently, during private study in the library, for example.
51. Excellent relationships form the basis of teachers' very good class management and contribute significantly to students' learning. Many sixth form lessons resemble the best adult teaching and learning, with teachers and students engaged in critical discussion on an equal basis. This was seen in an excellent Year 13 music lesson where excellent relationships and good humour between the teacher and students underpinned the very good progress students were making. Similarly, students made rapid progress in analysing the poems 'Easter 1916' and 'The Foggy Dew' in an excellent Year 13 English lesson because the teacher encouraged the students to express their own ideas rather than telling them what to think. What appeared at a surface level to be a gentle discussion of the poems was in fact a carefully structured analysis in a very supportive learning atmosphere. The adult nature of the relationships encourages students to exercise a high level of responsibility for their work. This is particularly evident in history and chemistry; however, there are not enough opportunities for students to engage in independent learning in mathematics. Mutual respect and excellent relationships are clearly demonstrated in art, where students and teachers work together in a very active and effective learning partnership.
52. Teachers' high expectations of what students should achieve are apparent in almost all lessons. In history, for example, students become absorbed in learning because of the high level of intellectual rigour and challenging pace in lessons. In French, students are motivated by the dynamic pace of lessons and the expectations that work will be of the highest standard. In physical education, teachers are particularly skilful at ensuring that students understand complex technical terms and are able to use these terms with confidence when discussing topics such as the effects of drugs on performance. In chemistry teachers use their subject expertise well to provide clear, detailed explanations in a careful logical sequence that allows students to understand intricate relationships and ideas. In design and technology, the teachers' enthusiasm for the subject and their high expectations inspire students to make very good intellectual and creative effort.
53. The range of methods that teachers use is extensive. Questions often provoke discussion and enable students to reach a good level of understanding for themselves; they learn well because they are not expected simply to accept the teacher's conclusions. However, in some lessons in mathematics, teachers do not engage all students in discussion enough. The last inspection report made reference to sixth form teaching being too teacher directed. This is no longer the case. Teachers help students to explore ideas for themselves and often make learning a very active process. In a Year 13 health and social care lesson, where students were examining the use of questionnaires in social research, the teacher's well-chosen questions constantly

challenged students' thinking, so that they gained a good appreciation of the advantages and disadvantages of obtaining information in this way. In the best lessons summaries of the main learning points at the end of lessons help to reinforce students' understanding and retention of what they have learned. Paired and small group work are regular features of lessons and students are expected to participate actively in the process of learning.

54. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and a strength of teaching in the sixth form. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to plan their lessons in the most effective way for successful learning of their subject. Within the structure of most lessons, teachers plan opportunities for students to learn independently and for good individual support to be provided. English lessons, for example, are characterised by the very good planning of independent learning activities and by individual support for students as they work their way towards greater knowledge and understanding.
55. Teachers make very good use of a wide range of resources to support students' learning and to meet their individual needs. Good use is made of computers to support teaching and learning in many subjects. Technology is used well in music, for example, to help students gain a clearer understanding of technical aspects of the work of different composers. In design and technology and ICT, the use of interactive white boards, the overhead projector and other technological aids enhances students' learning. The school is doing much to improve ICT resources in those subjects, such as mathematics, where limited resources restrict the use of ICT to support teaching and learning.
56. Teachers expect students to work at a high standard both at home and at school. Homework is set regularly and well planned to consolidate and extend classroom learning. Students are conscientious in tackling their homework and generally complete it successfully. Assignments are set appropriately and assessment is used very effectively to ensure that students are clear about the standard of their work and what they must do in order to attain high grades.

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

57. The school provides a broad curriculum for its sixth form students, from which they benefit both academically and socially. It is well planned to meet the needs of all its students, while focusing on a predominantly academic curriculum. In planning the sixth form curriculum, governors and senior management have been mindful of the post-16 options available to students in other institutions in the area and the need for cost-effectiveness in sixth form provision. Nineteen subjects are offered at AS-level and A-level, together with AVCE courses in health and social care, leisure and recreation, travel and tourism, and ICT. In addition, an Intermediate GNVQ course in business is offered. This range of courses provides an appropriate number of choices and students are satisfied that the curriculum meets their needs and aspirations. The curriculum is sufficiently flexible to allow students to combine the study of AS-level, A level and vocational courses, and about 40 per cent of students take at least one AVCE course. Because of the good quality of the information supplied to students before entering the sixth form, only a few make changes to their options early in Year 12. Those students who seek a vocationally orientated programme outside the range of courses offered are given help and guidance to find suitable courses in other schools or colleges. The very good relationships the school enjoys with other post-16 providers ensures that students are able to choose from a comprehensive range of courses at the end of Year 11.
58. The sixth form curriculum meets the needs of students very well. All students, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds and with English as additional language, have equal access to all courses, dependent upon their prior attainment. Teachers are aware of the needs of the very few sixth form students with special educational needs and ensure that they have sufficient support to enable them to succeed in their chosen subjects.

59. All students follow courses in general studies and religious education, which add further breadth to their worthwhile experience. In addition, students are offered a voluntary physical education course. The key skills (of communication, application of number and ICT) are part of the PSHE programme. Good provision is made for the development of key skills and standards are well above average. All students have ample opportunities to develop their communication and use of number skills through general studies, tutorials and their subject courses. Provision for ICT is adequate in subjects across the curriculum. Some students gain accreditation for the key skills of communication and ICT as a result of these arrangements. Students are well prepared to meet the higher intellectual challenges of their chosen subjects.
60. Careers education is very good and forms part of a broad PSHE programme. The very strong links with local universities enable the school to ensure that students are made fully aware of the choices available to them in higher education. The school provides a number of opportunities for students to discuss career prospects with tutors and external agencies, together with a good range of literature about opportunities beyond school. The careers library has a wealth of information, including computer programs, to assist students in their career choices.
61. A strength of the curriculum is the excellent range of enrichment activities it offers. These activities extend the range of achievement opportunities for all students and cater well for the needs of the gifted and talented. Many of these activities are in the performing arts and students have access to a very substantial programme of musical activities where the highest standards are achieved. The school swing band plays a major part in the extra-curricular life of the school, travelling abroad for competitions and tours. The music department organises several choirs, a rock band and concert band, and evening performances for parents are held regularly. There are regular theatre visits to Stratford and London and one-day examination study days held at universities. Students also have the opportunity of taking part in residential field courses in Anglesey. Students are able to train for the Community Sports Leadership Award and many help with teams and clubs, such as the reading, mathematics and ICT clubs, for younger pupils. Through these activities sixth form students provide excellent role models for younger pupils and make a significant contribution to the general ethos of the school.
62. Overall, the provision for students' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent. The spiritual aspect of students' development is underpinned by the Catholic faith, which permeates the whole school. There are opportunities for prayer and reflection in assemblies and form periods, and the lives of ex-students who have died are remembered and celebrated by commemorative masses. Students help to organise and conduct such events. The school is a very supportive community where, in the words of one teacher, "generosity and kindness underpin everything that happens" and where "any and every crisis, whether of pupil or teacher, is supported". Sixth form students are heavily involved in providing this support. Many have trained to be listeners and mentors to younger pupils and also assist in delivering personal, social and health days for the main school pupils. Involvement in charity and fund-raising events promotes their respect for others less fortunate than themselves. Every year a good number are actively involved in the Chester Sleep Out to raise funds for homeless people in the city.
63. Provision for students' moral development is excellent. Teachers are excellent role models, encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions. In part, this is accomplished in lessons where they establish a safe and open learning environment in which students can explore and express their views and test them against others' views. For instance, in French and Spanish, opportunities are taken to explore issues such as our attitudes to refugees, AIDS victims and alcoholism. The school is a microcosm of a fair and just society where each and every member is valued and respected. Although the school buildings are old, they are well cared for, with no instances of graffiti or litter.
64. The promotion of students' social development is excellent. There are many and varied opportunities for them to exercise responsibility through their involvement in mentoring younger pupils, assisting in lessons, acting as prefects, and participating in sporting and musical activities. Students take part in the Bar Council Mock Trial competition, edit magazines, organise

discos for the lower school, act as guides at open evenings and visits by feeder schools and participate in fund-raising activities for the school and for charities. They are excellent ambassadors for the school community.

65. Students' cultural development is achieved through an emphasis on the individual and his or her place in and responsibilities to the community. They take part in the provision of music for assemblies and masses and are aware of the influences, and particularly the religious influences, that shape them. The English department organises theatre trips and an annual cultural visit to Dublin, which enhances students' understanding of Irish literature and keeps alive the Irish connections, albeit distant, of many of the school's students. There are strong contributions from art, music and drama within the Western European tradition. Cultural diversity is well provided, particularly through art, history, geography, religious education, modern foreign languages and comparative studies in physical education. Students develop a good awareness of the richness of an ethnically diverse society.
66. The school is a living embodiment of its aim to be 'a true example of a Christian community where all members put Christ's teachings into action'. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the image of Christ in which a photograph appears of every member of the school during the millennium year. It forms a dramatic and moving memorial of the true meaning of the Millennium, which will remain as a marker for generations to come.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

67. The school's procedures for assessing sixth form students' attainment and progress are very effective. These procedures have strengthened considerably over recent years and the school is now able to set more precise targets for students' performance in A-level examinations, and to measure the 'added value' effect of teaching and learning. These targets are based on students' performance in the GCSE examination. Assessment is used effectively within subjects to monitor students' progress, and every term students' performance is measured against their target minimum grades. This information, together with other measures, such as attendance levels, informs teachers, students and parents about how well they are doing. This system is very effective in identifying which students need additional support and in which subjects. Students' self-assessment of the progress they are making is an integral part of the school's very good assessment procedures. Assessment arrangements in subjects carefully follow examination board requirements. As a consequence, students are well prepared for public examinations. Reports to parents are regular and include judgements on how well students are achieving and what they need to do to improve further. The school's increasingly effective use of assessment makes a significant contribution to students' achievement.

Advice, support and guidance

68. The school provides very good support and guidance for its students. The excellent relationships within the sixth form are a significant factor in the support the students receive. They know they can turn to their tutors for help, and that the interest shown is genuine and honest. Tutors carefully monitor students' personal and academic progress and this is enhanced by their personal knowledge of each student. Students are kept well informed of their progress and have open access to their tutors.
69. The school provides good information about the courses available in the sixth form. The students are carefully monitored during the first few weeks to check how they have settled in. They are given encouragement and support if they feel they have selected the wrong course or are having difficulties adapting to life in the sixth form. The information and guidance they receive from the careers advisor about future careers and opportunities for higher education are good.

70. Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety are very good. There are appropriate procedures in place for monitoring their attendance and punctuality, and the success of this work is reflected in the good attendance levels. The overall support and guidance provided to students is a strength of the school. The school continues to provide the high levels of care, support and guidance noted in the last inspection report.

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

71. Parents and students expressed overwhelmingly positive views about the school and the education it provides. The parents are happy with the progress their children make and feel they are well supported by their tutors. They consider that the students enjoy their new roles in the sixth form, and are happy in school.
72. Students feel they are taught well and that the courses available suit their needs. They appreciate the importance and impact of the excellent relationships within the sixth form. They are pleased with how accessible their teachers are and with the help and encouragement they receive from them. They also say they enjoy being in the sixth form.
73. Some concerns were expressed through the questionnaires. Students at that time felt they were receiving insufficient information about their progress, and advice about what they could do on leaving the sixth form. The questionnaires were sent out before the parents' meeting and the start of the mentoring programme. Students are now satisfied with the information the school provides for them. Although the teaching programme and the demands of examinations mean that free time is limited, there are many enrichment activities, both within and outside school hours, in which students can become involved. Students' progress is well monitored by their teachers and they have regular opportunities to discuss progress with their mentors, who make considerable efforts to provide help and support for those who have personal problems. The school offers a number of opportunities for students to discuss career prospects with tutors and external agencies, together with a good range of literature about opportunities beyond school. The school has also noted the concerns and is working with the students to enhance provision, wherever this is necessary.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

74. The quality of leadership of the sixth form, as part of that of the whole school, by the headteacher, senior leadership team, head of the sixth form and governors is excellent. The effectiveness of leadership is shown by the well above average standards attained in examinations by the sixth form. Students achieve these standards because leadership ensures that the quality of teaching is very good and the process of learning across the sixth form is equally very good. In order to ensure that all students, irrespective of background or ethnicity, have equal access to the educational opportunities the school provides great care is taken to make certain that courses are well matched to the needs and aspirations of students. As a result, sixth formers have confidence in what the school provides for them and this is reflected in the 44 per cent increase in the number of sixth form students since the last inspection. Governors monitor sixth form work and evaluate performance through, for example, presentations from the senior leadership team, subject leaders and sixth form students.
75. The sixth form leadership team, made up of the head and two assistant heads of the sixth form, ensure that day-to-day management is very effective. Their roles and responsibilities are clear. The head of sixth form ensures that senior management is fully informed on all matters affecting the sixth form. The subject leadership provided by the heads of the nine subjects reported on in depth in the inspection is never less than good, and most departments are very well led. Heads of department provide very clear educational direction for the work of their sixth form subjects and are increasingly taking on responsibility for monitoring and evaluating work in their departments. Performance management is being used well to extend the efficiency of departmental practice.
76. The school's strategies for monitoring and evaluating sixth form performance are very good and underpin all improvement planning. These strategies are very effective in ensuring that students achieve the standards that are, at least, as high as should reasonably be expected. Analyses of the value added to students' achievements between GCSE and A or AS-levels show that overall

performance is most often well above expectations. Where performance has not been what it should be, the headteacher and senior staff have taken action to improve the situation. For example, action has been taken to tackle the issue of under-performance at AS-level in mathematics. Inspection evidence indicates that this has been successful and that standards in Year 12 are now higher than that indicated by past AS-level results. School improvement planning is very good and most objectives have clear criteria for evaluation to enable management to judge progress towards the targets set. All of these have direct bearing on the sixth form, although they apply to the school as a whole. Plans to improve teaching and learning further, for example, have direct implications for work with the sixth form and have benefited students considerably. Overall, planning for change and improvement and evaluation of outcomes are effective in ensuring the continued progress of the sixth form.

Resources

77. The overall standard of resources in the sixth form is good. Spending on resources is about the same as the national average and in all subjects resource provision is generally suitable for the needs of the sixth form. The expertise and experience of teachers in the sixth form are well suited to the demands of sixth form teaching and teachers are deployed effectively to provide a rich and varied curriculum. Provision for the professional development of staff is very good in the sixth form. Staff development is given a high priority in the school and this is contributing to the continued improvement seen, for example, in the quality of teaching and learning. Induction procedures for newly qualified teachers and newly appointed teachers are very good.
78. Both governors and senior management are careful to seek the best value when deciding about spending in the sixth form and are concerned to evaluate the impact of these decisions on the quality of education the school provides. All funding is used in a highly cost-effective way. The income provided for the sixth form enables the school to give students a very good curriculum and appropriate subject choice. The quality of teaching is also very good. The school achieves very good value from the highly cost-effective provision it makes for sixth form students.
79. Overall, the accommodation for the sixth form is unsatisfactory. Senior managers and governors have worked hard to upgrade the accommodation for sixth form students and improvements have been made. The library, for example, serves the needs of the sixth form well. The computers in the library are well used by students for independent study. Library staff give students effective support for the work that they do when using the library's computers. The school has also tried to improve the sixth form social and private study areas. However, these are too small for the number of students and do not offer any quiet areas for private study. Many sixth form subjects are taught in reasonably-sized classrooms, which provide suitable accommodation. Teachers try hard to brighten classrooms and corridors with attractive displays. However, much of the accommodation is very worn and uninspiring, and there is an urgent need for redevelopment and refurbishment to improve the learning environment. Although the art department is well placed to build on its success and make further improvement, it is hampered by poor accommodation that restricts teaching and learning and, in particular, three-dimensional work. The main health and social care teaching room also acts as a corridor to two other rooms and the continuous movement of students through this area impacts adversely on teaching and learning. Students' rate of progress in design and technology is restricted by difficulties in accessing specialist rooms and equipment in some timetabled and personal study periods. As in the main school, the toilet facilities are in an unacceptable condition. The school is aware of these weaknesses in the accommodation and governors and senior management continue to work hard to obtain the funding needed to rectify them.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	21	29	-	62	-	24	-
Chemistry	6	83	-	100	-	48	-
Physics	7	0	-	86	-	20	-
Design and technology	6	33	-	100	-	35	-
ICT	13	31	-	100	-	38	-
Physical education	11	45	-	91	-	37	-
Leisure and recreation	4	0	-	50	-	15	-
Travel and tourism	4	0	-	75	-	23	-
Health and social care	9	11	-	78	-	24	-
Art and design	17	76	-	100	-	50	-
Music	6	17	-	100	-	35	-
Drama	14	64	-	100	-	47	-
Geography	7	43	-	100	-	41	-
History	19	63	-	95	-	44	-
Psychology	14	14	-	86	-	31	-
Theology	21	62	-	100	-	47	-
English language	15	7	-	73	-	21	-
English literature	25	20	-	84	-	31	-
French	7	86	-	100	-	50	-
Spanish	12	33	-	75	-	30	-

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	7	14	-	71	-	54	-
Biology	7	14	-	100	-	66	-
Chemistry	9	33	-	100	-	71	-

Physics	1	100	-	100	-	100	-
Electronics	3	0	-	100	-	67	-
Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Design technology	4	75	-	75	-	85	-
Business studies	2	0	-	0	-	0	-
ICT	9	23	-	100	-	89	-
Physical education	2	0	-	100	-	50	-
Leisure and recreation	3	33	-	100	-	87	-
Travel and tourism	3	33	-	100	-	80	-
Health and social care	6	35	-	100	-	80	-
Art and design	7	43	-	100	-	86	-
Music	3	0	-	100	-	67	-
Drama	10	40	-	100	-	84	-
Geography	7	43	-	100	-	71	-
History	15	40	-	93	-	75	-
Psychology	7	43	-	100	-	77	-
Theology	8	100	-	100	-	108	-
English language	15	60	-	100	-	87	-
English literature	9	67	-	100	-	100	-
French	7	14	-	100	-	77	-
Spanish	5	40	-	100	-	72	-

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

80. Mathematics and chemistry were inspected and reported on in depth, but biology and physics were also sampled. Biology results in 2001 were above average and students did as expected in comparison with their results at GCSE. The 2002 AS and A-level results were similar to those obtained in 2001. In the two lessons observed, students worked well and were eager to learn. Teaching was at least good. In one Year 12 lesson observed, for example, students made very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in mitosis. The physics A-level results in 2001 were average and as expected compared with students' GCSE results. Only one student was entered for the A-level examination in 2002, making it impossible to make meaningful comparisons. Teaching in physics is at least good.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Specialist teachers have strong subject knowledge.
- Well-planned lessons with clear objectives.
- Very good relationships between students and teachers.
- Teachers have a strong commitment to the raising of standards.

Areas for Improvement

- Standards of attainment in AS-level examinations.
- Opportunities for independent learning or investigative work.

81. Standards attained by A-level students in 2001 were average in comparison with all schools. Results at A-level for 2002 were below those normally attained within the department. Standards attained in AS-level examinations in 2002 were well below expectations and resulted in a significant drop in the number of students expected to study mathematics in Year 13.
82. In work seen during the inspection students' attainment at AS level is above national expectations; this is a reflection of the commitment of the students, appropriate prior attainment at GCSE and teachers' increased awareness of course demands.
83. Year 13 students have commenced A-level studies having experienced difficulties at AS level. Standards of work observed in lessons, however, are now above course expectations; students have gained in confidence and are making good progress: for example, most are able to develop and use the formula for integration by parts and to recognise the link with previous work on the differentiation of products. Year 12 students are also making good progress and demonstrate good insight when introduced to new topics such as differentiation from first principles. In mechanics they are able to draw accurate force diagrams, apply Newton's Laws and show good understanding of the principle of taking moments for forces in equilibrium.
84. The department provides courses in key skills numeracy at Foundation and Intermediate levels alongside a GCSE re-sit course. Students on these courses are enthusiastic and make good progress; they fully integrate the use of ICT into their project work.
85. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are conveyed to students. The marking of students' work is regular and they receive constructive feedback. Good practical illustrations are used when appropriate, for instance, in order to demonstrate aspects of mechanics. There are, however, few opportunities for independent learning, as a result of which students sometimes lack confidence when tackling more complex problems.
86. The use of ICT within the teaching of sixth form mathematics at advanced level has been restricted because of resource limitations, but these are being tackled by the introduction of interactive whiteboards.
87. Attitudes and behaviour are very good. Relationships between students and teachers are based on mutual respect and good humour. Students appreciate the support they receive from their teachers, who readily make themselves available outside of the normal school day.
88. The head of department provides good leadership and, along with colleagues, is committed to the raising of standards. The departmental handbook is helpful and contains policies and guidance for good teaching. Issues raised in the last inspection report have been tackled successfully: systems for monitoring the work of the department have been implemented and colleagues regularly share good practice. Analysis of students' performance has been established and all students are working towards individual targets based on prior attainment.

Chemistry

Overall, the provision for chemistry is **very good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge.
- Opportunities for independent learning are very good.
- Relationships between students and teachers are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Marking of students' work to indicate what they must do in order to improve.

89. The A-level examination results in 2001 were average when compared with schools nationally. Even though the number of students achieving higher A or B grades was below average, there was an improvement on results obtained in 2000. All male students and three-quarters of female students achieved a pass grade, but more female students achieved the higher grades than males. In relation to their GCSE results, students performed as expected. Results in 2002 were similar to those in 2001, particularly at grades A and B, but improved insofar as all students gained a pass grade. In both AS-level and A-level examinations, students achieved at least as expected, considering their GCSE grades.
90. The current standards of students are above average. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results, largely as a result of the very good teaching, which demands much of them. In one practical lesson, for example, students made very good progress in their understanding of reaction kinetics, equilibrium constants and partition coefficients. Written work is generally well presented and matches the confidence which students display in the classroom.
91. Students in Year 12, who are about half-way into their course, are achieving well. They show, for example, good knowledge and understanding of molecular dipoles and how these can lead to hydrogen bonding in molecules such as water and alcohols. Most are successfully moving on from GCSE work into new areas of chemistry and are making very good progress in developing their skills of independent research. Lower-attaining students have greater difficulty in applying the concepts learned in GCSE to more advanced work.
92. Teaching is very good because teachers have very good subject knowledge, planning is well-focused and teaching methods used maintain students' interest and engender learning. There are very good opportunities for students to work independently in lessons. Assessment is used very well to monitor the progress of students, to identify underachievers and to adjust teaching accordingly. Day-to-day marking is thorough overall, but does not always provide information for students on how to improve their performance.
93. Students learn very well. They respond very well to challenge, work very hard and show interest in their work. They support and help each other and enter into mature discussion as part of their learning. They undertake independent work maturely.
94. Leadership and management are very good. There is a commitment to improving standards. The scheme of work provides a consistent approach to the teaching of chemistry. A good range of learning support materials, including computers, is available, and is used well to develop opportunities for independent learning. Target setting, based on careful analysis of students' performance in tests, is in place and used very effectively to provide learning goals. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

95. The AS and A-level courses in design and technology were inspected and reported on in depth.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Students' very good achievement on AS and A-level courses.
- Students' excellent attitudes to the subject.
- Very good teaching.
- Teachers' expertise is used well to enhance students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- Students' access to specialist rooms and equipment in timetabled and personal study time.

96. The product design course was introduced in September 2000, with the first students entered for the A-level examination in 2002. Comparative judgements of examination results are not possible because of the small number of candidates. Nevertheless, three of the four students entered achieved the higher A or B grades. At AS level, the six students entered all achieved pass grades in the A to E range with two achieving a B grade. These results represent good achievement from standards on entry to the course. The 2001 AS-level results were broadly similar to those of 2002. Rates of retention are high, with almost all students continuing from Year 12 into Year 13.
97. In work seen during the inspection in Year 13, standards are above expectations for the majority of students and in some cases well above. Students are maintaining their very good progress from GCSE and AS level. They increase their subject knowledge and understanding of the subject. They have good skills in designing, making and graphical communication. Design folders and practical making in a range of materials are of high quality as the students develop their final projects. These include a display system for a small sports shop, a lounge table which can be adjusted to suit a range of uses, and a device for practising hockey shooting. Good use is made of ICT, computer aided design (CAD) and computer aided manufacture (CAM) in developing their work.
98. In Year 12, students are making good progress and achieving very well on the AS-level course. They are developing further their design and practical making skills and broadening their knowledge and understanding of the subject. In one lesson students were studying industrial practices and different types of production (i.e. one off, batch and mass production). As a practical demonstration of this the students had been set the task of designing and making a jig or jigs to produce a batch of box-shaped products where the materials had to be cut to length and holes drilled in specific places. The students found this a challenging task that tested their design and making skills and their ability to work productively in small groups, as well as reinforcing their knowledge and understanding.
99. The excellent attitudes of students towards their work contribute to very good learning. Students in Years 12 and 13 are very attentive and work very productively in class. Relationships between staff and students and among students themselves are excellent. They support each other and co-operate very well when working in small groups. Teachers give good support and guidance to the students, including advice on future career opportunities in the subject.
100. Teaching is very good and students learn very well as a result. Teachers are well deployed to make the most effective use of their specialist knowledge and expertise for the benefit of students. The latter know what is expected of them because teachers make the learning objectives of lessons very clear. Lessons are very well planned to ensure that work is of suitable difficulty and offers every student an appropriate level of challenge. Resources are of good quality and well used to support learning. The very effective support given to individual students helps to raise levels of attainment and rates of progress.
101. Leadership and management of the sixth form courses, by the course leader and head of department, are very good. Staff are effectively used and work very much as a team. Procedures for assessing students' work are very good and are effective in supporting learning. The choice of the product design syllabus provides very good continuity for students with resistant materials, graphics and textiles qualifications at GCSE, but is not appropriate for those who studied food technology. Students do not always have easy access to specialist facilities when timetabled into the department or when they have private study periods, because the rooms are being used

by other groups. This does have an adverse impact on the rate of progress students make. The introduction of the product design course has increased opportunities for students since the last inspection.

BUSINESS

102. The Intermediate GNVQ course in business studies was sampled. The numbers of students following the course are too small for meaningful comparisons of their examination results to be made with national figures. However, attainment is generally consistent with expectations based on standards on entry to the course. Teaching and learning in the one Year 12 lesson sampled were very good. The challenge and organisation of the work were strong features of teaching. Students achieved very well as they gained a greater understanding of the management of personal income and expenditure. The lesson made a very good contribution to the development of students' key skills.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

103. The AVCE course in ICT was sampled. Standards attained in 2001 were well above average and these standards, at both AS and A-level, were maintained in 2002. Very supportive attitudes among students and excellent relationships with teachers have a very positive effect on students' learning. Two lessons were observed; in one, teaching and learning were good and, in the other, very good. In the very good Year 13 lesson the teacher's skilful diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses in students' website designs enabled them to improve their work. In the good Year 12 lesson, the teacher made effective use of a Powerpoint presentation to give students a clearer understanding of the examination requirements with regard to their portfolios.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

104. The AS and A-level courses in physical education were inspected and reported on in depth. The AVCE course in leisure and recreation was sampled. The number of students entered for the AS and A-level examinations in 2001 were too small for meaningful comparisons to be made. However, in both courses standards of attainment were above expectations based on standards on entry in Year 12. This was also the case with the 2002 results. Students' very positive attitudes and excellent relationships with teachers contribute significantly to the good progress they make. One Year 12 lesson was observed, which was well taught. The teacher skilfully maintained interest and helped students to better understand the difference between a travel agent and a tour operator and the role of the Association of British Travel Agents.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- The very good quality of teaching and learning.
- The very good leadership and management of the department.
- The very positive and enthusiastic attitudes of students towards the subject.

Areas for development

- The consistent implementation of assessment systems to track student progress.
- The display of subject-related material to create a more stimulating learning environment.

105. The number of students entered for the A-level examination in 2001 was too small to make meaningful comparisons with national figures. This was also the case with regard to the A-level examination in 2002. Nevertheless, those taking the examination in 2002 achieved results that were above expectations when compared to their level of attainment on entry to the course.

Eleven students were entered for the AS-level examination in 2002, with almost half obtaining the higher A or B grades and almost all obtaining grades in the A to E range. These results represent very good achievement when standards on entry to the course are taken into account.

106. Inspection evidence shows the standards of students presently in Years 12 and 13 to be above expectations. Students demonstrate good knowledge of previous work and apply this well to the understanding of new concepts. In Year 13, students are able to use techniques and principles to analyse and evaluate competitive performance and suggest factors that could lead to improvement. For their project investigation they are able to select appropriate techniques to bring about improvement and to state how improvement will be measured.

107. Students have very positive and enthusiastic attitudes towards the subject. They work together in a variety of groupings and are very appreciative of the help and support they receive from teachers. Students enjoy being challenged in lessons and sustain concentration when engaged in difficult tasks. They readily engage in discussion and express their ideas confidently, while being prepared to acknowledge the points of view of others. Students take the opportunity to train for the Community Sports Leadership Awards as an extra-curricular activity and are happy to give up their time to help with extra-curricular clubs and team practices for the younger years.
108. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and their explanations of concepts are interesting and lively. Lessons are well planned and a range of teaching methods is used to promote understanding and to encourage students to extend their thinking. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson, for example, where students worked effectively in small groups to compile a list of key words relating to performance enhancing drugs in sport. The final presentations showed that students had a good understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of using drugs to enhance competitive performance. Students used complex technical terms confidently and their questions reflected an awareness of the ethical and moral implications of the use of drugs.
109. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Consistent with the school model of 'dispersed' leadership, each member of staff has responsibility for leading on different aspects of work in the sixth form. This enables them to develop their strengths and provides very good opportunities for professional development. Good practice is identified and shared both within the department and with other subjects. Assessment remains a high priority for the department. Students receive individual tutorials for their coursework. Progress and action sheets are used to inform students of their progress in relation to their target grades and to help them focus on particular areas for improvement. However, these sheets are not always visible in their work files. There is still no designated indoor teaching area for the examination groups. Students and staff would undoubtedly benefit from having a base from which to work and where subject-related displays and resources could be developed as teaching aids and materials for research.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

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

Strengths

- Excellent procedures for reviewing and assessing students' work.
- Teaching is very good with many excellent features.
- The positive attitudes of students are helping to raise achievement.
- Very good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation.

110. The AVCE course is increasing in popularity as a student choice and standards are very good. The first cohort of students taking the new AVCE course in 2001 achieved average results; however, there was a small number of students and comparison with national results is unreliable. In 2002 the results for both AS level and A2 level were good, with one third of the AS students gaining A or B grades and over half of all students attaining results either at, or above, the school targets and above the average points students achieved in their other subjects.
111. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well above expectations. In Year 12, students take part in work placements, which provide an opportunity for them to widen their experience through observation of behaviour in nursery or primary schools. In lessons students' theoretical knowledge is extended through activities such as the role-play of a dysfunctional group at work. Students made very good use of the computer to give Powerpoint presentations and showed their high level of understanding of Tuckman's theory of how groups work. Good understanding of the assessment criteria for written coursework supports this and, as a result, standards are well

above expectations. In Year 13, students are developing a clear understanding of research methods. They apply these well in their classroom activities, which, combined with their own first-hand knowledge from placements, consolidate their learning. However, work that relies entirely on secondary sources does not have the same impetus as that where students can draw on information gained from first-hand experience. Students have excellent attitudes to health and social care and this contributes significantly to their progress. Communication skills are developing well: all students gain confidence when presenting work to the class and interacting with people in work situations. Although Year 13 students appear more reticent in group sessions than those in Year 12, they use computers very well for research and to make effective presentations of their coursework.

112. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' excellent knowledge of the subject provides students with a firm theoretical foundation, which is then enhanced through a range of stimulating, practical activities that include group work, role-play, work placements and other links with the community. Challenging targets are set early in the course, and teachers provide strong support for students' individual needs. In particular, students benefit from regular reviews of their work and clear guidance that promotes achievement that is above expectations.
113. Leadership and management of health and social care are very good. There is a clear vision for the continued development of the subject, including the introduction of courses in Years 10 and 11. However, the teaching accommodation is unsatisfactory. The main teaching room also acts as a corridor to two other rooms and the continuous movement of students through this area impacts adversely on the quality of learning. Assessment procedures are excellent. There are many links with the caring professions, and the involvement of other specialist teachers widens students' horizons. Several students are considering continuing into higher education and training leading to careers in the care professions. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

114. Art and design was inspected and reported on in depth. Music was sampled. Very few students study music in most years and meaningful national comparisons of attainment are not possible. Nevertheless, students achieve well in the subject. In 2002, all three candidates entered for the examination attained grades in the A to E range, with two A or B grades. Six students were entered for the AS-level examination in 2002; all obtained grades in the A to E range, with one attaining a grade in the higher range. These results represent very good achievement when standards of attainment on entry to the course are taken into account. One Year 13 lesson was observed. Excellent teaching took account of students' different musical talents and ensured that they improved their skills in musical composition and performance.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Very good use of assessment.
- Very good teaching.
- Excellent opportunities for independent learning.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning.
- The accommodation and resources.

115. The school offers an AS-level course to students in Year 12, most of whom then go on to take the A-level examination at the end of Year 13. The department does not require students to have taken GCSE art, and students enter Year 12 with a wide range of attainment levels. The numbers of students choosing to take art has been increasing steadily over the past few years.

116. Results in the 2001 A-level examination were broadly average. Results in the 2002 examination rose, with almost all students gaining pass grades in the A to E range and just under half gaining the highest A or B grades. All students taking the AS-level examination obtained grades in the A to E range, with 83 per cent of students gaining A or B grades. These results represent very good achievement when standards on entry to Year 12 are taken into account. The high standards noted in the last inspection report are being maintained.
117. Inspection evidence confirms these standards. Students show a very high standard of observational drawing skills, using graphite, charcoal and a wide range of other materials. They show very good appreciation of colour, tone and texture in their numerous studies. Their sketchbooks show a wealth of creativity as students develop their ideas through exploration and experimentation, drawing upon their knowledge of the work of generations of artists. They work individually and imaginatively often using unusual materials such as sawdust or soapflakes to obtain specific desired effects. Students proudly exhibit some of their large-scale canvases where subtleties of colour and tone characterise abstract paintings of decaying fruit or studies of movement. Textiles and sewing are incorporated into their work, as when one student embroidered her thoughts on a tea-towel when creating her 'kitchen' of childhood memories. Light was used as the focus for another student whose series of light boxes illuminated his personal responses to colour, while the use of a fan from the interior of a computer to produce small 'pointillist' canvases showed remarkable imagination. Another student produced a beautifully mounted collection of resin gum shields for his hockey team, each individually cast and displayed upon glass plates engraved with the owner's team position and each with cast aluminium brackets. However, the lack of space in the art rooms limits opportunities to develop three-dimensional work.
118. Students' attitudes towards the subject are excellent and they take pride in the displays of their work around the school. They value the very good relationships with the staff and appreciate the way in which they are encouraged to develop personal and artistic independence. They appreciate the increased opportunities to visit galleries and exhibitions and to exhibit their own work. Opportunities to visit Tuscany with students from other schools are greatly valued, as are the after-school classes and clubs which the department organises.
119. The quality of teaching is very good overall and in some lessons it is excellent. Lesson planning is meticulous and the very good use of assessment helps to ensure that lesson tasks are well matched to students' attainment levels. Constant individual support and shared evaluations during the lessons encourage students to explore ideas and develop artistic confidence. This was seen, for example, when a student and teacher worked together to clarify ideas of how an initial landscape drawing could develop and incorporate soil samples and Ordnance Survey and aerial photographic maps. Similarly, a small group of students worked imaginatively as they produced a full-length portrait of a human body using torn paper to create light and dark shapes, before taking this further and casting parts of the body in wax or clay. Students appreciate the teachers' very good subject knowledge and this is seen in their desire to learn more about contemporary sculptors such as Antony Gormley, Rachel Whiteread and Marc Quinn. However, restricted access means that not enough use is made of ICT to support students' investigative and other work.
120. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The head of department works very closely with the second teacher and they share a common vision for the development of the subject. Very good assessment procedures and close monitoring of learning support students' learning. Teaching strategies have been modified to raise the achievement of boys, who are now more confident in their work. Staffing is adequate for the demands of the curriculum and resources are well used. Computer provision is being improved. However, the overall quality of the accommodation is unsatisfactory and impacts adversely on teaching and learning. Students do not have enough space for working during their private study time. A further constraint is the lack of technical support for ceramics and the lack of the storage space necessary for the development of three-dimensional work. Overall, the department has made very good progress since the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

121. The AS and A-level courses in history were inspected and reported on in depth.

History

Overall, the quality of provision for history is **very good** with some excellent features.

Strengths

- The very good quality of teaching, which promotes excellent learning.
- The very successful promotion of independent learning.
- The high level of support offered to individual students.

Areas for Improvement

- There are no major areas for improvement. The continued improvement of teaching and learning in pursuit of even higher standards is a development priority.

122. Following a pattern of consistently high attainment, results at A-level in 2001 were in the highest five per cent nationally. Sixty per cent of students gained A or B grades and all students obtained grades in the A to C range. This represented a higher level of performance than in other A-level subjects taken by these students. Similar results were obtained in 2002. Results at AS level were also positive. Sixty-three per cent of students gained grades in the A to B range in 2001 and this proportion rose to 74 per cent in 2002.

123. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were well above national expectations. Students are achieving well and making very good progress in relation to prior attainment. Students in Year 12 are able to draw on previous understanding gained from the GCSE courses and develop the confidence required to reach sound historical judgements independently. Encouraged by their teachers, they are learning to think creatively and to consider different analytical approaches and historical interpretations. Written work demonstrates the growing ability of all sixth form students to challenge the assumptions implied in a question, and to select and use knowledge relevantly and effectively. Year 13 students evaluate evidence critically and produce convincing arguments that lead to coherent conclusions. They are able to consider historical issues from different perspectives and to use the interpretations of different historians to support their arguments. Overall, the ability of students to digest, précis and synthesise information is impressive.

124. It is clear that the high levels of enthusiasm for history shown by the teachers and the emphasis placed on student involvement in lessons have a positive impact on the students. They are attentive and responsive, whether collaborating in small groups to share different perspectives and ideas or articulating their views in class discussions. Overall, students make very good progress in the development of their understanding and historical skills. They become confident, independent learners and, as such, are well prepared for university education.

125. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. Teachers' confident subject expertise allows them to confront students energetically with issues surrounding evidence and the significance of historical controversies. Their aim is to challenge students to think deeply and to provide multiple opportunities for discussion and debate. Using skilful questioning techniques, teachers heighten the appreciation of different factors in historical causation. Excellent learning is promoted through seminar-style lessons, which involve students in undertaking independent research – as in Year 12, where two groups assessed the relative importance of political and economic factors in explaining Chartism and presenting their conclusions to the class using Powerpoint and well-constructed information sheets. As the students are effectively engaged in teaching one another, lessons are lively and characterised by high levels of interaction and participation. The very good relationships between staff and students contribute to an atmosphere that is simultaneously secure and dynamic. Teachers demonstrate excellent understanding of the way students learn. Exemplary resources, including structured topic sheets, are designed to extend historical enquiry and develop conceptual understanding. A rigorous programme of skills development underpins

teaching, and is carried through to carefully differentiated student tasks and reading assignments. Teachers make well-considered interventions in class, and work to ensure that each student acquires the self-knowledge and assurance required for success. It is clear from discussions with students that they recognise that they are being very well taught and find their lessons intellectually challenging. Student recruitment rates reflect the popularity of the subject at A level.

126. The department is very well led and managed by a highly organised teacher. Departmental documentation and procedures are well defined. Teachers show high levels of commitment and are generous with their time, offering unscheduled one-to-one tuition to slower learners and Oxbridge candidates. The same quality of individual support is mirrored in the assessment of written work. Diagnostic feedback provides students with clear indicators for the improvement of their work. Marking is both regular and thorough. The department has made good progress since the last inspection and this is reflected in the further improvement in teaching and learning and the maintenance of well above average standards. The department has very good capacity to continue this improvement.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

127. The focus of the inspection was on English literature and French. English language and Spanish were sampled. Results in English language A-level examinations are well above average and in 2001 were in the highest five per cent nationally. Observation of work during the inspection confirms these high standards. Year 12 students make very rapid progress in the knowledge and understanding of subject-specific terminology and in a very good Year 13 lesson students demonstrated very good analytical skills. In Spanish, students' attainment is above expectations. The standards of work seen during the inspection were good. Teaching and learning are good, and students have very positive attitudes to the subject.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and passion for literature.
- Excellent support and guidance promote high achievement.
- Students' commitment to the subject is outstanding.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development.
- Subject leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- No significant areas for improvement were identified.

128. The results obtained in AS and A-level examinations are well above average and have improved since the last inspection, when attainment was above average. In 2001 and 2002 all students entered for A-level passed the examination and in both years the proportion gaining the highest grades A and B was well above the 2001 average. Results in 2002 show an improvement on those gained in 2001. Students achieve significantly higher grades in English literature than in most of their other subjects and there are no differences in the results of boys and girls. In 2002 students achieved on average over one grade higher in the A-level examination than was predicted by their GCSE results. Although there was a significant drop in the AS-level examination results in 2002, the department has reacted energetically to this: some students have retaken papers, scripts have been scrutinised and re-marks requested, and teachers have undertaken focused external and internal training.
129. Inspection evidence confirms the high standards gained in A-level examinations. Students achieve very well both in their discussions and in their written work. They use the specific terminology associated with literary criticism with confidence and recognise the links between texts. They are aware of different interpretations of literature and can measure these against their

own opinions. In discussion students are expected to be critical and to develop their own ideas and opinions. Teachers' sensitive and probing questioning encourages students to be tentative and exploratory and this helps them to become confident and discriminating readers.

Most have very good writing skills, showing a secure grasp of content and technique. Essays have a clear line of argument with close analysis of texts and are written in a fluent and coherent style.

130. Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject. They particularly enjoy being treated as adults with valid views and opinions and being able to discuss their texts in small groups. They appreciate the sensitivity of their teachers and the valuable and thorough marking, which helps them to reach high standards.
131. The quality of teaching is very good with some excellent features. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding are outstanding, and their passion for literature enthuses their students, who themselves develop a very broad knowledge and enjoyment of literature. Lessons are enriched by an emphasis on the links between texts and the wider world. Lessons are rich experiences for students; a great deal is covered and yet there is always opportunity for reflection and exploration. Teachers assess students' work carefully, and the use of assessment objectives and criteria ensures that students know exactly how well they are achieving and what they should do to improve their work. The department makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development. Mutual respect generates a climate in which students can explore human feelings, moral issues and values through the study of literature. The curriculum is further enhanced by the annual cultural visit to Dublin. The positive outcomes of this were demonstrated in a Year 13 lesson when students were discussing two poems about the 1916 Easter uprising, and the fact that some of them had stood on the execution ground gave an added dimension to their understanding.
132. The department is very well led and managed, and teachers work as a team to give a rich and satisfying experience to their students. The head of department provides a model by his own very good teaching and outstanding commitment to his staff and students. Rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation ensure that this department is well placed to effect further improvement.

French

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

Strengths

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge.
- Teachers' high expectations.
- The careful monitoring of students' work.
- Students' very good attitudes to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for students to spend time abroad.
- Students' use of the library resources for independent learning.

133. In French the standards achieved by students in 2001 at A-level were well above national averages and the results in 2002 show an improvement. However, the numbers of students taking French are small and meaningful comparisons with national figures are not possible. The high standards in evidence at the time of the last inspection have been maintained, which represents very good progress. A number of students each year gain the highest grades at A-level.
134. The standards of work seen during the inspection ranged from good to very good and are overall, above expectations. Students work at a level appropriate to their ability and to the demands of A-level, covering the full range of language skills, listening, reading, speaking, and writing, in an appropriate balance. The highest-attaining students work at the maximum levels demanded by

the examination. In lessons students use French naturally, are able to give and justify opinions and formulate arguments, understand complex texts in French, and write accurate and idiomatic French.

135. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Students participate conscientiously at all times and show enthusiasm. They respond to their teachers' high expectations and speak in glowing terms of the help and support they receive from their teachers. They know where to obtain help when needed. More girls than boys take French in the sixth form. This pattern is found nationally and is not as pronounced in this school as it is in many similar schools. Students tackle important social and cultural themes, such as alcoholism and racism, in lessons. The sensitive and at times moving way in which these are introduced by teachers creates an excellent response from students. Students show maturity and independence. They co-operate very well in groups. Some use the independent learning resources available in the school library, although others do not exploit these opportunities to the full. Although some students visit France on their own initiative, the school makes no provision for visits or for foreign work experience placements for sixth form students. This limits students' learning of the language as well as their wider social and cultural development.
136. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers' expectations are very high. They have very good knowledge of their subject and use this to good advantage to provide a model of pronunciation and intonation for students and to reinforce the idea that French is a living means of communication. The practical use of French is underpinned by a strong emphasis on grammar so that students learn to manipulate the language for their own purposes. Teachers provide a variety of activities in lessons to cater for the needs of different types of learner, to hold students' interest and to maintain pace. Marking is thorough – teachers relate their comments to A-level grades so that students know very clearly how they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
137. Leadership and management are very good. There is clear documentation covering every aspect of the department's work and relating this to the wider work of the school. Good schemes of work make clear what each student is expected to cover and detail the resources available. Teachers are monitored through observation in lessons and through the cross-marking of each other's work. Assessment information from students' work is used effectively to promote good progress. The subject leader has a broad awareness of developments nationally in modern foreign language teaching and uses this to provide very effective leadership with a clear vision for further progress. Where areas for improvement are identified effective action is taken. For example, in recent training sessions teachers have considered how better to motivate boys and enable them to reach higher standards.