

INSPECTION REPORT

ST JOHN FISHER CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Harrogate, North Yorkshire

LEA area: North Yorkshire

Unique reference number: 121717

Headteacher: Mr P Jackson

Reporting inspector: Alan Haigh
2630

Dates of inspection: 18th – 21st November 2002

Inspection number: 249655

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 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs S R Ambler
Date of previous inspection:	11 th November 1996

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3937	J Seed	Team inspector		
27984	A Whitehall	Team inspector		
2628	J Edwards	Team inspector	Physical education	How well does the school care for its students?
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24033	J Ruse	Team inspector	English	
27416	T Howard	Team inspector	Mathematics	
4922	M Driver	Team inspector	Biology, physics	
31981	E Forster	Team inspector	Art and design	
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25551	A Hodge	Team inspector	Business education, politics	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
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8873	C Evers	Co-ordinator	History	Results and achievements; how well are students taught?
27665	O Lees	Team inspector	Music	
4483	J-P Kirkland	Team inspector	Psychology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Saint John Fisher Catholic High School is a bigger than average, mixed, voluntary aided, comprehensive school, catering for 1327 boys and girls aged 11 to 18 years. There are equal numbers of girls and boys and 315 sixth formers. The sixth formers are part of an associated sixth form, which totals more than 830 students, the rest of the students coming from the neighbouring Saint Aidan's Church of England School. The school has grown steadily in recent years from below 1000 pupils in 1997 and is very popular and oversubscribed. Almost 90 per cent of pupils are from white ethnic backgrounds and none of the six pupils who speak English as an additional language is at an early stage of learning English. About three per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, a figure that is well below the national average. Around four per cent of the pupils are on the special educational needs register and about 1.3 per cent have statements of special educational needs; these figures are well below average. Most of these pupils are dyslexic or have general learning difficulties. The location, Harrogate, is an attractive Yorkshire spa town. The socio-economic background is wide, with the majority of pupils coming from relatively privileged circumstances. The school was awarded Specialist Arts College status in 2000, the Investors in People award in 2001 and School Achievement Awards for 2000 and 2001. Attainment at entry overall is well above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS (SIXTH FORM COMMENTS ARE IN A SEPARATE SECTION)

The school is very effective with many excellent features. Standards at all levels are well above average and teaching is consistently very good. Leadership and the educational direction of the school are excellent and management is very good. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Test and examination results for 14 and 16 year olds are well above the national average and are improving more quickly than results nationally. The results in the national tests in mathematics for 14 year olds in 2001 and 2002 were particularly strong.
- The GCSE results in English, business studies and chemistry in 2001 were especially good and boys' results at GCSE are very high overall.
- Much of the work observed was of a very high standard, particularly that in mathematics and the food and textile aspects of design and technology.
- Teaching and learning are very good, a significant minority is excellent; the high expectations and skilful management of classes foster pupils' interests and result in high rates of progress.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning and general behaviour are very good – relationships are excellent, and the provision for pupils' personal development is very good. Pupils are mature and considerate.
- Management is very strong and effective and the headteacher and senior staff, supported by keen governors, provide excellent leadership.

What could be improved

- The provision for and use of information and communication technology (ICT) are not yet wide enough despite significant progress in recent years.
- The personal and social education programme has too little time and lacks coherence and the progress towards introducing citizenship has been too slow.
- Reports to parents are not informative enough.
- Accommodation has some unsatisfactory aspects – space is tight and a little learning suffers.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1996. It has much improved since then and the very good examination results remain well above the national results and those in similar schools. The upward trend in results in the national tests taken by 14 year olds and GCSE results for 16 year olds has been faster than the national trend. The improvements in boys' results have been particularly noticeable over recent years and the gap between their results and those of girls is narrower than the gap found in most schools. The quality of teaching and learning is much better than it was. The weaknesses identified in 1996 in the education of pupils with special educational needs have been addressed very well and the quality of their education is now good. There have been significant improvements to the management of geography and the GCSE results are now significantly better than average in that subject. There has been good progress in the provision of resources for ICT but more still remains to be done in that area. The statutory requirements not met in 1996 are now all fully met.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

The results of the national tests taken by 14 year olds have remained well above the national average for many years. When compared with similar schools, those with about the same proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, the 2002 mathematics results were very high, being in the top five per cent of results nationally and the English and science results were well above average. These results were an improvement on the already very good results in 2001, especially for the proportions of pupils reaching the National Curriculum Level 6. Both boys' and girls' results remain well ahead of their respective national averages. The proportions of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes with grades A* to C and five or more with grades A* to G were well above the national averages in 2001 and 2002 and all pupils achieved at least one GCSE pass in 2001. These results were also well above those in similar schools. Based on recent years' results, girls have consistently achieved well above girls' national averages and boys have done even better, with results that have been very high in comparison with boys' national averages. The school's very good results fell a little below the ambitious targets that were set in 2002. In 2001 the targets were met. The upward trend in results for 14 year olds and for 16 year olds has been greater than national trends in recent years. The strongest subjects in GCSE in 2001 were English language and literature, business studies and chemistry. Biology, double science, mathematics and religious education were particularly strong in 2002. There were no weak subjects. Pupils achieve very well across all subjects. The 'value added' measures and work observed confirm very good progress at all stages. The standards of work were generally well above average for Years 7 to 9. They were usually well above average in Years 10 and 11. Pupils achieve very well in English, mathematics and science at all stages. Particularly high standards were seen in the food and textiles elements of design and technology and some outstanding work was observed in mathematics and chemistry with pupils in Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs are also progressing very well. Standards of literacy and numeracy are high and those in ICT are above average but not high enough because of restricted access to some hardware. Pupils' oral skills are especially high. The gifted and talented pupils do well, responding to the very high expectations placed on them.

Standards in the sixth form are well above average and students achieve very well. Both male and female students' A-level results were in the top five per cent of schools nationally in 2001. Of the subjects inspected in detail, standards are very high in art and in psychology, and well above average in most others. Students achieve very well in the vast majority of subjects and make significant progress in their studies with high levels of *value added* in virtually all subjects. There is a rising trend in sixth form standards.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	These are very good overall and excellent in the sixth form. Pupils know that they are in school to work and the vast majority co-operate extremely well with their teachers and fellow pupils.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	This is very good overall and frequently excellent in lessons. It is mostly very good around school but inadequate accommodation, which often constrains movement, sometimes causes frustration and results in minor examples of intolerance.
Personal development and relationships	These are very good overall and excellent in the sixth form. Pupils get on very well with their teachers and with each other, showing care and consideration and respect for others and their environment.
Attendance	This is very good overall and unauthorised absence is much lower than that in other schools.

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.

The quality of teaching is consistently high; no unsatisfactory lessons were observed. Well over a half were judged to be very good or excellent and nine out of ten were good or better. It is excellent in food and textiles. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is generally very good throughout. Literacy and numeracy are taught well and pupils apply these skills successfully throughout their learning. Teachers manage pupils with great skill and sensitivity and consequently pupils make every effort to do well, showing much interest in their work. Teachers have very high expectations of all their pupils, and pupils respond to this particularly well, concentrating throughout lessons and acquiring a broad range of skills. Planning of work is thorough and teachers show much expertise in their subjects. The skilled teaching of pupils with special educational needs enables these pupils to make very good progress. The gifted and talented pupils are extended well with much challenging work and they also make very good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	This is good overall but the provision for ICT, personal and social education and citizenship is not good enough, and the range of vocational courses for 14 to 16 year olds is not yet extensive enough.

	The sixth form curriculum is very good with a wide range of courses on offer.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is good and much improved in recent years. Pupils and students receive much good group and individual support but work in a few subjects (Year 7 mathematics, for example) is not matched closely enough to individual needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is very good: the school's Catholic ethos enhances spiritual development well and the code of conduct supports moral development well. The high expectations that permeate the school support pupils' and students' moral and social development very well. Pupils respond very well to these high expectations. Pupils' cultural development has many aesthetic strengths but their awareness of the multicultural dimension of society is less well developed.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares very well for all its pupils. The pastoral system is very effective, enabling pupils to learn in a secure and thoughtful environment.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher's leadership and the educational direction provided by him and senior colleagues are excellent. The school's aims and values show clearly through its ethos and commitment to improvement. Management is very good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are committed, capable and enthusiastic and support the school very well. They have a good knowledge of the school. They need to ensure that some minor gaps in the curriculum, related to ICT and citizenship, are filled.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is good and is developing soundly. Performance management arrangements meet requirements and the induction of new staff is very good.
The strategic use of resources	This is excellent with clear links between funding and plans. The principles of best value are applied assiduously. The school provides very good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They consider the school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. • They think the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. • They report their child likes school. • They judge that teaching is good. • They think their child is making good progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About one in five of those responding to the questionnaire thinks the school could work more closely with them. • About one in six thinks they are not kept well informed about how their child is getting on. • Around one in seven thinks the amounts of homework are too little or too much.

The inspectors fully endorse the parents' positive comments. They agree that reports ought to be more informative and say more about what their children can do. They think the school makes all reasonable efforts to work closely with parents and that the amounts of homework are, overall, about right.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is an ecumenical Association of St John Fisher Catholic High School and St Aidan's Church of England High School. It is the largest school-based sixth form in the country and consists of about 830 students and has grown substantially in recent years. There are about 120 more female students than male students. The ethnic mix matches that of the main schools, being predominantly white. There are three students on the register of special educational needs. Over four-fifths of pupils from Year 11 continue into the sixth form and about a fifth of the total join from other schools. The socio-economic background is wide with the majority of students from well above average circumstances. The students have achieved very well in their former schools and their GCSE results are well above average. There are no minimum requirements for entry into the sixth form. There are GCE AS and A-level courses and also vocational ones leading to intermediate and advanced qualifications. A small minority retake GCSE courses that are offered in English and mathematics. There are enrichment courses, some of which are compulsory, and a particularly wide range of extra-curricular activities.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very effective and its cost-effectiveness is very good. Standards are well above average and students achieve very well, continuing to make very good progress from their above average levels at entry. Teaching and learning are very good and the provision is very successful in meeting the needs of the students.

Strengths

- Students achieve well above average standards overall but especially so in art and psychology.
- Results in GCE A2 and AS-level examinations are very high.
- Students' attitudes to sixth form life and work are excellent, promoting very good learning.
- Teaching is consistently very good; one in eight lessons was excellent; students respond very well to the high expectations and thorough assessment methods and make very good progress.
- Excellent leadership and very good management lead to a very strong ethos that permeates the whole sixth form. The ecumenical dimension fosters tolerance and understanding extremely well.
- The sixth form provides very good quality support and guidance for its students.

What could be improved

- The medium and long-term planning for the sixth form provision as a whole is not strong.
- There is too little monitoring and evaluation of teaching; the excellent practice is not disseminated widely enough.
- Several subjects make too little use of ICT.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Standards of attainment are well above average and students achieve well, reflecting very good teaching, insightful learning and strong management. There is too little use of ICT.
Biology	Very good. Examination results and standards observed are well above average, reflecting the very good teaching. There are too few opportunities to challenge students with more independent or problem-solving work.
Physics	Good. Results were well above average in 2001 but dipped in 2002. Work seen was above average in Year 12 and well above in Year 13. Teaching and learning are good. There is too little sharing of good practice across the two departments.
Design and technology – product design: three-dimensional products	Good. Standards are above average overall. Students achieve well. Teaching is good overall; much is very good. The quality of ongoing assessment and project management lacks rigour.
Business education	Very good. Results in this vocational subject are well above average and students are achieving better than expected considering their GCSE results. The department is well led and teaching is good. Boys’ standards are not high enough.
Information and communication technology	Excellent. The 2002 results in this new advanced vocational course were well above average with students achieving very much better than would be expected. Teaching is consistently very good – staff have a strong understanding of course requirements.
Sports studies	Very good. Standards are above average across all aspects of the course. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. There is strong management and very good co-operation between the two departments.
Art	Excellent. Students achieve very high standards and examination results are well above average. The teaching is consistently very good, great care and attention being paid to individual needs. The subject is very well managed. There is too little use of computers.
Music	Excellent. Standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Teaching and learning are very good, reflecting excellent management.
Theatre studies	Very good. Examination results were average in 2001 and improved in 2002. Students achieve well but written work is not as good as practical work. Teaching and learning are very good. Leadership is strong and extra-curricular provision is outstanding.
Geography	Very good. Standards are well above average and students progress very well, reflecting the very good teaching. There is excellent collaboration between the two well-managed departments but teaching is not monitored systematically.
History	Very good. Very good teaching results in very good learning and above average standards. The hardworking students achieve very well. The subject is well led but longer-term planning and collaboration are not good enough.
Politics	Very good. Standards and examination results are well above average; students achieve well because of very good teaching and strong leadership.

Psychology	Excellent. Standards are very high and students, higher attainers especially, achieve very well. Teaching, learning and management are excellent.
English	Very good. Attainment is well above average and students achieve very well. Very good teaching inspires students and leads to very effective learning. Management is good but there is too little sharing of good practice.
French	Very good. Examination results are well above average and students achieve very well. Teaching is very good and the students' personal development is excellent.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The assessment and monitoring of students' academic performance are very thorough. The provision of information and advice for students is very strong, supported by very good careers and university guidance.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership is excellent and management is strong and very effective despite the complications of the arrangements. The aims are achieved very well and equality of opportunity is excellent. Medium and long-term planning is not strong enough and monitoring of teaching is not systematic and does not support dissemination of the widespread very good practice.

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 curricular choices suit their talents and aspirations. Teaching is good and students are challenged. Teachers are helpful and accessible. Sixth form is enjoyable and they would recommend it to others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About a quarter say they would like more advice about their future options. One in five says they are not well enough informed of their progress. One in five feels their views on the sixth form are not sufficiently considered.

Students' positive views are well based and justified. Their criticisms are somewhat contradicted by the inspectors' evidence arising from discussions with students and interviews with staff. Careers and university advice is of very good quality. Teachers provide much evidence for students on their progress. Students' opinions are sought regularly.

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

Test and examination results for 14 and 16 year olds are well above the national average and are improving more quickly than results nationally. The results in the national tests in mathematics for 14 year olds in 2001 and 2002 were particularly strong.

1. When compared with all schools nationally, the results in the national tests taken by 14 year olds in English, mathematics and science have been well above the national average for many years. When compared with similar schools (those with about the same proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals), the mathematics results were still well above the national average in 2001 and the science results were above the national average. Results in both these subjects improved further in 2002. There is an upward trend in results of the tests taken by 14 year olds and this was maintained in 2002. This trend is more noticeable than the national upward trend and particularly evident in mathematics.
2. The results in the English tests taken by 14 year olds have been well above the national average for many years. However, they have remained in line with those in similar schools, and relatively are not as strong as results in mathematics and science, a concern of which the school has been well aware and has investigated thoroughly. There is no clear conclusion to the investigations but the well above average GCSE English results and the fact that pupils achieve more highly in English at age 16 than in most of their other subjects is some consolation. The overall trend in the English tests taken by 14 year olds is upwards and is similar to the national trend.
3. The GCSE results have been consistently very good for some time. In 2001, they were well above the national average and also that for similar schools for the proportions of pupils achieving five or more passes with grades A* to C and also for five or more with grades A* to G. All pupils achieved at least one GCSE pass and this was only the case in fewer than one in 20 schools nationally. The upward trend in GCSE results is also faster than the national upward trend. The school achieves well above average standards across the board and maintains its success.

The GCSE results in English, business studies and chemistry in 2001 were especially good and boys' achievements at GCSE are very high overall.

4. The GCSE results in 2001 were significantly better than results nationally in all 16 subjects for which data is available. Pupils did significantly better in English language, English literature, business studies and chemistry than they did in their other subjects. The results in English language and chemistry were virtually the same in 2002. As in chemistry, all pupils taking physics and biology at GCSE in 2001 and 2002 achieved at least a grade C, the vast majority being awarded A* or A. The 2002 results in dual science, in religious studies, in art and especially in geography improved much on the already good figures for 2001. Pupils did particularly well and achieved significantly higher results in biology, dual science, mathematics and religious education in 2002 than in most of their other subjects.
5. The last inspection report drew attention to the fact that boys' results were generally further behind girls' results than was the case nationally and suggested that the school take remedial action to minimise this anomaly. It did so and has been

spectacularly successful. The boys' performance in the tests they take at 14 was 4.2 points above the national score for boys over the period 1999 to 2001. The equivalent gap for girls was a little lower, at 3.7 points. Although girls achieve a little more highly than boys, the gap is narrower than the gap nationally. The picture for 16 year olds in relation to GCSE data is even more compelling. The average total GCSE points score per boy was 16.1 points ahead of boys' national figure for the period 1999 to 2001. The girls' score was 13.6 points ahead of girls' national figures for the same period.

Much of the work observed was of a very high standard, particularly that in mathematics and the food and textile aspects of design and technology.

6. The work of a wide selection of pupils from Years 7, 9 and 11 in English, mathematics and science was scrutinised closely and 54 lessons across the full range of subjects were seen, with a focus on English, mathematics and science. The Year 8 pupils were doing work on angles in a mathematics lesson and using some basic assumptions to prove a range of facts. They successfully proved that the angles of a triangle add up to 180 degrees and went on to calculate 'missing' angles in a range of diagrams involving parallel lines and triangles. Some of these problems also involved solving linear equations which many pupils did successfully. The pupils were working at levels far in excess of what is expected for their age.
7. A group of Year 10 pupils was observed learning about textiles. Following a very clear explanation and demonstration, and working with background music to enhance the purposeful and calm atmosphere, pupils attained the highest standards in their design and practical work. A group of Year 11 pupils was observed working in a food technology room. Their practical skills, which ranged from chopping and mixing to using ICT, were of a very high order and attention to safety was excellent. The standard of work was excellent, supported by outstanding teaching.

Teaching and learning are very good, a significant minority is excellent; the high expectations and skilful management of classes foster pupils' interests and result in high rates of progress.

8. The teaching in all the 54 lessons observed was at least satisfactory. More than 90 per cent were good or better and 56 per cent were very good or excellent. The grades for learning mirror these figures very closely. Much of the teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science was very good or better. The consistency of the high quality of teaching and learning is the major contributor to the school's continuing high performance. There are no weak subjects.
9. Teachers expect a lot of the pupils. The demands are high but targets are, nonetheless, realistic. Pupils in a Year 8 English lesson were analysing a text to study the narrative voice in fiction writing. The pace was brisk, preparation was thorough and the stimulating approach made good use of technical terms. All pupils were involved and they responded in an excellent way with rapid progress and high standards of achievement. A Year 10 lower set science class was studying the actions of microbes. The very good organisation involved using microscopes and reference materials. The pupils' progress was monitored closely, relationships were very good with much praise, and progress was rapid with standards achieved being much higher than would be expected.
10. The teachers manage pupils very skilfully. There are no confrontations in lessons and any minor departures from the expected patterns of behaviour are dealt with speedily

and without fuss. Transgressions are rare and the pupils clearly understand that they are in school to work. Many lessons are fun and pupils say how much they enjoy learning. Concentration is usually sustained throughout the full 60 minutes of the session and most lessons are structured with sufficient variety to capture and maintain this interest. A purposeful start is often the trigger to good teaching, as seen in two music lessons. One started with pupils untangling some tricky anagrams of technical words they had recently seen. The other had a recording of *Hound Dog* being played as pupils arrived, so setting the scene for their work on the Blues.

Pupils' attitudes to learning and general behaviour are very good – relationships are excellent, and the provision for pupils' personal development is very good. Pupils are mature and considerate.

11. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons were never less than satisfactory and in nearly all lessons they were at least good. They were very good or better in four fifths of lessons and excellent in a quarter. The school's ethos fosters a calm and purposeful approach to learning. The pastoral and support systems encourage good behaviour and the teachers' continued high expectations of work and behaviour and their use of praise ensure that high standards are maintained.
12. Pupils show a keen interest in their learning and much enthusiasm for school. Those in a Year 7 mathematics lesson were learning about probability and doing experiments with dice to assist with their understanding. They were very excited but never lost their self-control. They enthusiastically threw their dice (and rarely did these fall on the floor!), waited patiently for their next turn, and co-operated fully with each other and their talented teacher.
13. Pupils get on well together and show much respect for each other's feelings, values and beliefs. They listen well. There is no bullying, racism or sexism. Relationships are excellent. Occasionally, on narrow and crowded corridors and stairways, their patience frays and some pushing takes place but no incidents of poor behaviour were seen. Pupils queue sensibly for dinners and wait patiently for their turn at the vending machines.
14. The provision for the pupils' spiritual development is strong. The Catholic ethos permeates much of the work in school and the chapel provides a focus for quiet reflection and worship. The pupils' moral development is fostered well and pupils debate issues sensitively with tolerant and mature attitudes being displayed. They care for each other and for their teachers and adult visitors, holding doors open, offering to help with jobs and generally being nice and friendly. The code of conduct supports moral development well. The high expectations that permeate the school support pupils' moral and social development very well. Pupils respond very well to these high expectations. Pupils' cultural development has many aesthetic strengths, often reflecting the Specialist Art College status, but pupils' awareness of the multicultural dimension of the society in which they live is less well developed.
15. The pastoral arrangements are very effective and teachers know their pupils very well. There is a relaxed but respectful relationship between pupils and teachers. Senior staff, on their travels around school, enjoy informal conversations with pupils and know them well. Pupils reciprocate the respect their teachers show for them. The school's rules and high expectations are displayed prominently but not threateningly, in all rooms.

Management is very strong and the headteacher, supported by keen governors, provide excellent leadership.

16. The headteacher has been in post for just over one year and he has enabled the school to continue making improvements from an already high baseline. His vision and commitment for the school's further success are of a very high order and the educational direction provided is excellent. He is very well supported by capable and committed deputies and the senior staff work extremely well as a team. The school's aims are abundantly clear in all its work. The commitment to equality of opportunity and social inclusiveness is without question. The achievement of the Investors in People award last year is one confirmation of this. The high quality care for all the pupils is another.
17. There is a strong partnership between school and governors. The very capable and knowledgeable chair of governors spends much time in school and she, together with fellow governors, is very supportive of all the school's work. Governors have a clear grasp of the school's many strengths and few weaknesses. Their role is effective but not heavy-handed. They fulfil their statutory duties well and understand that some minor curricular gaps need filling. The school is a happy place, with pupils, staff and governors sharing the same goals.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The provision and use of ICT are not yet wide enough despite significant progress in recent years.

18. The school has made significant progress in the provision of ICT equipment in recent years and the ratio of pupils to computers is more favourable than that in most schools. The time allocated to the discrete teaching of ICT has been doubled for Year 7 and Year 10 this year and is now one hour per fortnight. This increase will apply to other years progressively. The amount of time is at present, however, insufficient to enable all pupils to cover the requirements of the National Curriculum in ICT. Moreover, the more than adequate resources are often unavailable for pupils in Years 7 to 11 as they are needed for sixth form courses.

The personal and social education programme has too little time and lacks coherence, and the progress towards introducing citizenship has been too slow.

19. The present arrangements for personal and social education are that the component parts are taught in religious education and science lessons as well as citizenship time and form tutor time. This arrangement lacks coherence and the overall time allocated is insufficient for a successful programme to be taught. The introduction of citizenship suffered from staffing difficulties that have now been resolved but is, in consequence, behind schedule.

Reports to parents are not informative enough.

20. The school generally keeps parents well informed about their child's progress and parents report that the open evenings are very helpful. However, about one in six of the parents replying to a questionnaire about the school said they were not well enough informed about their child's progress. The annual reports give clear information about the pupils' attitudes to learning but say too little about what pupils know and can do and how they could improve their work.

Accommodation has some unsatisfactory aspects – space is tight and little learning suffers.

21. The number of pupils has risen quite markedly in recent years and there have been significant improvements and additions to the accommodation, notably the opening of a performing arts building. However, parts of the original building, which was a convent, have narrow corridors and stairways. These cause congestion and this occasionally impinges on pupils' behaviour or makes pupils late for lessons. Additionally, some accommodation is in need of refurbishment. Some rooms are unsuitable in shape or size as teaching spaces and occasionally this narrows the range of teaching approaches. The quality of learning, in history and physical education theory for example, suffers accordingly. The school's large budget surplus has been earmarked as its contribution to intended improvements to its accommodation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

22. In order to further improve the high quality education and sustain recent progress, the governors and senior staff should now:
- (1) Provide all pupils with sufficient time and access to computers for them to ensure that they cover the requirements of the National Curriculum for ICT. (See paragraph 18)
 - (2) Provide a coherent personal and social education programme with an appropriate citizenship component and ensure that form tutor time is uniformly used well. (See paragraph 19)
 - (3) Ensure that the annual reports to parents say what pupils know and can do and also consistently include more specific information to help pupils improve their work. (See paragraph 20)
 - (4) Improve the accommodation by providing more suitable teaching spaces and facilitating movement around the buildings. (See paragraph 21)

Sixth form

- (1) Improve the medium and long-term planning for the sixth form provision as a whole by ensuring regular meetings of staff and ensuring all departments imitate the excellent practice of the most successful departments. (See paragraphs 62, 64, 71, 78, 84 and 91)
- (2) Improve the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and ensure that the excellent practice is disseminated more widely. (See paragraphs 64, 78, 84, 136, 143 and 168)
- (3) Ensure that all subjects make appropriate use of ICT by providing good access to suitable hardware and considering a link between the two sites. (See paragraphs 70, 76, 82, 92, 109 and 114)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 to 11	54
	Sixth form	105
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		70

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 to 11							
Number	6	24	19	5	0	0	0
Percentage	11	44	35	9	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	14	52	28	10	0	0	0
Percentage	13	50	27	10	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 to 11 as each lesson represents about 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	1012	315
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	35	7

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	15	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	51	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	6

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	8.0

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.0

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	96	96	192

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	75	86	89
	Girls	89	91	90
	Total	164	177	179
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (85)	92 (88)	93 (89)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	56 (45)	80 (69)	67 (54)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	76	86	89
	Girls	90	91	90
	Total	166	177	179
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	86 (85)	92 (86)	93 (89)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	65 (45)	76 (63)	74 (53)
	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	109	91	200

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	78	99	104
	Girls	79	91	93
	Total	157	190	197
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	79 (81)	95 (99)	99 (100)
	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	52.7 (54.7)
	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) in 2001

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	120	135	255
	Average point score per candidate	25.4 (22.5)	26.5 (25.9)	25.9 (24.4)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.8)	17.7 (18.6)	17.4 (18.2)

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
1113	15	0
4	0	0
61	1	1
1	0	0
0	0	0
3	0	0
3	0	0
5	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
6	0	0
20	0	0
105	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)	77.18
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.19

Education support staff: Year 7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	469

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.7
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Average teaching group size: Year 7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.8
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Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	3,807,485
Total expenditure	3,631,567
Expenditure per pupil	3006
Balance brought forward from previous year	102,935
Balance carried forward to next year	278,853

Key Stage 4	21.5
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	20.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
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	1320
Number of questionnaires returned	320

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	54	42	4	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	44	3	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	53	4	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	51	11	2	2
The teaching is good.	42	53	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	41	14	4	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	52	39	6	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	69	30	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	30	48	16	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	45	47	2	0	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	49	49	1	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	44	39	9	2	6

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

23. The standards reached in public examinations by students at the end of Year 13 are high, being very well above average. Both male students' and female students' average points score in their GCE advanced level (A-level) examinations were in the top five per cent of schools nationally in 2001. Results in the vast majority of subjects at A-level, and advanced vocational (AVCE) level are well above average and the vast majority of students make significant progress in their sixth form studies with high levels of 'value added' in virtually all subjects, based on their already above average GCSE results. The average points score per student shows a rising trend from 22 in 1997 to almost 26 in 2001, indicating significant improvements in standards since the last inspection. The national comparative figure was 17.4 in 2001.
24. The results in the A2 examinations in 2001 were well above the national average in all subjects except design and technology, where they were above average, and in German and religious studies, where they were below average. In 2001 over half the grades awarded to students were A or B. The results for 2002 were similar overall to those of 2001 and nearly one third of all grades were A, and well over a half were A or B grades, figures well in excess of recent national comparisons. The average points score per student was, however, lower than that of 2001 but the value added measures showed that this cohort achieved very well as their GCSE profile was lower than that of the 2001 cohort.
25. The proportion gaining A or B grades was much higher in 2002 than in 2001 in German, English literature, French, psychology, sports studies and theatre studies. The proportion of students gaining an A or B grade was noticeably lower in 2002 than in 2001 in biology, English language, geography, music, physics, and religious studies.
26. The standards reached by students taking the AS examination at the end of Year 12 are high. In 2002, over half the results were an A or B grade, a slight increase on the proportion in 2001. Over two thirds reached the two highest grades in art, biology, economics, geography, mathematics, music and politics. All but two of the 177 of the students who took the AVCE courses in 2001 achieved a pass grade. A quarter of the grades achieved were A or B. In 2002 nearly one in three grades was A or B.
27. The retention rates in sixth form courses are good, generally above 70 per cent and often above 90 per cent. Male students and female students achieve equally highly. Indeed, in 2001, they both surpassed their respective national average points scores by almost nine points, in each case being 50 per cent ahead of their national figures.
28. The standard of work seen during the inspection was well above average overall and much in Year 13 was high. It was very high in art and psychology and well above average in biology, English, French, geography, ICT, mathematics and music. In physics, politics, theatre studies, design and technology, history, business and sports studies the standard was above average. Students achieve very well overall, reflecting consistently very good teaching and their own unstinting endeavours. The very small number of students with special educational needs make good progress because the teachers ensure that the work matches their needs well. The gifted and

talented students make very good progress as much of the work is very challenging and expectations are very high.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

29. Sixth formers have outstandingly positive attitudes to learning, which are reflected in their conduct, both in and outside lessons. Relationships are exceptionally good and students show a high degree of maturity. Their attendance is very good and there have been no exclusions in recent years. Students are very enthusiastic about the sixth form and enjoy all aspects of the time they spend in school. They take a lively interest in organising their own activities, and willingly put time and effort into school-based events and projects, such as sport, drama and music. Their punctuality to lessons, which was criticised at the time of the last inspection, is now good. The vast majority of students who begin a sixth form course stay to complete it.
30. Students are totally committed to achieving the best possible results by making the most of the educational opportunities available to them. Their concentration and involvement in lessons are invariably very good, often excellent. They listen attentively, taking their own notes instead of waiting for prepared handouts, and are keen to express their opinions and demonstrate what they know. They have a very mature approach to their school work and are more than willing to use any spare time profitably; for example, students were observed before registration making additional notes that might prove useful, others were continuing with an art assignment through lunchtime.
31. Students enjoy the mental demands made of them in lessons, and rise to the academic challenge of advanced level work. They arrive in class well organised and prepared, and remain very focused throughout their lessons. They apply themselves assiduously to independent study, making very good use of library and ICT resources to complete the research required for their subjects. Their understanding of the need to establish a self-disciplined approach to learning is helping them build a firm foundation for later life.
32. Relationships amongst students themselves, and between students and their teachers, are excellent. They collaborate very well on joint projects, helping one another appropriately, for example, in an art lesson where new techniques were being explored. In small discussion groups they show mature consideration and respect for the views of others. Opportunities to show initiative and take responsibility are plentiful, and students are very willing to take them. They take part in a very wide range of activities that enrich their educational experiences. Many of these are of benefit to the school or wider community, as well as allowing students to demonstrate their social and organisational skills. For example, through membership of the sixth form committees, students are able to make their views known to staff and to influence events. Staff, in their turn, canvass sixth form opinion and value the mature feedback that this provides. Students in the two main contributing schools also benefit from the willingness of sixth formers to devote time to them, for example, as voluntary peer counsellors, or in helping Year 11 students choosing courses to gain an insight into what life is really like in the sixth form. Students have a real sense of their responsibilities in life, and give time and energy to raising funds for charitable causes.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

33. More than 100 sixth form lessons were observed. The teaching was very good or excellent in almost two-thirds of all lessons. It was at least good in nine out of ten and none was unsatisfactory. The teaching is very good overall. It is excellent in psychology and very good in art, biology, English, French, geography, history, ICT, mathematics, music, politics, theatre studies and sports studies. It is good in physics, design and technology and business.
34. The overall strength in the teaching is its consistency. Teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge. They plan lessons carefully and thoroughly. Where there is a wide range of ability in classes, teachers ensure that the work is appropriately challenging for all and also accessible to all. Teachers demand, and receive, high quality work from their students. Lessons usually proceed at a brisk pace so that students make very good progress in both knowledge and understanding in lessons and over a period of time. In a psychology lesson, for example, high attaining students in Year 12 studying flashbulb memory were moved forward intellectually and academically by the challenging concepts and the pace of the lesson.
35. Teachers often use probing questions to deepen students' understanding, usually ensuring that all students are involved in the lesson. This was seen to work very effectively in a Year 12 English language lesson where students developed their understanding of lexical frameworks to a deeper understanding of stylistics. The needs of the small number of students with special educational needs and the large number who are gifted and talented are well met.
36. Students have many opportunities to learn in a variety of ways. Teachers make very effective use of whole class teaching, group and paired work and independent study. In a history lesson, the very well organised group work led students in Year 12 to make excellent progress in understanding the role of individuals in the unification of Italy. Excellent whole class teaching in a psychology lesson for students in Year 13 on ethical issues in research into human behaviour included very challenging questioning which resulted in learning of the highest quality.
37. Teachers use assessment methods very well to check what students are learning during lessons. The quality of marking is very good. The constructive comments, which teachers write on students' work, give very clear indications as to how the students can improve still further.
38. The quality of students' learning is very good. Students have an extremely high level of commitment to their work. They are usually inquisitive and not afraid to put their own views forward in a mature way. In most lessons the teacher's interest is reflected in the active involvement of the students and in many lessons the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject rubs off on to the students.
39. Relationships are excellent and make a very positive contribution to learning. In a music lesson in which students in Year 12 worked on producing their own backing tracks, the excellent rapport between an expert and dedicated teacher and the students led to learning of the highest quality. Similar results of high quality collaboration between teachers and students were seen in Year 13 in a theatre studies lesson on *Our Country's Good*.
40. Teachers ensure that students develop very effectively as independent learners. Homework is generally used very well for this purpose. In lessons also students are

expected to work independently. This was especially noteworthy in a further mathematics lesson on motion in a vertical circle in which very high attaining students were asked to choose and work on their own examples that they did with competence and confidence.

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

41. The curriculum opportunities provided in the associated sixth form are very good and result from close collaboration between the two schools. There is a wide range of 27 GCE courses on offer at AS and A2 level, which represents a significant increase since the last inspection. There is a good choice of traditional subjects, and others introduced in response to changing needs, such as media studies and a new joint English language and literature course. In addition, there are five AVCE courses and one intermediate vocational course in ICT, which was introduced last September. Re-sit courses are available in GCSE English and mathematics, and Spanish is offered at GCSE level.
42. There is no formal Key Skills programme for all students in communications, numeracy and information technology. The schools feel that these are adequately catered for up to age 16 and through the subject teaching of the sixth form curriculum and this appears to be the case. There is no evidence that students are disadvantaged by this policy. Similarly, there is no separate programme of personal, social and health education – this is dealt with within the general studies course and within subject teaching.
43. Equal opportunity provision in the sixth form is very good. Students from other schools are invited to a Prospective Sixth Formers' Conference in the summer term of Year 11, and they settle well into the life of the school. All students have the opportunity in annual feedback to express their views on the curriculum and other matters, and they are listened to. Also, male students and female students are elected in equal numbers in student representative bodies from both schools, and they meet the governors once a year for discussion.
44. The needs of students who are not ready for a two-year sixth form career are not, however, well catered for, and this was a point also made in the last report. Although the staying on rate is about 80 per cent, a significant number of Year 11 students leave for vocational education elsewhere. The specific needs of a small number of students are met well with courses tailored to their individual needs. Only nine students completed a one-year course in summer 2001. The schools are beginning to address the question of how to cater for the student who might wish to stay on for one year only to take intermediate vocational courses and re-sits, or for three years and take one- and two-year courses in succession. The introduction of intermediate level ICT is the first response to this need, and discussions on this question continue, with the participation of the local Area Learning Partnership, with a view to increasing the provision in September 2003.
45. Breadth is given to the curriculum in a number of ways, and students are able to get a very well rounded education. In Year 12, students must take a well-planned general studies course for one hour a week, and about two-thirds of them choose to take an examination at AS-level at the end of the year. A minority continue to A2 in this course in Year 13. A keynote speaker is arranged for each of the three units of the course. A central emphasis is the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, and these are well catered for generally in the sixth form. There are some

very strong elements within subject areas, for example in modern foreign languages, which has considered animal rights, French education practices and drug abuse, and organises work experience in France.

46. The statutory requirements for religious education are met, with a 'Thought for the Day' delivered through tutor groups, and a weekly assembly that contains a strong spiritual element. The ecumenical arrangements foster students' understanding and tolerance. Students are expected to add individual 'extra commitment time' to their curriculum for one hour a week, and this emphasises giving, and the needs of others. For example, about a quarter of the sixth form are engaged in helping students with special educational needs in the combined schools, and others participate in the 'Smile Room' counselling scheme. Students show a great commitment to charitable and social work in the community, such as Riding for the Disabled, the Dr Barnardo's Play Scheme, visiting the elderly and disabled, Sportathon, and links with schools in Uganda and Sri Lanka. Sixth formers contribute greatly to charitable fund-raising.
47. Extra-curricular provision is outstanding. Students can participate in a particularly wide range of sporting, dramatic and musical activities, many of which take them out of school and into the community and national arena, for example, interactive drama workshops in local schools, and participation in national musical competitions. There is a debating society, Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and a range of outdoor activities such as Lake District weekends and a winter mountaineering course.
48. In general, the sixth form is highly responsive to local circumstances and is successful in meeting external requirements. Nearly 90 per cent of those leaving in 2001 were qualified and intending to go on to a higher education course, and their success emphasises the close match of the curriculum to their needs. Specialist courses outside school are arranged for medical applicants, lawyers and engineers. The students' personal development is very well supported by many of the courses and much of the teaching, not least that in French where foreign trips and work experience give students a good insight into French life.
49. Since the last inspection, with the exception of the provision of one-year courses, the curriculum of the associated sixth form has improved and grown in both coherence and depth, and there remains a real commitment to providing a full and satisfying educational experience for sixth form students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SIXTH FORM CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

50. The assessment and monitoring of students' academic performance are very good, being supported through very effective procedures. There are clear systems for recording and monitoring students' progress and students are well informed of their anticipated grades. Individual target setting is effective in challenging students and raising standards. This process involves the students, their subject teachers, senior tutors and heads of sixth form. Parents are made aware of predicted grades. Arrangements are in place for individual students to receive advice and guidance to improve their achievement grades.
51. The marking of students' work is of very good quality overall. The vast majority of students who responded to a questionnaire about the sixth form, as well as those who were interviewed, said their work was thoroughly assessed. Most felt that they were kept well informed about their progress but about one in five of those replying to

the questionnaire thought they could be better informed. Virtually all, however, find their teachers helpful and accessible.

52. The director of the associated sixth form provides a wealth of data that assists subject departments in their planning. Data is analysed thoroughly and value added measures are provided for all subjects. This information is presented clearly and used very well. Most departments use assessment information well to improve their work.

Advice, support and guidance

53. The advice, care and support for students are of high quality. All reasonable steps are taken to ensure the students' health and safety. The information available to Year 11 students coming into the sixth form is very good, with detailed advice given through interview and 'Forums' run by Year 12 students. Present students speak very highly of the help they get and the courses offered, and they confirm that the provision closely matches their needs and aspirations. This point is reinforced by the entry of students from a large number of other schools.
54. The overwhelming majority of students responding to the questionnaire felt that the courses they had chosen suited their talents and aspirations and that they had received clear information to assist them in this choice. Four out of five students found the advice helpful and constructive. Senior tutors have a good overall view of individual students and offer effective support and guidance throughout the sixth form.
55. The sixth form has strong links with universities. These links help students to make informed choices about their futures. All students receive very good careers and higher education advice through a programme of weekly workshops, visiting speakers and a parents' evening. Students have the opportunity to attend careers fairs and conferences. Work experience is available and students report that this is very helpful and much valued. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. There are close links with Oxford and Cambridge colleges and these include a yearly visit. All participate in a two-day 'Challenge of Management' conference. 'Young Enterprise' is offered to students across Year 12, in which they can gain practical business experience.
56. The students had mixed views on advice about their future options. About two-thirds replying to the questionnaire felt this was good but a quarter had some reservations. The vast majority of students feel that the induction into the sixth form was very effective.

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

57. As at the time of the last inspection, parents strongly believe that the sixth form is providing their sons and daughters with a good education and a thorough preparation for adult life. They are particularly pleased with the high expectations and the academic standards that students achieve. The fact that the sixth form is so popular is an indication of the satisfaction of both parents and students.
58. Sixth formers themselves, like their parents, have predominantly positive views about the sixth form. For many, the decision to enter the sixth form was influenced by the very broad range of subjects and extra-curricular opportunities that the associated sixth form offers, which meant that they were all able to choose appropriate courses. A wealth of information and advice, both general and individual, helped them to make

suitable decisions and prepared them well for what was to come. Students appreciate the good relationships they have with teachers, who mostly treat them like responsible young adults.

59. Students believe they are well taught and appreciate the way teachers challenge them to give of their best. They are pleased that teachers expect them to become self-reliant and to develop independent study skills. Well-organised systems of review and assessment keep them informed of their progress and help them to work towards their agreed personal targets. Students are particularly impressed with the commitment of their teachers, who give unstintingly of their time to help with any problems, whether academic or personal.
60. Students consider that advice about options beyond the sixth form is readily available, with especially useful practical help in making applications for higher education. Although students are intent on achieving good qualifications, they also appreciate that the sixth form makes a substantial contribution to their personal development, through its very wide range of extra-curricular provision and the opportunities that exist to show initiative and take responsibility. Almost without exception, students agree that they enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it wholeheartedly.

HOW WELL IS THE SIXTH FORM LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

61. The heads of the two sixth forms and the director of the associated sixth form provide excellent leadership and very good management of the sixth form. There is a very strong ethos that promotes very high standards of work and leads to well above average examination results. The ethos permeates every aspect of sixth form life, and its impact can be seen in the high attaining, mature, thoughtful and independent young people in Years 12 and 13.
62. The aims of the sixth form are very well supported by the senior management team and all senior staff, who have a very clear view of how they see the sixth form developing and improving. In this they are supported most effectively by the associated governors who have a very close involvement and an active role in the continued improvement of the sixth form. The issues for action identified at the last inspection have largely been dealt with, with two exceptions, those of collaborative development planning and some poor accommodation for theory lessons in sports studies.
63. The management of the complex organisation of the associated sixth form is very good. The problems of running a joint sixth form in two schools several minutes walk apart, each with its own staff, are overcome largely very successfully. The overall very good leadership and management of the respective heads of subject in both schools make a very positive contribution to the overall very good quality of the management.
64. There are, however, some areas in which the sixth forms can improve the management still further. There is no sixth form development plan that sets out aims and systems for monitoring and evaluation, other than that which exists within the two individual whole sixth form plans. This was identified as an area for improvement at the time of the last inspection. There are some inconsistencies in the extent to which collaboration and co-operation operate at a departmental level. The number of formal meetings between the heads of subject in the two schools varies from one per year to

one per week, with many meeting only three times a year. The teaching staffs of subjects rarely meet together. This results in an inconsistency in the amount and depth of effective planning for mutual development and improvement. There is also no systematic monitoring and evaluating of teaching in the associated sixth form, which means that the excellent practice that exists is not disseminated sufficiently well.

Resources

65. The teaching staff are very well qualified and deployed very effectively, and their expertise is used well to ensure that standards remain high. Overall the provision and quality of resources available for the sixth form are very good, but the lack of a link in the ICT network between the two sixth forms means students cannot save work in one sixth form and use it in the other. The accommodation for the sixth form is generally sufficient, but varies considerably in quality. Most is of good quality and provides a pleasant environment that stimulates learning. A small number of rooms on one site are, however, in a poor state of repair and as a result provide an uninspiring environment in which to teach and learn.

66. The principles of best value are applied rigorously and this results in provision that is very cost effective. Resources are used well and spending decisions link clearly to educational priorities. Financial planning is very good. Funds allocated to the sixth form are separate from the main budgets. They are carefully apportioned to cover defined needs and closely monitored to ensure that spending matches identified headings. Sixth form administrative staff work closely with the finance officers of both sixth forms to keep a tight rein on expenditure. Procedures for financial control are excellent. Given the very good outcomes in terms of academic achievement and personal development, and the wide range of available courses, the sixth form provides very good value for money.

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

In the inspection, 18 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001 (the latest year for which national comparisons are available).

GCE A level

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	79	98	89	70	48	7.7	5.8
Further mathematics	11	100	NA	90	NA	9.5	NA
Chemistry	68	99	92	68	49	7.6	5.9
Biology	85	99	88	61	38	7.7	5.3
Physics	44	93	89	64	45	7.0	5.7
Design and technology	30	90	92	50	31	6.2	5.4
Economics	30	93	90	53	42	7.0	5.5
Sport studies	32	100	92	59	25	7.6	5.1
Art	32	100	97	72	48	8.3	6.6
Music	10	100	95	70	42	8.0	5.7
Theatre studies	15	93	93	27	32	6.0	NA
Geography	41	100	93	63	42	7.8	5.7
History	51	96	89	49	40	6.7	5.5
Religious studies	25	76	93	32	41	4.7	5.8
Politics	9	100	92	78	43	8.2	5.3
Psychology	30	97	85	53	31	6.9	5.3
English language	43	100	94	61	36	7.3	5.3
English literature	40	100	94	50	36	6.6	5.9
French	25	92	92	52	45	6.8	5.6
German	19	90	93	26	49	4.6	5.8
General studies	198	97	85	48	29	6.4	4.9

AVCE courses

Subject	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Science	9	100		67		11	

Business	35	100		57		37	
Health and social care	9	100		44		56	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Students attain well above average standards in A-level examinations.
- Very high quality of teaching provides very good learning opportunities.
- High attaining students are supported well in their applications to higher education.
- Students' independent learning skills are developed well.

Areas for improvement

- There is no formal, joint development plan to ensure a co-ordinated approach to future actions.
- There are too few opportunities for students to use computers to enrich their learning.

67. In 2001 A-level examinations, students gained well above average results. The 2002 results maintained the 'well above average' trend evident over past years. However, there was a reduction in the percentage of students attaining the highest grades. The 2002 AS results improved on the already high level of the previous year, with the percentage of students attaining the highest grades increasing and the average point score rising. Analysis of students' individual performances indicates that they had made good progress since they started their courses. In 2001, all but one of the ten students of further mathematics attained the highest grade possible. In 2002, all five candidates achieved an A or B grade on this demanding course. Of those students re-sitting GCSE mathematics, about one third improved their grade. There are no significant differences in the performance of male and female students or in the performance of students from minority ethnic backgrounds.
68. The standard of A-level work seen in students' books and in lessons is well above average; students achieve well. High attaining students' work demonstrates very good flexibility of thought, and answers to examination questions are presented with mathematical rigour. They use clear freehand diagrams to develop their mechanics and statistical solutions. Generally, algebraic skills are very high and students progress through proofs and calculations without resorting to basic techniques. Year 13 further mathematics students' standards are high; they demonstrate very good understanding of complex vertical circular motion problems and apply their understanding of Newton's laws of motion to solving them. On all courses, students use their scientific calculators appropriately to develop rapid understanding of algebraic and statistical problems. Year 12 students, studying AS-level modules, achieve well and show interest and much concentration during lessons. However, in a lesson of two hours duration, the concentration of some students waned towards the end, reducing the impact of their early effort. Ability levels observed in a GCSE re-sit lesson covered a wide range, but students worked successfully, showing average attainment as they studied the angle properties associated with parallel lines.

69. The teaching is very good and this ensures very good learning. The very high quality of teachers' subject knowledge ensures insightful delivery of new concepts to students. Very good student-teacher relationships within the classroom, and the willingness of teachers to assist students at any time, provide the students with confidence to ask questions and seek help whenever it is needed. Regular assessment of students' work, with detailed marking, ensures problems are identified early and addressed.
70. The many very high quality lessons are typified by pace, challenge and clear methodology. Teachers ensure that the work is made relevant to students by linking the current topic to real-world applications. This was clearly seen in a Year 12 lesson on frictional force and in a Year 13 lesson on circular motion. The first example related to the need for friction in tyres and the other to the possibilities observed in fairground rides. This enrichment brings the subject to life and maintains students' interest in their future learning. By Year 13, students have accepted responsibility for their own learning and work at topics until they have full understanding. The predominant style of teaching is that of demonstration of technique and practice. Whilst this is very effective in maintaining progress and developing understanding, it provides too few planned opportunities for the use of computers as tools or as extension activities.
71. The combined management of the subject is very good. Courses provided meet the needs and aspirations of students and very good monitoring of students' progress is in place. The department analyses examination data well and modifies provision accordingly. Gifted mathematicians are well catered for in a successful further mathematics course and strong links and support are in place for students aspiring to go to Oxford or Cambridge colleges. However, there is no formal, combined development plan to which the separate departments can work to achieve their shared goals. This inhibits long-term planning for the quality of teaching and course planning, as staff movement and curriculum changes affect what the schools provide.
72. Good progress has been maintained since the last inspection; A-level results stay well above the national average. The new AS course has been introduced and developed well, together with a very successful further mathematics course. Retention rates are high. Links with Oxford and Cambridge colleges have been developed and an increasing number of students progress to study mathematics at university.

Sciences

The focus of the inspection was on biology and physics. In addition, work in A-level chemistry and the AVCE science course was sampled. The standards in chemistry are well above average; teaching and learning were good, with students exhibiting very good attitudes to their studies. One chemistry lesson was observed. This was good. Students worked confidently on their practical investigations and discussion showed they have an above average understanding of recent work on rate and order of reactions. Results in the vocational science course are high. One lesson was observed and this was very good. The students enjoyed the task-based approach to learning and worked confidently on practical activities relating to sound and vibration. The work observed demonstrated the students' good grasp and understanding of the topics.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Standards in 1999 and 2000 were well above the national average; in 2001 they were very high.
- Students perform significantly better in biology than would be predicted from their prior attainment.
- Overall, teaching is very good.
- Advanced extension work is offered for the higher attainers.

Areas for improvement

- The range of learning opportunities is a little narrow and has too few opportunities for independent work, research and problem-solving activities.
- There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching.

73. Standards at A-level have been consistently well above the national average in recent years and standards in 2001 were very high. Standards in 2002 dipped but were still clearly above recent averages. The students achieve very well and have consistently performed significantly better in biology than would be predicted from their prior attainment.
74. The standards of work of current Year 13 students are well above average – much is of high quality. They make very good progress as a result of well-structured and thorough teaching. In an introductory lesson on the kidney, students made very good progress in identifying the gross structure of the kidney, using an information sheet provided by the teacher. Discussion with students showed a well above average understanding of recent work on the structure and function of nerves, including neurotransmitters and their control.
75. Students in Year 12 have only recently begun their course but are also making very good progress. Their understanding of work on the structure of DNA and its replication and translation to produce proteins is well above average. They have developed competent practical skills, using microscopes with camera attachments effectively.
76. Teaching is very good overall, and this is reflected in very good learning and the progress the students make. The key features of effective teaching are well-planned and structured lessons, conducted at a brisk pace, which involve a variety of activity to bring about learning. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject, explanations are clear, and questioning is used effectively to check upon and develop students' understanding. In some lessons, good handouts were used which required students to extract information. Homework is set regularly and is used effectively to promote students' learning. Advanced extension work provides extra challenge for higher attaining students. Students feel well supported with the help that teachers give, and know that teachers are approachable. ICT is used to support learning but the use is more on one site than the other. Whilst teaching is very good overall, opportunities are not always taken to use more problem-solving approaches and to develop students' skills in independent working and research.
77. Students make very good progress and learn well. Their attitudes are very positive, they are mature in their approach and they respond very well to the learning opportunities provided. They work well both individually and in groups and carry out practical tasks safely and accurately. Retention rates are high.

78. Work in biology is well led and managed in the two schools and this is reflected in the high standards achieved and there has been very good progress since the last inspection. There is scope, however, for greater collaboration to ensure that the most effective teaching methods are shared between all staff across the two schools. To this end it would be beneficial to develop a more detailed, common scheme of work, which incorporated a suitable breadth of learning opportunities. There is some monitoring of teaching and learning as part of performance management, but good practice is insufficiently shared.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Standards rose in 2001 and were well above average.
- Students' high levels of concentration ensure good understanding, which is consolidated through appropriate practical work.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching.
- There is no development plan for A-level physics.
- There is no common detailed scheme of work to share effective practice and ensure a consistent high quality approach.

79. Standards at A-level were well above average in 2001 and students achieved more highly than would be expected on the basis of prior attainment. In 1999 the results were also well above average but they were average in 2000 and students generally performed less well in physics than in their other subjects. The results in 2002 dipped more sharply than those in the other sciences.
80. The work of current Year 13 students is well above average and progress is good. In one lesson, as part of their revision, students made good presentations about various aspects of astrophysics, including quasars, Wien's Law, Stefan's Law and radio astronomy. In another lesson students made very good progress in understanding standing waves in strings and the relationship between the length of the string and the frequency of the wave for the fundamental note and for harmonics.
81. Students in Year 12 are less than one term into their course and are also making good progress and attaining above average standards. In one practical lesson they showed a good understanding of the principles behind a variety of mechanics experiments including the determination of the muzzle velocity of a gun and finding the terminal velocity of a ball-bearing dropped in glycerine.
82. Teaching is good overall and the quality of lessons seen ranged from very good to satisfactory. The main features of the most effective teaching included brisk questioning to involve all students, the use of analogies, clear explanation, a good variety of activity, good demonstrations, well-designed worksheets, good revision techniques which developed students' key skills, and good support for students not taking A-level mathematics. In an introductory lesson on waves the teacher effectively showed the nature of standing waves with a number of good demonstrations. Students' learning was promoted with a well-designed worksheet. The lesson was conducted at a brisk pace. In another lesson the teacher made effective use of

students' presentations to help students revise. There is too little use of ICT at St John Fisher because of a lack of some resources.

83. Learning is good: students make good progress. They have a positive attitude and respond well in lessons. Students work well with one another in groups and also individually. They carry out practical tasks accurately. Concentration is sustained very well and all make good efforts to do their best. Retention rates are good.
84. Leadership and management in physics are satisfactory as is progress since the last inspection. There is a need, however, to ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and to share effective practice. There is at present insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching, although analysis of performance by teaching group has recently been introduced. There is no common detailed scheme of work for the two schools to ensure consistency in teaching or the sharing of good practice. There is no development plan for physics and so improvements are too slow.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The inspection focused on the design and technology A-level course in product design: three-dimensional products, although lessons were observed in food technology and product design: textiles. Teaching and learning are very good in food studies and textiles and standards are well above average, supported by high quality project management and assessment methods. The leadership and management in food technology are excellent.

Design and technology – product design: three-dimensional products

Overall the quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Examination results are above average.
- Teaching is universally good, and some is very good.
- Use of computer-aided design and manufacturing (CAD/CAM) in three-dimensional product design is strong.

Areas for Improvement

- The quality of ongoing assessment/project management in three-dimensional product design is not strong enough.
- There is no joint sixth form development plan to address course development, resources and in-service training needs.
- The access to and the availability of computer-aided design and manufacturing facilities at St John Fisher High School are inadequate.

85. Examination results are above average and are continuing to rise. In recent years almost all students have achieved at least a pass, and a high proportion have gained A and B grades at both GCE AS and A2 levels.
86. Attainment in lessons is above average. All students make good progress in knowledge, understanding and skills during the first term of the AS course, because teachers have developed new and challenging projects, carefully linked to commercial and industrial practices. Parallels are drawn in applying techniques to industrial production. Students analysed domestic vacuum cleaners produced over the past 40 years and then, in another lesson, analysed modern appliances made from plastics. Over the two years, students' understanding of design issues and manufacturing

practice is well developed and they apply this knowledge to other products and to their own projects.

87. Male and female students achieve well and make substantial gains through Years 12 and 13. All students use computers well for computer-aided design, testing, presentation and manufacturing. They have a well-developed understanding of design processes.
88. Students' learning is good: many learn very quickly. They come to lessons with very good attitudes to work and often begin productive activities before the lesson formally starts. They are clear about the next stages of learning or task to be undertaken. Their personal development is very good. Students work independently, in small groups and whole class situations. They have very good communication, information technology and numeracy skills.
89. Teaching is good overall. All teachers have a depth of experience and the knowledge and skills to enable students to learn at a good pace, from work pitched at a demanding level. Lesson planning is detailed and uses a range of appropriate strategies to engage and motivate students. Computers, with appropriate software and associated output devices, are well used to extend learning. There is a high level of individual support at all times and challenging questions are asked to explore ideas and extend the levels of understanding.
90. In the most successful lessons, project work is very well managed. Targets are set for each lesson, reviewed and reset for the next lesson. In three-dimensional product design, although teaching and learning are consistently good, standards could be improved further if some of the better practice evident in food and textiles was applied to learning on this course. During these lessons, the students did not have the same thorough approach to work. Progress on projects varied more widely, and students were less aware of the standard at which they were working. More and better lesson target setting and written assessments of project development would help students to achieve higher standards.
91. The leadership and management are good and there has been good progress since the last inspection. Retention rates are good. The work of students is effectively monitored on a regular basis and outcomes compared with the set course targets. More emphasis needs to be placed on evaluating what has been learned from monitoring, and implementing lessons learned. Links between teachers from the two schools are effective, and when necessary resources are shared or collectively purchased. Adjustment to the demands of the new AS and A2 courses have been effective and the number of students studying in this curriculum area have grown significantly in recent years. However, there is no over-arching development plan for the subject area. A jointly-produced plan would support further curriculum and course development, help identify and target resource spending and indicate areas of need for in-service training.
92. Limitations in access to computers, and the restricted nature of manufacturing output devices at St John Fisher, inhibit the quality and frequency of use of these essential tools for learning. Accommodation at this school is also limited both in extent and in the nature and range of equipment required for modern technological work.

BUSINESS

The focus was on AVCE business, but GCE A-level economics was also sampled. Standards in economics are high. Recent examination results in both GCE A-level and in AS are above the national average and on an upward trend. Teaching in the two classes seen was very good, as was the quality of students' learning, taking them to a high level of attainment.

Business

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and there is a commitment to maintaining standards that are well above average.
- Results have been well above average over the last three years.
- Students progress faster than might be expected, often from entry with quite low GCSE grades.
- The quality of assessment and advice given to students is very good.
- The department operates a very active Young Enterprise scheme for hands-on business experience across the sixth form.

Areas for improvement

- More attention should be paid to raising the attainment of male students.
- More use should be made of whole group discussions in AVCE classes to reinforce the main themes of unit assignments.

93. Results in external examinations have been well above average in the last three years. In 2000 and 2001 the pass rate was 100 per cent, and was just below that figure in 2002. In relation to their previous GCSE results, students made better than expected progress and achieved well, in some cases significantly so. Girls' results have been consistently better than boys'.
94. Across both years of the sixth form, the standards of work are above average, many students having started the course with modest GCSE results. There is the variability that might be expected with a wide range of prior attainment. A planning sheet, well supported by teacher's comments, prefaces every piece of coursework, and this evidence of good organisation contributes to good learning. The structure of the work is clear and well thought out, with extensive use of ICT.
95. Students have a good grasp of the criteria for success in each unit and act on this. They bring a wide variety of sources into their research and formulate hypotheses. In class, their attainment is at least average and often above this. In a Year 13 class on cash flow forecasts, for example, most students showed confidence in their use of financial tools and could, with more or less sophistication, construct a spreadsheet and explain it. Where they were less sure they were able, nevertheless, to ask for advice and act on it. The accessibility and helpfulness of teachers are an important factor in the department's commitment to high standards and the good progress of students, especially those with low GCSE grades. Sometimes students are not testing their understanding in higher level evaluative skills, as in a Year 12 class on the growth of firms, where they were confident in their understanding of facts and applications, but did not make progress in critical comment.

96. Teaching is consistently good. The main features are: the very good knowledge teachers have of theory, techniques and applied business examples; good class planning with variety; careful assessment of students' progress and attention to the needs of individual students; reinforcement and the constructive use of encouragement; and high expectations. In a Year 13 class on business at work, a case study of a well-known bed manufacturer was used, where the teacher acted as adviser to individual students, giving very good quality advice, continuously assessing progress and understanding through question and answer, and assisting them to discover answers for themselves. All were required to produce a time plan for completion of the unit. Similarly, a constructive and relaxed working environment was promoted at the start of a Year 12 class. A good, direct re-cap of the main elements of market research analysis was given, followed by individual help to students by the teacher and an ICT assistant. As a result, learning was good. On occasions, a class, once split for individual work, can lack coherence, and teachers make insufficient use of whole-class work to reinforce the main themes and produce greater cohesion.
97. Students generally learn well and make good progress. In all classes, teaching fosters co-operative working patterns, particularly in research, and this gives support to all and promotes learning. For example, each market research group was able to find information on different aspects of this business tool, bring the data together, and collaborate on synthesising it. Students make faster progress than might be expected, given their GCSE grades, and this is in part due to their own efforts and strong sense of motivation, and in part to the opportunities given them by their teachers. They are keen to do well, and are enthusiastic about the subject.
98. Since the last inspection sound progress has been made and the department has continued to provide a valuable and growing part of the sixth form curriculum, maintaining a high commitment to business education for all students. The subject has high retention rates. Its staff are well qualified and there is frequent attendance at in-service training courses. The department is well led and managed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The focus was on the AVCE course in ICT.

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well, attaining very good standards in their work.
- Teaching is consistently very good, ensuring that students develop their skills very effectively.
- Teachers assess students' work very well. They make very good use of this information to tell students of the progress they are making and how to improve yet further.
- The subject is very well led so that all teachers work effectively.

Area for improvement

- There is no method by which students on one site can access work stored on the computer system at the other site.

99. This is a new course for this sixth form. The first students to complete the course did so in 2002. All students gained a pass grade and a half obtained A or B grades. Students gained much higher grades than might have been expected based upon their GCSE results. Male and female students achieved equally well.

100. Standards of work of current students are well above average and levels of achievement are high. During the inspection, students in both years were preparing for tests that would count towards their final grade. In this work students showed that they had a very good understanding of the material they had been learning. Students in Year 13 searched the Internet effectively to compare ways in which travel agencies present information. Very positive attitudes towards work ensured that students were not sidetracked in any way. Students in Year 12 extracted the key information from written material and then presented it as a chart. They understood fully why they had to do this on a single side of paper. Students producing a range of stationery for a clothing company showed they have a good sense of the audience for whom their work is intended. They understand a design brief. Students planned, tested and evaluated their work very systematically. They understand both the purpose and limitations of tests.
101. The main reason for these standards is the consistently very good teaching. Teachers have an excellent knowledge, not just of what the course covers, but also of the best way to teach it. They take every opportunity to develop students' abilities to learn by themselves. Teachers have produced a very high quality series of course guides to help students learn. Students make very good use of these booklets, particularly to check very regularly that they have included everything required in each piece of work. Teachers are very good at assessing students' work. They regularly tell students about the progress they are making and the next step for them to take.
102. Students learn very well in lessons. They have mature and responsible attitudes towards their work. They respond well to the invitation to take charge of their own learning. However, they will seek advice from the teacher when they need to. Students keep good records of how their work is developing. They set themselves deadlines and work well to these. Only a handful of students do not complete the course. Although students have all their ICT lessons on the same site, some of them do find themselves on the other site during 'free for study' periods. At such times, they cannot get to their work stored on computer because there is no link between the sites. This means that they cannot always use their study time to the best advantage without spending time moving between the two schools.
103. The subject is very well led and managed. Effective measures have been put in place to ensure that the course is taught consistently on both sites. A very good feature of the course is the introductory unit. In the first three weeks students are introduced to the features of the course. Most importantly, this is done in the way in which they will work. This is very helpful, especially to those who have not followed a similar course before they entered the sixth form. Very few students do not continue with the course after this introduction. After the first group of students completed the course in 2002, the examination board was very complimentary about the steps the school had taken to introduce the course. ICT is proving to be very popular in the sixth form and there are very good plans on how the provision can develop to meet this growth.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Sports studies

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Results on the A-level course and current standards are well above average.
- Learning is very good and students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Very good relationships between teachers and their students promote very good learning.

Area for improvement

- The accommodation for teaching some theory lessons is of poor quality.

104. Results in the A-level examinations in 2001 were well above average. Over half the students gained an A or B grade. In 2002 this proportion rose to 70 per cent. Results have been consistently high for four years. They have improved since the previous inspection. There is no significant difference in the attainment of male and female students.
105. During the inspection students produced written and theory work of well above average standards in most lessons, representing very good achievement when their prior attainment is considered. Their skills in gymnastics were, however, below average although the sample of work observed was small. In a psychology of sport lesson, students in Year 13 understood that the attitudes of performers tend to reflect behaviour and that stereotyping is based on opinions and not knowledge. They know that aggression in sport can be positive, for example in boxing, and that decision making should consider the personality of the individual in coaching. Another group of Year 13 students discussed in depth the pressures of sponsorship on sportsmen with references to advertising in Formula One motor sport. When tracing the history of sports studies through the last century, students in Year 12 appreciated the developments from the military drill style of the 1950s through to the present day in gymnastics.
106. Students take pride in their work and use word processing skills well in their personal studies resulting in very good presentation skills. They demonstrate evidence of research skills in individual fitness programmes and interpret data through graphs and calculations. Students use a wide range of vocabulary relevant to their courses and speak enthusiastically about all aspects of their work. Their attitudes are very positive; they are confident to be involved in discussions, work collaboratively in groups and form very good relationships with their teachers.
107. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good. Teachers have a very good grasp of the topics taught and students speak highly of the quality of the teaching. Teachers have high expectations and they share learning objectives with students in their planning, which is thorough. Very good use is made of ICT such as *PowerPoint* for presentations. Appropriate use is made of the wide expertise of teachers. All teachers are committed to raising standards and to providing a positive learning experience for students.
108. Students have an excellent grasp of how they are progressing. They work independently when necessary and show a high level of interest in the course. They take responsibility for note taking without prompts from teachers and take homework seriously. A high level of effort and concentration typifies the very good learning.
109. Leadership and management are of good quality and teachers work well together. There has been good progress since the last inspection. Retention rates are good. The accommodation for theoretical lessons varies and is barely satisfactory overall.

because students are taught in a variety of rooms and access to ICT equipment is consequently impaired.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The inspection focused on art, music and theatre studies. Within these, lessons in art history and music technology were also observed and these are reported on under the main subject's heading.

Art

Overall the quality of provision is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Exceptionally good individual tuition results in very high standards.
- The monitoring of students' achievements is exceptionally good.
- The craft skills demonstrated in all aspects of work are of a high standard.
- The quality of students' personal responses when looking at art is very mature.

Areas for improvement

- Students visit art galleries too infrequently and there are too few links with working artists.
- The creative use of computers needs is undeveloped and students following the art history course do not have studio access to the Internet.

110. Students are able to follow either an art course or a recently introduced art history course. Standards of work seen are very high, and art students' achievements overall, in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form, are outstanding. These standards are achieved because the teaching is consistently very good and at times excellent. Students' attitudes also enable the quality of their learning to be excellent.
111. In the 2001 examination at A-level students achieved results that were well above the national average. The results in 2002 were very similar and again amongst the best in the sixth form. In 2002, the first AS examination year of the art history course, most students achieved grades A to C.
112. The standards of work seen are well above those seen in most sixth forms. Students draw and paint with very good craft skills. Painting of the human form often exceeds expectations. They use their sketchbooks to record accurately from observation and to explore different solutions. They develop imaginative three-dimensional work in a range of different media. From looking at a wide range of different artists' work they learn how to use different techniques and to incorporate these influences into their own original work. They look at art of other cultures to enrich their work and use art to express personal spiritual values.
113. Students learn good composition skills from taking part in role-play activities and analysing and discussing how the positioning of the figure can be most effectively used. In paired assessment tasks, students identify strengths and areas for improvement and apply this process to their own work. This results in improved critical judgement and leads to the rapid progress. Because teachers have very high expectations, it is normal for students not to settle for their first answer to a task but to explore alternatives. This results in a variety of art demonstrated with much individual

flair. Students on one site are provided with useful workspace to continue their practical work in private study time. Students on the other site do not have this opportunity to continue to rehearse their practical skills.

114. The standard of work seen in art history is also well above the average as students are exposed to work of the highest quality. Students look at a range of slides of different artists' work and analyse what they see. They make connections between the work of different artists and different art movements and relate this to historical events. They write confidently about what they see and feel, following very clear guidance. As a result of the teachers' regular emphases on the use of words, particularly with phrases in Italian, they use a correct art vocabulary to express accurately what they think. Their work is notable for the thoughtful way personal opinion and judgement are informed and expressed. Unfortunately studios for art history are not provided with Internet access to aid research, as would be expected.
115. Teaching and learning are excellent overall and in no lessons were they less than very good. All lessons in both activities are notable for all teachers making very clear the lesson objectives. Students are very well informed of what is expected of them and provided with useful information sheets to clarify lesson and examination requirements. The monitoring of students' achievement in lessons and homework tasks is exceptionally thorough. Teachers share their assessments and judgements and, from the exceptionally good individual tutorials, each student understands what must be done in order to improve.
116. Both male and female students show a very mature response to their work and achieve equally high standards. All lessons are purposeful and very productive as teachers and students work hard to make maximum use of every moment of time. There is a regular planned trip to national art galleries but students do not visit galleries or sculpture parks as frequently as would be expected. There are opportunities to work with artists to develop life drawing and photographic skills, but opportunities to work with artists-in-residence are infrequent. All students know how to use computers to find out about artists' work and show good word-processing skills in presenting their writing. With the introduction of digital cameras they are beginning to use sophisticated software to develop creatively their work, but this area is not yet fully exploited. Retention rates are high.
117. Leadership and management of what is a complex situation are excellent. There has been very good progress since the previous report with all issues being successfully addressed. The study of history of art has been successfully developed as a specialist course. Examination results at the higher grades in art have risen and now exceed the national average. On both sites students are exposed to a wide range of widely displayed exemplary artwork that sets high standards for which to strive.

Music

The quality of provision for music is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Standards are well above average.
- Students achieve very well because of the very good teaching and because of their own excellent attitudes.
- Leadership is excellent and staff from both schools work closely together.
- The outstanding range of extra-curricular work, competitions, workshops and concerts considerably enhances the experiences of the students and raises standards.

Area for improvement

- The accommodation at St Aidan's is unsatisfactory, although improvements are planned.

118. Results in the 2001 examinations were well above the national average for music at both AS and A-level. All students achieved a pass grade at AS-level and eight of the 12 students achieved grade A or B. In the 2001 A-level examination, seven of the 10 students achieved grades A and B and all students achieved at least a pass grade. One student achieved a place in the top five nationally. In AS music technology in 2001 all students achieved a grade from A to D. These results were far higher than expected. In 2002 these high standards were maintained in all cases and in music technology students achieved much better than expected. Again, a student in A-level music achieved a place in the top five nationally. Boys and girls achieve equally well. The majority of students progress from the AS course to A2 level and many of the students go on to study music at university or college. The examination results have improved substantially since the last inspection. The introduction of music technology considerably enhances the provision in the sixth form.
119. Standards seen during the inspection were well above average and students make very good progress through the courses. Standards of composition and performance are very high. Students have a very good grasp of music theory that they can translate very effectively into practical performance and composition. Some students are very able improvisers. All have very well developed listening skills and use technology confidently for composition. In music technology, arrangements and backing tracks using computers are effective and students manipulate the parameters to achieve a satisfying musical result.
120. Teaching and learning overall are very good. Both are often excellent. Teachers are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their subject. As a result students are acquiring very good knowledge and understanding and excellent practical skills. Lessons are excellently planned with regard to what has led to the current position and how it will be built on. As a result students are very clear what they have to achieve. Teachers use highly appropriate and innovative methods and approaches to teaching and learning. Question and answer sessions in most lessons establish students' very good knowledge. Individual work is then reinforced by paired or class discussion. Homework is designed to build on their knowledge and skills. Rehearsal groups are chosen to enhance learning for all. Students learn very well because theory and practice are always linked. Teachers motivate students well when assessing them, by using high quality examples from previous students' work to show what can be achieved.
121. Students work hard and productively in lessons because the pace set by teachers is demanding. Tasks are very challenging and as a result students make considerable effort on many levels. Students' work is very thoroughly assessed both in lessons and more formally for a complete piece of work. Students use the examination criteria in lessons so that they know exactly what is required of them and how to improve their

work. They also have half-termly reviews during which strengths and weaknesses are discussed and targets set.

122. Students are very interested in their work and are highly motivated. Retention rates are very good. They are responsible and mature and are very positive about the music courses in the school. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent and a very strong feature of the departments. These excellent attitudes considerably enhance their learning.
123. Music making outside the curriculum is also a very strong feature of the sixth form. Students have their own chamber choir and the high standards and total commitment in rehearsal have enabled them to win prestigious competitions nationally. Students also belong to a wide range of high quality bands, orchestras, choirs and groups all available in the schools and they take part in productions such as the current *My Fair Lady*. These opportunities add a further dimension to the quality of students' experience in the sixth form and contribute much to the excellent overall provision.
124. The management is excellent and the two very competent heads of departments work closely together. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good. The accommodation is excellent on one site and is being enhanced on the other as a result of the increased numbers choosing to study music in the sixth form. Resources, particularly those for technology, are excellent at both schools.

Theatre studies

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average and are improving because of the very good teaching and learning.
- Very good leadership enhances students' progress.
- Excellent extra-curricular provision develops students' social and subject skills.
- Teachers work very closely with each other, and with students, resulting in the requirements of the course being shared and well understood.
- Excellent relationships promote learning well.

Area for improvement

- Students' perceptions of their written work are less positive than those for performance and consequently standards are slightly lower.

125. The number of students taking the subject has increased and the retention rate is high. The first group of students was examined in the subject in 2001. Results matched national ones and have continued to improve with the proportion of students achieving A or B grades rising from 27 per cent to 44 per cent. Students' current standards of attainment are above average and they are achieving very well, taking their GCSE backgrounds into account.
126. Students have an excellent understanding of theories about acting, particularly those of Stanislavsky. They use these theories to guide their own acting, to help them evaluate the work of others and to be self-critical. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students successfully explored how an actor's proximity to others was an important factor in expressing particular moods. In a Year 13 class students showed a high level of insight as to how the contradictions in characters might be communicated. In all the practical work seen students displayed excellent communication skills. The

quality of their speech, their awareness of how to use the acting space to advantage and the quality of their non-verbal communication, such as facial expression, meant they held the attention of the audience very well. When evaluating the performances of others, students display insight and tact. Written work is of a high standard, although not quite as assured as students' performance skills. The department has strategies in place, including developing literacy skills, to improve students' writing further.

127. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and there are examples of excellent teaching and learning. The teachers who share the sixth form classes work very closely with each other, and with students, so that all the work is co-ordinated and students feel the course is coherent and enables them to progress. Students have a very good understanding of their own learning. Teachers possess excellent subject knowledge, as was seen in the way in which theories on acting were explained and in the discussion of particular texts. They also have an excellent understanding of the practicalities of producing and directing plays. The consequence is that students engage with what they read and act out at a high intellectual level, enjoying rigorous discussion with others.
128. The planning of lessons is a particular strength. Teachers take into account how well students have understood what was taught in earlier lessons so as to remedy any deficiencies of understanding. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson that revised aspects of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Lessons include variety, give ample opportunities for students to be actively involved in the work and are conducted at a brisk pace. All the time available is used to full advantage. The department is active in encouraging students to broaden their interest in the subject beyond the classroom by, for example, organising visits to theatres, community involvement, supporting younger students in lessons and presenting professional quality productions. These not only develop subject skills but also heighten citizenship. All students relish the subject and the excellent relationships reflect the enthusiasm and joy of both staff and students. Students do not use their initiative to explore the subject as fully in their written work and consequently their standards are slightly lower.
129. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Resources are deployed efficiently and effectively. Students are provided with very good support and guidance on a range of relevant matters, ranging from the opportunities available to become involved with local groups to university courses. The arrangements for assessing students' progress, and using this to determine what and how they will be taught, are very good. The quality of the accommodation has improved significantly since the last inspection and the subject has a high profile and steadily improving standards.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography, history, politics and psychology. Religious education was inspected by the Section 23 inspector whose report is published separately.

Geography

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

Strengths

- There is excellent collaboration in the management of sixth form geography.
- Examination results and current standards are well above average.
- Students make very good progress because the teaching is very good.
- Students are very interested and have excellent attitudes towards their work.
- Very good individual support is given to students.

Areas for improvement

- There is no formal system to monitor the work of the department.
- The marking and grading systems are potentially confusing to students.

130. In the 2001 A-level examination results were well above average; the proportion of students achieving the top two grades was very high. These high standards were maintained in the results for 2002, and at AS-level all students achieved at least a pass grade and over two-thirds achieved the highest two grades. Students begin their AS and A-level courses with levels of attainment that are above average. They make good progress throughout the sixth form and their achievement in relation to their prior attainment is very good.
131. The standard of work in Year 13 is well above average. Students have a very good breadth and depth of knowledge, seen in essays evaluating the impact of top-down and bottom-up aid schemes in less economically developed countries. In lessons preparing for the synoptic paper, students demonstrated that they could draw information and use skills from different parts of the syllabus. They used their knowledge of both physical and human factors to evaluate development opportunities on the island of Raratonga. Students are competent in their analysis and interpretation of data, for example, when seeking to find an objective measure of levels of deprivation in civic wards in Leeds. Students' contributions to classroom debates are perceptive, demonstrating a very good understanding of the effects of demographic change on societies and of the need to balance the protection of natural environments with the requirement for economic growth.
132. Standards in Year 12 are also well above average. As in Year 13, written work is of a very high standard and students build up a comprehensive portfolio of work. Students' personal investigations based on Leeds show a very good understanding of models of city development and the challenge of urban environments. They analyse data well and come to valid, clearly expressed conclusions. Their understanding of coastal deposition and erosion is enhanced by the fieldwork visit to the Holderness coast. Fieldwork reports show clearly that students understand the difficulties facing coastal communities and can evaluate the effectiveness of sea defence strategies.
133. Very good teaching ensures that all students make very good progress with their learning. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and they ensure that students are well prepared for the examination. Practice examination questions are used to very good effect and preparation for the synoptic paper mimics that of the actual examination. Lessons are very well planned to include a variety of activities. The mixture of class teaching, group work and student feedback opportunities ensures that all students, including those with special educational needs, are well supported. Resource packs, used when students are working in groups, are comprehensive and often contain articles from recent newspapers and geographical periodicals. They encourage students' independent learning and provide wide-ranging examples. The teachers' very good oversight of group work maintains the pace of the lesson and allows for additional input where necessary. The support given to individual students,

particularly when they are completing personal studies and longer assignments, is excellent and is a major strength of the department. Students make good use of the extra help that they know is available at lunchtimes and after school. As a consequence, students develop very good essay writing skills and students' personal investigations reach a very high standard.

134. Students are given regular opportunities to complete practice examination questions. The thorough marking of these indicates clearly what the student should do to improve and is instrumental in maintaining students' good progress. There is, however, some inconsistency in the way that marks are given, using both percentages and grades in similar exercises. This is an area for development so that, after every assessment, students understand clearly the standard they have reached in relation to their predicted examination grade.
135. Students enjoy the subject. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. Students have a real confidence in their teachers and find them easy to approach. They feel supported and encouraged by teachers who demonstrate a good knowledge of their subject and the demands of the examination. They appreciate the individual support that is available to them and feel that they make good progress because teaching is good and lessons are interesting. Most students progress from AS-level to complete the A-level course and retention rates are good.
136. Leadership and management of sixth form geography are very good, as is progress since the last inspection. There is excellent collaboration between the two heads of department. Both departments now use the same examination board and syllabus and resources are purchased together and shared as necessary. The team of teachers work very well together and have prepared new joint schemes of work. All teachers are committed to raising standards and meet regularly to discuss how this is to be achieved. Selective training opportunities ensure that knowledge of examination requirements is up to date. However, a system of formal monitoring of the department's work, including direct observations of lessons, has yet to be put in place, and this is an area for development to facilitate the sharing of good practice. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

History

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

Strengths

- Attainment in AS and A2 examinations is well above average.
- Teaching is very good and results in students making very good progress.
- Students' attitudes towards their work are excellent.
- Very good relationships motivate students to aim for the highest standards.

Areas for improvement

- The joint management of the two departments does not sufficiently ensure effective collaboration or the spreading of the very best practice in teaching.
- The medium and long-term planning for future development of the two departments is not strong enough.

137. The GCE A2-level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average. This continued the high attainment of 1999 and 2000. In 2002 there was a slight dip in the proportion gaining grades A or B but it was still above the 2001 national average. All students who took the examination in 2002 gained a pass grade. These results

largely reflect the prior attainment of the students in their GCSE two years previously. All students who took the AS examination in 2002 gained a pass grade, and half gained grade A or B. This was a slight improvement on the 2001 results. Students achieve very well and make very good progress overall from their GCSE work as a result of very good teaching and their own hard work.

138. The standard of work is overall higher than that in most sixth forms, being above average. Students in Years 12 and 13 produce essays that are well structured and analytical. They have very good knowledge and understanding of the periods of history they are studying. Students explained clearly, and in some depth, the problems facing Russia in the early 20th century that hindered industrialisation. A group of students studying the Cold War in the 1950s had very good understanding of long and short-term causes in their work on Castro's rise to power. The highest attainers made very valid comments on the likelihood and nature of bias in some of the sources of their evidence. The oral contributions of the highest attainers are articulate and well developed.
139. The Year 13 essay work is well structured and analytical, shows considerable depth of understanding and presents a valid viewpoint, backed up by well-researched evidence. Students studying the General Strike of 1926 compared very successfully two contrasting explanations of why the strike failed. They identified very clearly the bias in the extracts, and the highest attainers explained how the language and tone used could show bias. They successfully explained how the same events could be interpreted in different ways. The highest attainers in a group studying Napoleon I identified very competently whether or not he could be seen as an heir to the French Revolution. The lower attainers found the task of linking Napoleon's reforms to the principles of the revolution a difficult one.
140. Teaching is very good overall, and often excellent. This is a major contributory factor to the students' very good progress in both Years 12 and 13 and to the well above average attainment in examinations. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they communicate very effectively. Teachers start lessons by checking that students have understood previous work before moving on to new work, and use short plenary sessions to draw conclusions both during and at the end of lessons. They thus are well informed about their students' understanding and progress. The work set is appropriately challenging, and gives very good opportunities for the highest attainers to work at the highest standards. Teachers prepare students very well for examinations and give very clear guidance on how to write high quality examination answers. The detailed comments on marked work provide students with clear guidance and targets to improve their answers in the future.
141. Teaching methods ensure that students have a variety of ways in which to learn; learning and progress are very good. Students have good opportunities to work independently and not to rely too heavily on their teachers. Group work is well organised and ensures all students participate in the work. The best lessons have a suitable mix of whole-class work, paired or group activities and independent work. In a lesson on the changing nature of warfare, for instance, a series of paired activities kept all students involved, including some who had not been involved in whole-class discussion. The activities were interspersed with short whole-class sessions in which the teacher checked students' progress. Teachers rightly emphasise students' oral contributions to lessons and give them frequent opportunities to develop their answers at length.

142. Students' attitudes to their work are very good. They work hard and come to lessons prepared for work, thus enabling the teachers to move on to new work effectively. They have very strong commitment to their studies, and clearly want to learn and improve. A very small number occasionally do not participate actively in lessons, and allow others to answer questions and contribute to discussions.
143. The very good leadership and management of the departments ensure that high standards are maintained. There has been good progress since the last inspection. The ethos of hard work and high attainment supports the schools' aims strongly. History is a very popular subject, and virtually all students who start the course remain on it through the two years. Both heads of department provide very good leadership and management for their respective sixth forms. They do not, however, meet sufficiently frequently to ensure that the two departments are always working together as well as they should be. There is, for example, little opportunity for departments to share the excellent practice in teaching that exists in both schools. The teaching staff from the two schools do not meet together to discuss issues of teaching and learning. This need to improve the collaboration was identified at the previous inspection.

Politics

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- There is a strong sense of shared values in the department and a commitment to high standards.
- Teaching is very good and promotes very good learning.
- The department uses a wide range of up-to-date and challenging materials.
- Students work very well together and co-operate fully.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities are sometimes missed to ensure that all students participate fully in classroom activities.
- The style of teaching occasionally lacks variety.

144. The GCE A-level results in 2002 were well above recent averages, and this was part of a rising trend of above average results in previous years. A similar pattern exists in the last two years' AS results. All students taking the examinations passed, and in relation to their previous results at GCSE they did better than expected. Male and female students did equally well.
145. The standards of work of current Year 12 students are above average. The majority of students in both years are progressing faster than might be expected for this stage of the course. In Year 12, their notebooks are clear and well presented, and higher attaining students are already, at an early stage of their studies, using quite advanced and sophisticated concepts together with good factual knowledge and a good writing style. This is a reflection of very good teaching. In class, they are able to reflect and argue convincingly, and all students contribute to discussion and respond to questions. For example, in a class on referenda, students volunteered their views, showing interest and an awareness of political issues, and similarly in a class on electoral turnout there was a lively and well-informed response.
146. In Year 13 the quality of work is, in general, above average and much is well above. Students have grasped the importance of critical comment in their participation in

class and in their writing. Their responses are accurate and show a sound grasp of facts, and in addition they can build on this to weigh the pros and cons of an argument. In a class on the peace process in Northern Ireland, for example, students worked well in groups to disentangle the complexities of participation and vested interests, and their responses were detailed, thoughtful and evaluative.

147. Teaching is very good overall and promotes very good learning. The main features are very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, a wide range of materials, good planning, a challenging style and wide use of encouragement and praise. In addition, there is a constant emphasis to the students of the need to develop higher level skills and ways of thinking. For example, in a Year 12 class on referenda a very clear and direct teaching style, alternating explanation with reading and group work, produced good learning and inspired confidence. A Year 13 class on Northern Ireland was conducted in an adult, collaborative atmosphere to which the students responded well – the teacher’s knowledge was excellent, and very precise and detailed help was given. In general, feedback from teachers in class and in assignments is very good. Occasionally, however, opportunities are missed to involve all students, as, for example, in a Year 13 class on law and order, where some students were allowed to be passive, and where moderate pace and emphasis on absorbing information lacked challenge for an advanced group – but this is the exception.
148. Students learn very well. They are attentive and are mostly very willing to respond to the promptings of their teachers. Industriousness is a feature of their approach, together with co-operative work habits that ensure that the class moves forward together. They rise to the challenge of the very good teaching, as in a Year 13 class on the significance of falling voter turnout, where they moved confidently through a sequence of individual response, small group work and the drawing of mind maps. They were self-motivated to stretch themselves intellectually and see complex connections in the Northern Ireland discussions. They are well organised and become adept at working on their own as they progress through the two years. In particular, their research skills develop well. In general, they record information and ideas well, but particularly in Year 12 they are not always good at making notes in open discussion, something not always picked up by their teachers.
149. Since the last inspection very good progress has been made. Provision in politics has improved, particularly in teaching, the standard of which has risen from satisfactory to very good, and attainment is now consistently above average. The department is well led and managed and has a well-qualified staff who frequently attend courses to update their knowledge. There is a pleasing sense of unity across the teaching, particularly in challenging students to higher levels of attainment.

Psychology

The quality of provision in psychology is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Excellent leadership and management of the department focus on raising standards and improving overall provision.
- A rich, stimulating curriculum engages students' interests and enthusiasms to a high degree.

Areas for improvement

- There are no areas of any significance for further improvement.

150. The 2001 A-level results were very high with over half the students attaining A or B grades. The proportion of students obtaining pass grades was well above the national average. The results improved significantly in 2002 with the proportion gaining A or B grades rising to two thirds, and all gaining grades A to E. Over the past three years, results have continued to improve. Students who took the AS examinations in 2002 achieved very well and reached high standards. Over three-quarters of the students reached A, B or C grades on the first two test papers; students' performance on the third test paper was not so good, but over two-fifths obtained an A, B or C grade.
151. Students have already obtained well above average grades at GCSE overall and they continue to make very good progress, achieving very well and reaching high standards. Higher attaining students and those with talent in the subject do particularly well and make excellent progress. In 2002, based on results overall at GCSE, eight students were predicted to reach an A grade; however, 17 reached this top grade in the examinations, showing excellent achievement over the two years. The standard of work seen during the inspection was very significantly above what is expected.
152. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Students are provided with an excellent range of opportunities to advance their understanding, knowledge and skills. Teaching is of extremely high quality and staff take great care to advance learning through a thorough understanding of complex technical language. As a result, students debate and discuss issues such as 'flashbulb memory' or 'post-traumatic stress disorder' comfortably, with understanding and with authority. Students learn the skills of cause and effect by relating psychological research to real-life situations. They realise very quickly the ethical implications of testing on an unaware audience. Through the use of case studies and video clips, students readily appreciate the differences in responses of men and women to sexual advances, learning to relate this to ethical and gender considerations when assessing the validity of the research.
153. Teachers provide frequent opportunities for students to assess each other by performing simple yet relevant experiments on each other, even to the point of rewarding them with sweets. As a result, the theories and experiments of great psychologists such as Piaget or Vygotsky are brought alive. Higher attaining students are effectively challenged further by being given opportunities to read more widely or to research from a broader field. This gives them a deeper insight into the risks and consequences of experiments and research.
154. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They use this very effectively when challenging students' thinking in the frequent question and answer sessions in lessons. The teaching methods are especially successful. A very extensive range is used frequently, keeping students on their toes and stimulating their interest and imagination. The frequent use of case studies, video clips, opportunities to interview each other or to present their findings, all encourage better learning while promoting key skills of listening, reading, speaking and measuring.

155. The department is a centre of excellence. Staff work as a team and meet regularly. All discussion centres on improving students' learning, and on helping them reach better grades. The head of department observes all her colleagues teach regularly and provides effective feedback on how to improve. Work is very carefully marked with very helpful annotations on how to improve. An excellent range of resources ensures students are constantly challenged and moved on in their learning. The adaptation of the curriculum has also made a significant contribution to enhancing students' learning. By ensuring that learning is active and draws upon a very wide range of information, current and historical, students' enquiring minds are further stimulated. The teacher and students drew the conclusion in one lesson having looked at some recent research, that learning is greatly enhanced if participants enjoy what they are doing. That is the hallmark of this department and accounts to a large degree to its great success.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

The focus of the inspection was on all English courses and involved observing lessons and scrutinising work in GCE AS and A2 classes in English language, English literature and the dual course in both. The GCSE re-sit course was also sampled. Comments on all these are included below.

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive.
- Levels of attainment are well above average – students achieve very well.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.
- The effective use of assessment facilitates good progress.

Areas for improvement

- There is too little sharing of good practice through lesson observations.
- The absence of a detailed sixth form development plan hinders progress.

156. The 2001 examination results, with a large entry, were well above the national average in English literature and were very high in English language. The percentage of high grades, A and B, was also well above average in both. All students who took the course gained grades A to D in English literature and all gained A to E in English language. Male students performed as well as female students. The 2002 results indicate a trend of maintaining standards well above what is expected nationally in both English language and English literature. In GCSE retakes, most of the students gained a grade C.
157. Standards of attainment seen during the inspection were well above average. In Year 12, students of all abilities have already made good progress from their GCSE level of work. In Year 13, when previous attainment is considered, achievement is very good. Coursework in both year groups is above average and some excellent responses to Chaucer and the analysis of language were seen. In a Year 13 lesson, students showed very high levels of understanding in their work on Marlowe's *Edward II*. In all cases male students are performing as well as, and in some cases better than,

female students. Those who are retaking examinations are building on previous learning and most are on track to improve their grades.

158. The quality of teaching is very good overall, and in a small number of lessons it was excellent. As a result, students learn very well. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and they make full use of assessment and targets to plan their lessons carefully. In the very best lessons teachers use questioning very effectively to test students' understanding. Teachers' expectations are high and students respond well to the challenges. Learning was best when students were given the responsibility to form their own judgments. They have a good understanding of how well they are doing and how they can make further progress. In a minority of lessons the students are not sufficiently involved because the teacher's exposition dominates the whole lesson.
159. Students' attitudes are very positive. They show interest in lessons, are ready to contribute to class discussions and co-operate well with each other. Relationships with teachers are very good. Students show initiative and have developed strong learning skills. They work well independently and take pride in their achievements.
160. The subject is well led and managed. There is a clear direction for the sixth form work and this promotes high standards of teaching and learning. The lack of a detailed development plan for the department limits teachers' understanding of the department's priorities and their role in them. Target setting is well established and is based on a thorough understanding of students' abilities. It helps students to build on what they already know and can do. Teachers do not have sufficient opportunities to watch each other teach and share the very good practice and ideas. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

Modern foreign languages

The focus was on French, but German was also sampled. In German, average A-level point scores and the higher grade (A and B) pass rate were below the national average in 2001, but the overall pass rate was about average. A strategic change of staff is producing good improvements. Teaching and learning were very good in the one Year 13 lesson observed. Numerous inter-related activities culminated in a good debate in German on the subject of cloning. The lesson gave the students substantial practice in expressing themselves fluently in German on a moral issue in which they were really interested.

French

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

Strengths

- The A-level examination pass rates and points scores are well above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- The chosen study themes, visits and work experiences abroad make an excellent contribution to the students' personal development.

Area for improvement

- Some teachers would benefit from closer guidance from senior and middle management through helpful criticism of their work in class.

161. Examination results are well above average; only one candidate failed the A-level examination in the past four years. The GCE A-level results in 2001 continued the well

above average pattern since the previous inspection; the 2002 results were similar. In 2001, the average point scores and higher grade, A and B, pass rates were well above average. The well above average standards are the outcome of very hard work and commitment on the part of able students and of very good, imaginative teaching that leads to learning of a similar quality. Male and female students do equally well.

162. Current standards of work are also well above average and, in Year 13, achievement is very much better than what could reasonably be expected considering the students' GCSE and AS results. Some students' written work is outstandingly fluid and very well researched; it makes compelling reading. Others' writing is interesting and uses a good range of construction and vocabulary, but is interspersed with grammatical errors and misspelling, although it is within the range of course grades.
163. Lesson observations confirm the students' very good achievement over the duration of the courses, with very good reading and excellent listening and comprehension skills. In classes and homework, which makes a very good contribution to learning, the students have thorough practice that improves their literacy and ICT skills, in which they are very proficient. For example, in one very good lesson the students collaborated very well in groups to prepare talks on education systems in five French-speaking countries around the world, having found the material they worked on through useful websites.
164. The achievement of students in Year 12 is good overall, although they are only a little way into their course. Some written and oral work is well above average, but that of others lack some confidence. Whilst they have a good understanding of the topics studied, their writing has not shown much improvement in accuracy since they started the course. Interviews with students confirm the very good relationships and attitudes that are crucial parts of the very good achievement made by the end of the two-year course in a positive learning atmosphere.
165. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. This translates into classes where there is no slacking. Students are frequently put on their mettle to find their own solutions through, for example, focused group work. In these lessons, the resources used are often particularly effective in helping very good learning to occur. For instance, in a very good Year 12 lesson, an action-packed snippet of a French film formed the basis for testing the students' observation skills in reporting the actions of aggressors and victim into a computer program that checked their accuracy with them. Learning, as a result, was very good, as the students were highly motivated and keen to do well.
166. Whilst no teaching is unsatisfactory, some does lack the sparkle of the best. Certain activities go on for too long, so the pace slows and questioning and discussions lack depth, although in one lesson on bulimia some responses showed good insight, for instance, stating, in perfect French, it to be both an alimentary and psychological condition.
167. An excellent characteristic is the impact of the course on the students' personal development. The work requires study, from a French point of view, of themes that are of immediate interest to the students, showing they are not alone in their concerns. At the same time, very well supported work experience programmes in, among others, French veterinary, chemist and café work places, residence in French families and study of literature that is couched in rural French culture, give the students clear perspectives of other ways of doing things.

168. Leadership and management are good. Each school makes an equal contribution to the curriculum that lends itself so well to raising standards. Assessment and marking are very good; they help the students to know how they are doing and equally how to improve. The main weakness is in the relative isolation of the numerous teachers who contribute to the courses. Middle and senior managers do not arrange mutual observations to promote positive professional criticism of each other's work to bring the quality of teaching and learning up to that of the best.