

INSPECTION REPORT

**THOMAS BECKET CATHOLIC UPPER
SCHOOL**

Northampton

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122100

Head teacher: Mr T Percy

Reporting inspector: Mr R Palmer
31198

Dates of inspection: 18th – 21st November 2002

Inspection number: 249708

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

Crown copyright 2002.

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of students:	13 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Becket Way Kettering Road North Northampton
Postcode:	NN3 6HT
Telephone number:	01604 493211
Fax number:	01604 497300
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M Forsyth
Date of previous inspection:	2 nd – 6 th December 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
31198	R Palmer	Registered inspector	Provision for students in the sixth form	Information about the school The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? What should the school do to improve further?
13786	S Walsh	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? How well is the school led and managed?
30690	G Allison	Team inspector	Geography Information and communication technology in sixth form	
8216	G Binks	Team inspector	Provision for students with special educational needs Provision for students with English as an additional language	
3534	A Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical education	
3556	C Emery	Team inspector	Vocational subjects	
23188	V Maunder	Team inspector	Science Biology	
31986	B Medhurst	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
17868	E Metcalfe	Team inspector	Art and design Citizenship	
31850	D Nevens	Team inspector	Music	

20380	N Pinkney	Team inspector	Chemistry	
19214	G Price	Team inspector	English	
12607	S Relf	Team inspector	Mathematics	
21806	P Swinnerton	Team inspector	Design and technology	
31191	D Sylph	Team inspector	History	
17404	J Tolley	Team inspector	Modern languages	

The inspection contractor was:

Independent School Inspection Services (ISIS)
3 Harrowby Road
West Park
Leeds
LS16 5HN

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

Page

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

7

Information about the school
How good the school is
What the school does well
What could be improved
How the school has improved since its last inspection
Standards
Pupils' attitudes and values
Teaching and learning
Other aspects of the school
How well the school is led and managed
Parents' and carers' views of the school

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

15

The school's results and pupils' achievements
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20

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

25

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

28

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

31

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

32

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

36

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

37

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

43

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

63

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Thomas Becket School is a voluntary-aided, Catholic, comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 13 to 18 years. It serves the parishes of Northampton and a wide surrounding area. Most pupils come from the two Catholic middle schools in Northampton. The school is being reorganised to accommodate pupils aged 11 to 18 from September 2004. The school is smaller than other secondary schools in England. It has 798 pupils (408 boys and 390 girls), compared with 829 pupils at the time of the previous inspection in 1996. About six out of every ten pupils are Catholics. The attainment of pupils on entry in Year 9 is below average overall. Pupils come from a very wide range of social and economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (about one in every six) is average. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English. About one in every 14 pupils is from an ethnic minority. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, approximately one in every six, is average. Most of these pupils have learning or behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs, one in 40, is average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school provides an overall good quality of education for pupils of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Pupils raise their standards from below average when they enter the school in Year 9 to average by the end of Year 11. Standards are average in the sixth form and represent satisfactory achievement. Pupils of all ethnicities work well together. The good leadership and management of the head teacher and senior staff contribute greatly to the school's continuing improvement. Achievement is good in almost all subjects by the end of Year 11 because the large majority of pupils respond positively to the good quality of teaching they receive. Very good relationships between pupils and staff encourage good learning. Staffing difficulties have placed additional work on senior staff and have adversely affected standards in French and the procedures for monitoring attendance. The school has many strengths and few weaknesses. It manages its resources well and provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 11 is good.
- Good teaching helps pupils to attain good GCSE results in most subjects.
- Good leadership and management have enabled the school to improve considerably in recent years.
- Pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to work help them to make good progress in most lessons.
- Very good relationships between staff and pupils make a positive contribution to good learning.

What could be improved

- Standards and the overall quality of teaching and learning in French are unsatisfactory.
- Teachers provide too few opportunities for pupils to use and develop their skills in information and communication technology (ICT).
- Procedures for checking attendance are unsatisfactory and lead to inaccurate recording.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since its previous inspection in 1996. Numbers on roll have increased recently and the school is oversubscribed in Years 9 and 10. Leadership and management have improved considerably and are now good. The head teacher and senior staff make an important contribution to the school's many successful developments and enable pupils of all backgrounds to receive a good quality of education. The school has kept its previous strengths. Pupils attain better GCSE results than expected from their previous attainment. Standards in the sixth form have improved satisfactorily and remain average. The proportion of teaching observed that was good or better has increased. In respect of the six key issues identified for action, improvement is good overall. However,

girls' performance in GCSE examinations remains much higher than that of boys. The school has the capacity and the commitment to continue to make improvements.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	A
A-levels/AS-levels	D	C	*	

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

*National comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available.

Pupils' attainment when they join the school in Year 9 is below average. Attainment improves as pupils move through the main school and is average by the end of Year 11. This indicates good achievement. In 2001, results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 were average in English and below average in mathematics and science. Overall, they were below those attained by schools that have a similar proportion of pupils entitled to receive free school meals. In 2002, results in the national tests were average in mathematics and science and well below average in English. Results have been improving at the same rate as the national improvement. Girls have attained higher standards than boys in the national tests. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are currently average in English and below average in mathematics and science. They indicate good achievement in English and mathematics and satisfactory achievement in science. In other subjects pupils' achievement after less than one term in the school is at least satisfactory apart from French in which it is unsatisfactory.

GCSE results matched the national average in all of the past three years. Results for boys were close to the average for boys nationally. Results for girls matched those of girls nationally during this period. Boys' results are further behind those of girls than is the case nationally and reflect the difference in their levels of attainment when they joined the school. In 2001, GCSE results matched those of similar schools and indicate satisfactory achievement compared with pupils' previous attainment at the end of Year 9. Results are improving at the same rate as the national improvement. Results at grades A*-C, in 2001, were above average in most subjects. Results at the highest grades A* and A were above average in English, communication studies, geography, ICT and sociology. GCSE results in 2002 are higher than those attained in 2001. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are slightly higher than the overall average standards indicated by recent GCSE results. However, underachievement occurs in French because of staffing difficulties and some inadequate teaching. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, those who are gifted or talented and the few for whom English is an additional language, achieve well by the end of Year 11. Results at GCSE are good and improving as a result of effective teaching and pupils' good commitment to work hard. The school exceeded its challenging targets for GCSE results in 2001 and again in 2002.

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is average. AS-level results in 2001 were well below average and poor. They improved considerably in 2002 and indicate at least satisfactory achievement. A-level results in 2001 were average overall and represented satisfactory achievement compared with students' prior attainment. Standards of work seen in Years 12 and 13 are currently average in most subjects. Students make appropriate progress in most lessons.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils have very good attitudes and work hard. As a result they achieve well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils' good behaviour contributes to a positive and purposeful climate for learning. Permanent exclusions are rare.
Personal development and relationships	Good. The Christian ethos of the school enables pupils of all backgrounds to get on well with each other and with the staff. Pupils are tolerant and respectful of differing viewpoints.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory. Many pupils take occasional days off school. Rates of unauthorised absence are high.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is often very good. A small amount of less than satisfactory teaching was seen in which teachers did not manage the class well, expectations were not high enough and the work was not suited well to pupils' capabilities. Teaching is good throughout Years 9 to 11 in English and mathematics. In science, teaching is satisfactory in Year 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is good in Years 9 to 11 in art and design, geography, history and ICT. In physical education, teaching is good in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. In design and technology and music, teaching is satisfactory in Year 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. In French, teaching is unsatisfactory in Years 9 to 11, largely because of difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers. This leads to underachievement in French. Teaching is effective in meeting the needs of boys and girls of all backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those who are gifted or talented and the few for whom English is an additional language. The teaching of literacy and of numeracy, though largely unplanned, is satisfactory across subjects. Good support for pupils with special educational needs helps them to make similar progress to other pupils. Learning is good in most lessons because pupils are usually keen to do their best, concentrate well and work at a brisk pace to complete the work set. As a result, they acquire good skills and an appropriate knowledge and understanding in nearly all subjects.

Teaching has many positive features. The large majority of teachers manage their classes effectively to ensure that pupils receive work of suitable difficulty and participate fully in all activities. They use their good expertise in the specialist subject to motivate pupils of all levels of attainment and have suitably high expectations for pupils' success. Teachers make satisfactory use of marking and assessment to show pupils how to improve their work. They set homework of suitable amount and quality to extend pupils' learning. In lessons in which teaching was satisfactory rather than good a few pupils found the work too easy and a few found it too difficult. Occasionally, teachers did not make the most effective use of all the time available; pupils spent too much time copying up notes and had too few opportunities to think for themselves.

In the sixth form, teaching varies among subjects and is satisfactory overall. Most teachers make good use of their expertise in the subject to help students to achieve well. Occasionally the work set is of inappropriate difficulty and challenge. Through working hard and a desire to succeed, students are currently achieving at least as well as they should in their sixth form courses.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Pupils have equal access to the range of learning experiences. Provision for careers education is good. Active participation in a good programme of activities outside of lessons extends and enriches pupils' learning. The range of vocational courses is limited.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The Code of Practice for special educational needs has been implemented fully. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well as a result of good teaching and through good help from learning support assistants in class. An effective programme for improving literacy skills helps these pupils to improve their skills in reading and writing quickly. Pupils with behavioural difficulties receive good support in the Refocus Unit.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language make similar progress in lessons and over time to that of other pupils because teachers make sure that they understand the work. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision for social development is very good, that for cultural and moral development is good. Pupils learn how to tell right from wrong and to be tolerant. They respond positively to the school's encouragement to support a wide range of charitable causes. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Teachers know the pupils well and provide good care and support for pupils' all-round development. Staff value all pupils equally and treat them with trust and fairness. The use of assessment to help pupils to improve their work is good overall. Appropriate procedures for child protection and for health and safety are in place. Procedures for monitoring attendance are unsatisfactory.
How well the school works in partnership with parents.	Satisfactory. Parents have positive views about the school. They receive good information about the school's activities. Reports about pupils' progress and work are good. Very few parents take an active part in the work of the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	Good. The head teacher, with good support from senior staff, provides a clear direction for the school's development. As a result of good management, standards are rising and the quality of teaching has improved. Management of subjects has improved since the previous inspection and is good overall.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors are supportive and have a suitable knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They carry out their duties responsibly.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Senior staff make good use of test results and comparative information to see if the school and different subjects are doing as well as they should. Suitably challenging targets for improvement are set. Systems to monitor and improve the quality of teaching have succeeded in raising standards. The system for monitoring attendance is not as effective as it should be.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Financial management is good. Effective forward planning has helped to reduce the budgetary deficit to manageable proportions. Spending decisions are considered carefully to seek best value and to meet the school's educational priorities.

The school makes suitable use of its adequate staffing, accommodation and learning resources to support pupils' learning. The use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning is insufficient in many subjects.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are expected to work hard. • Pupils are helped to mature and be responsible. • Pupils like the school and make good progress. • Teaching is generally good. • Behaviour is good. • Parents can raise concerns easily with staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of homework is inadequate. • Links between school and home are not close.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. They disagree with parents about homework and judge that the quality and amount of homework are satisfactory, though there is inconsistency among teachers in the frequency and regularity of its setting. Inspectors do not agree that links between the school and parents are not close enough. Good information about the school's activities and good reports about pupils' work and progress are sent home at suitably frequent intervals. Staff are ready and willing to meet parents at mutually convenient times.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is of average size compared with those in other schools. It has 172 students (74 males and 98 females), of whom just over one third are in Year 13. There were 228 students on roll at the time of the previous inspection in 1996. The composition of the sixth form matches that of the main school in terms of ethnic groupings and students' backgrounds. A very small number of students have special educational needs. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average. Students' attainment on entry to Year 12 is average overall. The school participates in a sixth form cluster arrangement with four other local schools and two nearby colleges of further education. Together, they provide access to a wide range of AS/A2-level and vocational courses. Most students study AS-level courses in Year 12 and A2-level courses in Year 13. A few students follow vocational courses. About two thirds of students stay on from Year 11 into the school's sixth form. All courses of study at the school have suitable requirements for entry. Students require a minimum of four GCSE grades A*-C for enrolment on the AS-level and A2-level courses. There are no minimal requirements for enrolment on the intermediate vocational courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides a satisfactory quality of education. It is cost-effective. The new leadership and management are effective in improving the quality of care, support and guidance for students. Standards are similar to those reported at the time of the previous inspection and are average overall. Students usually attain A-level results that match predictions based on their previous attainment in GCSE examinations. They choose from a suitable range of courses, though the take-up on vocational courses is low. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory in all subjects inspected. Teaching is very good in art and design, design and technology and physical education, and good in English. A-level results in 2001 matched the national average and indicated satisfactory achievement. However, AS-level results in 2001 were well below average and poor. In 2002, the AS-level results improved substantially and were at least satisfactory because teachers had acquired a much better understanding of the requirements for these new examinations. The sixth form meets well the needs of its students apart from those who would benefit from a wider range of vocational courses.

Strengths

- New and effective leadership has resulted in an improved and good quality of support, advice and guidance for students.
- Very positive attitudes to work help students to achieve standards of which they are capable.
- Students appreciate the very good relationships with teachers.

What could be improved

- Teachers are not consistent in the way they use assessment to help students to raise standards.
- The curriculum provides insufficient opportunities for students to use ICT in subjects and an inadequate number and range of vocational courses to meet the needs of all students.

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	Satisfactory. A-level results are below average. Students respond positively to satisfactory teaching to achieve standards that match

	expectations based on their prior attainment. They have few opportunities to use ICT to extend their work.
Chemistry	Satisfactory. A-level results for the small number of candidates were well below average in 2001. In Years 12 and 13 students of a wide range of attainment are achieving the standards expected from their prior attainment as a result of satisfactory teaching. There is little use of ICT to assist learning.
Biology	Satisfactory. Satisfactory teaching enables students to achieve standards expected from their previous attainment. A-level results for the small number of candidates were well below average in 2001. New leadership is helping to improve standards.
Design and technology	Good. Standards in the new AS and A2-level courses are well above average. Very good teaching enables students to learn at a fast rate and to achieve very well.
ICT	Satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory and leads to satisfactory achievement. Standards are below average on the AS and A2-level courses and average on the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate course.
Physical education	Good. Standards of work seen are average and indicate good achievement. Good teaching, much of it very good, and students' positive attitudes to work help students to make very good progress in lessons. Students do not make effective use of the separate study period for the subject.
Art and design	Good. Good teaching helps students currently in Years 12 and 13 to attain above average standards. This indicates good achievement. Poor AS-level results in 2001 were followed by a substantial improvement in 2002.
Geography	Satisfactory. A-level results in 2001 were well below average. Standards are currently below average and represent satisfactory achievement. Teaching is satisfactory overall but is occasionally unsatisfactory. Students' positive attitudes to work assist their learning.
English literature	Good. Standards are above average in this very popular subject. Good teaching and students' very good attitudes to work result in good achievement.

In a few other subjects, work was sampled. In history, standards were above average and the teaching observed was very good. In physics, the teaching observed was good and standards in the lesson observed were appropriate to students' prior attainment. In the two lessons observed in music, standards were above average and good teaching enabled students to make good progress. In lessons sampled in English language and communication studies, standards for the large number of students involved were average. Students made at least satisfactory progress in these lessons as a result of effective teaching and their own very positive attitudes to work. Teaching and learning were good in the psychology lesson observed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good. Teachers prepare students well for entry to the sixth form. Students receive plenty of useful information and advice on the courses available to them, although the provision of courses for lower attaining students is not as good as that for average and higher attaining students. Teachers use their good knowledge of students well to provide them with appropriate advice and guidance about their current work and future options. Students who are hoping to go to university or other institutions of higher education receive particularly good support and advice. The quality of guidance for other students is satisfactory. Very good

	relationships between students and staff give students the confidence to approach staff in order to share problems or concerns. The use of assessment to raise standards and to set targets for academic and personal development is satisfactory and improving. Most students know what they are expected to achieve. Teachers check students' progress closely and frequently.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. New and effective leadership knows the strengths and weaknesses of provision in the sixth form and sets a clear direction for future improvement. Good management and teamwork ensure that very good relationships and mutual trust between staff and students create a good climate for learning. The sixth form offers open access to courses for students of all levels of attainment. The management of the school's work in the cluster arrangement is satisfactory. Monitoring of teaching and learning has improved and is effective in raising standards. The school's very positive reaction to the poor AS-level results in 2001 and the subsequent improvements in planning and teaching ensured that results in 2002 improved considerably and were at least satisfactory.

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"> • Teaching is good and makes them think. • They enjoy the sixth form and recommend it. • They can discuss matters with staff, are treated as adults and receive good support. • The choice of courses is suitable. • They are helped to study independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice and guidance are insufficient and students lack information about future options.

Inspectors agree with most of the students' positive views. However, teaching is satisfactory rather than good overall and the range of courses available for lower attaining students is limited. Students do develop their study skills well. However, in several subjects they do not get enough opportunities to use ICT, for example to carry out research. In respect of the point for improvement, appropriate changes are already under way. Under the new leadership in the sixth form, good systems of advice and support are being developed. Inspectors agree that students who are not entering higher education after the sixth form do not currently have enough guidance about future options. Information and guidance available for other students are of good quality.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' attainment is below average when they join the school in Year 9. Attainment improves as pupils move through the main school and is average by the end of Year 11. As a result of good teaching, achievement is good by the end of Year 9 and good by the end of Year 11. Standards in the sixth form currently are average and represent satisfactory achievement based on students' previous attainment in GCSE examinations. Standards in religious education were judged by the separate inspection carried out at the same time by inspectors appointed by the Catholic Church.
2. Improvement in standards since the previous inspection in 1996 is good overall. The proportion of pupils attaining five or more grades A*-C has been average and rising over recent years whereas it was ten per cent below average at the time of the previous inspection. For the three-year period 1999 to 2001, results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 rose at the same rate as the national improvement. This represents at least satisfactory achievement taking into account pupils' previous attainment. GCSE results have improved at the same rate as the national improvement over recent years. The further improvement in GCSE results in 2002 represents good achievement. Standards by the end of Year 13 have improved satisfactorily since the previous inspection and are average.
3. In 2001, results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 were below the national average overall. They were below those attained by schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. This is largely because standards are below average on entry and the school has much less than one year to try to raise standards to average or above. Even so, the results were better than those predicted from pupils' previous levels of attainment. Results in English matched the national average. Those in mathematics and science were below average. In 2002, results in mathematics and science in the national tests matched the national average and those attained in similar schools. They were well below average in English. The results in English were a surprise and, on reflection, the English department feels that it should have asked for many scripts to be re-marked.
4. In Year 9, standards seen in classes and in scrutiny of work are average overall. They represent good achievement over the short time that pupils have been at the school. Standards are currently average in English and below average in mathematics and science. They are above average in geography, below average in modern languages and average in all other National Curriculum subjects. Achievement in relation to pupils' prior attainment is currently good in English, mathematics, art and design, geography, ICT and history. It is satisfactory in other subjects apart from French in which it is unsatisfactory.

5. In all four years from 1998 to 2001, attainment in GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11 matched the national average. In 2001, the results matched those attained by similar schools. When compared with pupils' previous attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, the results indicated satisfactory achievement. The proportion of pupils attaining five or more grades A*-C was above the national average. The proportion attaining one or more grades A*-G was in the bottom five per cent nationally. This was partly because several pupils of Year 11 age were in Year 10 and did not sit GCSE examinations. The other main contributory factor was the erratic attendance of several pupils that affected adversely their coursework and the continuity of their learning. Over the three-year period 1999 to 2001, girls and boys both attained results in GCSE that were similar to the separate, respective national averages of girls and boys. Provisional results in 2002 were higher both for girls and for boys than in previous years. They represent good achievement based on pupils' prior attainment. In particular, they show a good increase in the proportion of pupils attaining five or more grades A*-C and grades A*-G. They also indicate that pupils with special educational needs and pupils of below average attainment achieved well at GCSE examinations in 2002.
6. In Years 10 and 11, standards seen in classes and in scrutiny of work are above average overall and higher than those indicated by the GCSE results of 2001. They represent good achievement. Standards are currently average in mathematics and science and below average in French. They are above average in English and all other subjects of the National Curriculum. Pupils' achievement by Year 11 is very good in English, ICT and physical education. It is good in all other subjects apart from modern languages in which it is unsatisfactory. Underachievement occurs in French because the overall quality of teaching and learning is not good enough and the department has had difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff.
7. Pupils on the register of special educational needs, including those who have statements, are making good progress throughout Years 9 to 11 towards their individual targets. This is because they receive good support from teachers and classroom assistants in and out of lessons.
8. Pupils of different ethnic backgrounds make similar progress to that of other pupils. They integrate easily into the school and work hard to achieve well. The achievement of the few pupils for whom English is an additional language is the same as that of other pupils throughout the school.
9. Pupils who are gifted or talented achieve well by the end of Year 11. In 2001, the proportion of pupils attaining the highest GCSE grades of A* and A was at least average in almost all subjects. It was above average in a few subjects including English literature, ICT and geography.
10. The attainment of girls is much higher than that of boys when they join the school in Year 9 and remains so at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11.
11. Pupils have below average standards of literacy when they join the school in Year 9. As a result of good teaching in English and good support for pupils with special educational needs, pupils improve their skills in reading and writing so that they are average by the end of Year 9 and remain average to the end of Year 11. In all subjects, pupils cope with the demands made on their skills in reading and writing. Many pupils make good use of the library to broaden the range of their reading. In a few subjects, such as art and design, pupils develop their skills of creative writing. In most subjects they improve their knowledge and spelling of technical vocabulary

through the prominent display and use of words used frequently in the subject. Skills in speaking are good. In many subjects, and particularly in English and history, pupils benefit from good opportunities to debate and discuss their work in class and in small groups. The reason that pupils' literacy skills are average rather than above average at the end of Year 11 is the lack of a coherent policy to ensure that the teaching of literacy is consistently good across all subjects.

12. Skills of numeracy develop steadily as pupils move through the school and are average throughout Years 9 to 11. In mathematics, pupils improve their numeracy, and particularly their skills in mental arithmetic, as a result of the implementation of suggestions for learning activities contained in the National Strategy for Numeracy for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Pupils' mathematical skills are adequate for their work in all subjects. In geography, they use a range of graphical and statistical skills well to assist their understanding and to improve the presentation of their work. They use skills in estimating, measuring and calculating effectively in work in many subjects such as physical education, design and technology and science.
13. Pupils' skills in ICT are average in Year 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11. They use and develop their ICT skills well in a few subjects. Pupils use their good skills in word processing to present their work well in subjects such as English, French and geography. They access the Internet for personal research and to provide information for their coursework. In design and technology, they make good use of the computing resources available to improve their work. However, in many subjects teachers rarely provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to use or develop their ICT skills. Limited access to the computer suites restricts pupils' opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning in many subjects.
14. The main contributory factors to good achievement by the end of Year 11 are the overall good quality of teaching, pupils' positive attitudes to learning and the increasingly effective use of assessment in most subjects to set realistic and challenging targets for improvement. A few factors hinder the school's good attempts to raise standards further by the end of Year 11. They include the current staffing difficulties in modern languages, the erratic attendance of a few pupils and insufficient use of ICT to enhance learning in several subjects.
15. The school sets challenging targets for performance in external examinations. It bases these targets on pupils' previous attainment and comparisons with appropriate national comparative information. It exceeded by more than three per cent its suitably challenging target for 50 per cent of pupils to gain five or more grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 2002.

Sixth form

16. The courses taken by students are taught either wholly in the school or in a shared teaching arrangement with the other schools and colleges in the local sixth form cluster. The inspection focused on nine subjects. Most students in Years 12 and 13 follow courses that lead to AS/A2-level examinations. Very few students follow vocational courses in Years 12 and 13.
17. Standards in the sixth form are average, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. They vary among subjects from well above average to below average. Taking into account students' prior attainment in GCSE examinations, achievement in external examinations recently is satisfactory.

18. Standards of work seen in classes in Years 12 and 13 of subjects inspected and sampled, in scrutiny of coursework and written work, and in discussions with students are average overall. They are well above average in design and technology, above average in English and art and design, average in physical education and below average in mathematics, ICT, biology and chemistry. They point to satisfactory achievement overall compared with students' earlier attainment in GCSE examinations.
19. In 2001, results at A-level matched the national average overall, although in most subjects, many of which had few candidates, they were below the national average. Results were above average in the popular courses in English literature and general studies. They were average for the large number taking the examinations in English language and communication studies. In the two previous years, results were below average for boys and for girls. Provisional results in A2-level examinations in 2002 indicate that results were below those of 2001. Students' results in both of these years generally matched expectations based on prior attainment. The attainment of boys in Years 12 and 13 is similar to that of girls. It varies from year to year and reflects the different levels of attainment of successive year groups.
20. Results at AS-level were well below average in 2001. They represented poor achievement. Provisional results for 2002 indicate vastly improved standards and at least satisfactory achievement based on prior attainment. A few factors caused the underachievement in AS-level examinations in 2001. Firstly, the institutions that make up the sixth form cluster took a long time to agree which courses and syllabuses should be taught throughout the cluster. This affected adversely the planning of the new courses. Secondly, teachers at the school took time to adjust to the requirements of the new examinations and to realise the effect of the increased demands upon students. Teachers were slow to realise that the timing of the AS-level examinations was about a month earlier than the traditional A-level examinations. This meant that opportunities for revision and consolidation of learning were restricted and students were not prepared as well as teachers would have wished. The greatly improved AS-level results in 2002 show that teachers have come to terms with the requirements for teaching these new courses.
21. Results in the only GNVQ advanced course taken in 2001 were well below average. They indicate satisfactory achievement compared with students' previous attainment.
22. Standards of literacy and numeracy are generally appropriate for students' work in all subjects, although a few lower attaining students have difficulty in writing accurately and at length. Students use their good skills in ICT well to enhance their work in a few subjects such as design and technology but in several subjects such as mathematics and chemistry they have too few opportunities to make the most of these skills to enhance and extend their work. Students develop good skills of research and independent study through good use of the library and its resources.
23. The main reasons that students' achievement is satisfactory rather than good are that teaching is satisfactory overall and many teachers are still finding out how to make the most effective use of information from assessment to show students how to improve. Another factor is that the range of courses available does not provide sufficient opportunities for students of lower attainment to succeed.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

24. Pupils have very good attitudes and most enjoy school. They develop a pride in the school. They show this through very high participation in extra-curricular activities in

- physical education and games. The school fields some very successful teams including a very enthusiastic girls' football team that is managed by a sixth form student. A good number of pupils take part in musical activities. At the first rehearsal for *Godspell*, pupils showed good skills in organising. They set up equipment so that the rehearsal could start promptly. Pupils were provided with the words for the songs but many had already learnt them. Pupils were very keen to perform.
25. Pupils have very good attitudes to the work in lessons. They make good progress by working hard. Their work is neat and well presented. They take a pride in what they do. This helps pupils when they come to revise for examinations. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils and good relationships among pupils motivate pupils to co-operate with each other and to work well. In a design and technology lesson, for example, pupils had the task of designing a leaflet to encourage children to eat more fruit and vegetables. They worked very well in groups and, after discussion and negotiation, they came to a mutually agreed group decision. Boys and girls worked together well. Personal development was good because pupils learned some important skills necessary for adult life, such as listening carefully to different viewpoints. In most lessons, relationships are often very good with much commitment from the pupils. In a physical education lesson observed, pupils were very supportive of one other and enjoyed working independently. They responded very positively when making judgements about one another's performance and techniques. They did this sensibly and sensitively. Pupils from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds work together well.
 26. Most pupils try hard and want to do well. In the very small number of lessons seen in which attitudes were unsatisfactory, these attitudes were associated with some unsatisfactory teaching. Generally, pupils are very tolerant. They continue to try hard even in lessons that they do not find interesting.
 27. The attitudes and behaviour in lessons of pupils on the register of special needs are good. This is mainly because they are motivated well and know that teachers want them to succeed. In lessons in design and technology and in the withdrawal groups for individual literacy in Year 9, pupils' concentration and determination to succeed were very good.
 28. The school uses effectively a system of temporary internal exclusion in cases of any disruptive behaviour by pupils. The Refocus Unit is organised and run throughout the week by the co-ordinator of special educational needs and the learning support assistants. The aim is to keep pupils who might be near exclusion within the school and to help them to confront their behavioural problems within a calm and quiet environment. The unit was successful in doing this with two to three pupils each day during the week of the inspection.
 29. Behaviour is good both in classrooms and around the school. The previous inspection reported unsatisfactory behaviour in the corridors. There have been good improvements to behaviour in the corridors. Despite obvious overcrowding in narrow corridors, pupils behave sensibly as they move around school. Behaviour in the dining hall is good. Fixed-term exclusions are now average and declining. The school avoids permanent exclusions wherever possible. The school's good arrangements for dealing with isolated incidents of inappropriate behaviour by trying to improve pupil's behaviour have helped to keep rates of exclusion down. Pupils and parents report very little bullying.
 30. Personal development is enhanced by the Christian ethos of the school and the very good relationships within the school. Pupils respect the views of others. For example,

in an English lesson in which drink driving was discussed, pupils listened sensibly to the views of others. The higher attaining pupils understood issues like stereotyping and empathised with the views of others. Pupils generally treat property with respect.

31. Although the reported rate of attendance of 90.8 per cent for last year is close to average, the figure is unreliable. The school's procedures for recording attendance are unsatisfactory and insufficiently rigorous. A small minority of pupils take odd days off school. Rates of unauthorised absence are high, though this is probably misleading and due more to the lax procedures for checking that absences are accounted for. Nevertheless, inadequate attendance by a few pupils means that they do not complete their GCSE examinations.

Sixth form

32. Students have very positive attitudes towards their studies. They work hard and show a genuine desire to do well. Students have very mature attitudes towards their workload. Most of their working files are very detailed and kept extremely well. Many extend their work through considerable amounts of personal study. This helps students to achieve at least as well as they should. Students in Year 12 are just starting to develop independence. At this stage of the courses, a few are still too reliant on the teacher and have not adjusted fully to the demands of the advanced courses and the need for personal study and research. Homework is often designed to encourage students to carry out independent research. Very occasionally, students show little enthusiasm in the work, as seen in a biology lesson in which the teacher had not explained the work well and students were unsure of what they were expected to do.
33. Relationships among students and between students and teachers are very good. A serious and purposeful working atmosphere in the classroom assists learning. Students treat one other with respect. This was evident in lessons such as one in communication studies in which students were asked to analyse each other's role within the group. Students support each other well, as seen in a Year 13 physical education lesson in which students had to tackle the difficult topic of aerobic and anaerobic respiration. Students are receptive to new ideas and fresh viewpoints. For example, in art and design lessons they willingly talk about what they found inspiring and what they found disappointing.
34. Students are prepared to take initiative. A group of students, for instance, are busy organising a Christmas ball. Students enjoy their active involvement in and organisation of 'Super Sevens' sports events that are extended to include other competitions including cookery. These events provide a good sense of fun and competition that assist the social and personal development of students.
35. Students' regular attendance helps them to achieve appropriate standards. The circular nature of the cluster's bus route sometimes results in students being late for lessons, through no fault of their own.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

36. The quality of teaching and the quality of learning are good overall. Teaching is good in Year 9 and in Years 10 to 11. It is satisfactory in the sixth form. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection. In two out of every three lessons observed, teaching was good or better. The proportion of lessons observed that were very good or better has improved from about one in eight to better than one

in every five. The proportion of teaching observed that was less than satisfactory has declined from one in every eight lessons to one in every 16.

37. In the core subjects, teaching is good throughout Years 9 to 11 in English and mathematics. In science, it is satisfactory in Year 9 and good in Years 10 to 11. Teaching is good in Years 9 to 11 in art and design, geography, history and ICT. In physical education, teaching is good in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. In design and technology and music, teaching is satisfactory in Year 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. In modern languages, teaching is unsatisfactory in Years 9 to 11, largely because of difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers. Currently, the school has sufficient staff in other subjects with appropriate qualifications and experience to meet the needs of pupils of all backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those who are gifted or talented.
38. Pupils' achievement in Years 9 to 11 usually matches the quality of teaching that they receive in the different subjects. The achievement of a few pupils is not as high as it should be because their attendance is unsatisfactory and hinders the continuity of their learning.
39. An increasingly successful aspect of teaching in a few subjects, but not in French, is the focus on trying to raise the attainment of boys. As a result, boys' results in the GCSE examinations in 2002 showed a big improvement from the previous year. In attempts to help boys to raise standards, many teachers have adjusted the ways they teach. They now take care to share the lesson's objectives closely with the class and provide a series of carefully planned, interesting and short-term tasks. This helps all pupils, and boys in particular, to keep their concentration and focus well on the activities. In a few classes, the seating of boys next to girls helps to create a good atmosphere for learning. The provision of one-to-one help for pupils and special packs of information for parents about how to help boys to achieve well, is successful in raising standards. The personal plans for a pupil's improvement and the effective use of praise by most teachers gives all pupils good opportunities to do well. Boys have found the modular courses in Years 10 and 11 to their liking because they get quick feedback on how well they are doing. The improved use of assessment to set short and long-term targets has been particularly effective in helping boys to raise attainment considerably in design and technology.
40. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good across the school. It provides particularly good support to individuals in Year 9 who need to improve their literacy skills quickly. Pupils using the programmes to improve their reading and writing receive immediate and encouraging feedback on their performance from the learning support assistants. As a result, they make good progress. Most teachers make effective use of the good individual education plans to assist these pupils to reach their targets and to make sure that the work is of appropriate challenge and difficulty. However, in a small number of classes seen in which teachers paid insufficient attention to pupils' individual needs, pupils with learning difficulties struggled and made insufficient progress. Learning support assistants provide good care and assistance, both in and out of class, to individuals and groups of pupils that help pupils with special educational needs to achieve well by the end of Year 11. Teachers and learning support assistants keep careful records of progress to ensure that these pupils achieve well over time.
41. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language make progress at the same rate as other pupils. This is largely because teachers take special care to ensure that these pupils have work of suitable difficulty and that they understand what

- needs to be done. Pupils of different minority ethnic backgrounds make the same rate of progress as other pupils because staff make them all feel equally valued. Pupils of high attainment, including those who are gifted or talented, achieve at least as well as expected by the end of Year 11 because most teachers set work that stretches and motivates them to do well.
42. Teaching is more consistently good in Years 10 and 11 than in Year 9. This is partly because teachers have more accurate and detailed information about pupils' previous attainment and capabilities in Years 10 and 11 than they do in Year 9. Teachers also have a longer time to prepare pupils for the GCSE examinations than the short time available for preparation for the national tests at the end of Year 9. Accordingly, pupils' achievement, though good overall by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11, is very good in a few subjects such as English, ICT and physical education by the end of Year 11. However, unsatisfactory teaching in French results in underachievement by the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
43. The quality of learning is good because the large majority of pupils in Years 9 to 11 are keen to do their best, get on well with each other and with the teaching and support staff, and are prepared to work hard. In most lessons, pupils participate willingly in activities and concentrate well on the tasks set. Particularly in Years 10 and 11, most pupils have a good awareness of how well they are doing. Pupils of all levels of attainment respond well to the overall good teaching they receive. Boys and girls work at a suitably fast rate to complete the work set. They acquire a good knowledge and understanding of the work in most subjects. In many lessons, pupils show good recall of previous work and use this to consolidate their understanding. They enjoy thinking things out for themselves, as observed, for example, in several mathematics lessons in which teachers encouraged pupils to provide their own solutions to problems. Pupils use their good skills in creativity well in lessons in many subjects, as seen in a Year 11 art and design lesson in which pupils produced a wide range of interesting ideas for designing shoes. Although pupils use their skills of independent learning well when opportunities arise, teachers in many subjects provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their skills in ICT to extend their learning and raise standards further.
44. Teaching has many positive features. The most apparent strength is the competent manner in which the vast majority of teachers manage their classes effectively to ensure that pupils receive work of suitable difficulty and participate fully so that learning proceeds at a good pace. An example of this occurred in a very good English lesson for a class in Year 10. Pupils knew clearly what they were expected to do during the lesson and, through a series of interesting and challenging activities, made very good progress in learning about media techniques. Teachers have suitably high expectations for pupils' success. Pupils know that they are expected to work hard. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils create a good climate for learning in most lessons. Teachers make satisfactory use of marking and assessment to show pupils how to improve their work. They set homework of suitable amount and quality to extend pupils' learning with a good range of tasks including revision and investigation. In most lessons, teachers use a good range of different activities for learning that help to maintain pupils' interest and concentration.
45. In lessons in which teaching was satisfactory rather than good, teachers sometimes had not paid enough attention to pupils' prior attainment and, as a result, a few pupils found the work too easy and a few found it too difficult. Occasionally, teachers did not make the most effective use of all the time available and pupils spent too much time copying up notes. In these lessons, teachers tended to do too much of the work and did not always provide enough opportunities for pupils to think for themselves.

46. No lessons were seen in which teaching was poor. However, in a few lessons throughout the school unsatisfactory teaching was observed. In French, for example, although some good teaching occurred, teaching and learning were unsatisfactory in a few lessons because expectations of the teacher and class were not high enough and there was hardly any use of the French language. The lack of skills of class management by unqualified teachers in French resulted in too slow a pace of learning and unsatisfactory progress. The quality of supply teaching varied and was occasionally unsatisfactory, largely because of lack of expertise in the subject. This was seen in a Year 10 mathematics class in which the teacher was unable to provide pupils with the appropriate help and advice that they needed.
47. The teaching of literacy, oracy and numeracy is satisfactory across subjects. The teaching of ICT across subjects varies considerably and is satisfactory overall. Partly because pupils enter the school in Year 9, features of the National Strategy for Literacy are not as evident as in many other schools. Pupils develop their literacy skills very well in English so that they have literacy skills that are competent enough to help them in their work in all subjects. In a few subjects, such as in art and design, teachers help pupils to improve their understanding of work in the subject through creative writing. Teachers in most subjects make effective use of technical words on display to help pupils to increase their vocabulary and to improve their spelling. However, the lack of a coherent policy for the teaching of literacy skills across the curriculum means that subjects are inconsistent in the ways they try to encourage pupils to write better. For this reason, standards of literacy overall are not raised above average levels.
48. Teachers provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to make competent use of their adequate skills of numeracy to support their work in many subjects including science, design and technology, English, geography, music and physical education. In mathematics, the effective use of methods suggested in the National Numeracy Strategy helps pupils of all levels of attainment to develop their mathematical skills. Pupils often use and develop their statistical and graphical skills well, in subjects such as geography, in the analysis, interpretation and display of information.
49. Opportunities for pupils to use and develop their skills in ICT across the curriculum have improved since the previous inspection but remain inadequate in several subjects. The school recognises that the use of ICT to promote and extend learning is insufficient in many subjects. In the few subjects in which teachers and pupils make effective use of ICT to assist learning, as in design and technology, pupils' skills in ICT contribute well to the good standards achieved. Generally, it is the individual teacher's enthusiasm and expertise in ICT, or lack of these, that determine the extent to which pupils use ICT in subjects. Because of this, not all pupils have sufficient access to the ICT facilities to improve their learning.

Sixth form

50. Teaching in the nine subjects inspected in Years 12 and 13 varies from satisfactory to very good and is satisfactory overall. The quality of learning is satisfactory and is often good. Students do not always use the allotted study period for each advanced course to develop their work in the particular subject as well as they should. The overall satisfactory quality of teaching and learning enables students to achieve standards that are at least as good as expected from their prior attainment in GCSE examinations. In two out of every three lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning was good. It was very good in one lesson out of every four observed. It was

unsatisfactory in about one lesson in 20. Teaching was very good in design and technology and good overall in art and design, English literature and physical education. It was satisfactory in the other five subjects. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen in geography and biology. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection.

51. The few students with special educational needs in the sixth form make similar rates of progress as other students because teachers use their good knowledge of these students and their learning needs to provide them with good support and work that is of suitable difficulty. In appropriate cases, the school makes application to examining boards for dispensation for students with learning or physical difficulties.
52. Students' very positive attitudes to school lead them to work hard to improve their standards of attainment. In subjects such as art and design, design and technology and English literature, students' learning is good or better because they have plenty of opportunities to use and develop their creative and investigative skills in a range of individual and group activities. In subjects such as mathematics, biology and chemistry they make satisfactory use and application of their problem-solving and investigative skills. They have infrequent opportunities in several subjects to enhance their skills of independent study through the use of ICT. Very good relationships between students and teachers enable learning to proceed at a suitable pace. Students listen carefully in lessons and respond positively to the tasks set. Teachers use a suitable variety of methods and activities to motivate students. In many lessons, students are involved actively in their own learning. Many have good skills of independent study and enjoy working things out for themselves. In many lessons, as seen in English, for example, students use their good speaking skills to debate and discuss their work competently.
53. Sixth form teaching has several good features. Most teachers have a suitable expertise in the specialist subject and use this well to plan lessons effectively and to encourage students of all levels of attainment to do well. Most teachers use good techniques of questioning to ensure that students play an active part in the lesson. They remind students constantly of how best to tackle examination questions. Occasionally, as seen in a Year 13 geography lesson, the teacher's command of the subject is not always confident enough to inspire the students to make fast enough progress. After the disappointing AS-level results in 2001, teachers have improved their knowledge of the new examinations' requirements and have adjusted the content of the schemes of work. As a result, students in all subjects inspected are making at least satisfactory progress at this stage of their advanced courses.
54. In the lessons that were satisfactory rather than good, teachers did not use a sufficiently wide range of learning activities to ensure that students worked at a fast pace throughout. Often, in these lessons, the teacher took too prominent a part and did not involve the students sufficiently in discussion or practical activities. This was the case in an ICT lesson in Year 12 in which students had few opportunities to share information or to work independently to solve problems in an exercise on handling data. At times, teachers tend to rely on a narrow range of learning activities and do not always provide work of sufficient difficulty to extend the learning of all students. Occasionally, as in a mathematics lesson in Year 12, students were not clear about the lesson's objectives and were unsure about how to improve their work. In one of the two unsatisfactory lessons seen, both in Year 13, the main shortcomings included work that was of inappropriate difficulty for the class, ineffective marking of students' work and too great a reliance on photocopied notes. In the other, the teacher's subject expertise was inadequate to engage the students' full attention or to give them

additional examples or extension work. Students were unclear about what was expected of them and the lesson finished early.

55. The teaching of the key skills of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. All students have suitable basic skills to meet the requirements of the courses they are studying. Students enhance their learning by using and applying their ICT skills well in a few subjects and particularly in design and technology. However, they have insufficient opportunities to use ICT in subjects such as mathematics and chemistry.

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

56. The quality and range of learning opportunities in Years 9 to 11 are satisfactory. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and reflects the school's published aims. The deficiencies of curricular provision identified in the previous inspection have been corrected. All pupils have equal access to the learning opportunities provided by the school.
57. Provision for teaching literacy is good in that pupils improve their skills in reading and writing to average by the end of Year 11. However, little is done in subjects other than English to raise attainment in literacy above average levels. Few departments have a clear scheme of work for improving literacy in their subject. Most subjects have technical vocabulary on display but other than this there is little co-ordination of the teaching of literacy across subjects. For this reason standards of literacy overall are not raised above average levels. The school has, as a pilot institution, implemented the Key Stage 3 National Numeracy Strategy successfully in Year 9. Its effect is now evident in the improved teaching of mathematics in Years 10 and 11 and pupils' adequate mathematical skills.
58. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. It is managed well and uses learning support assistants to good effect to assist small groups of pupils and individuals as appropriate. The additional literacy programme to help pupils with learning difficulties to improve their reading and writing skills in Year 9 is a successful feature. The few pupils who speak English as an additional language participate fully in all subjects of the curriculum because their skills in English are competent enough to cope with the suitably demanding work set. Pupils on the register of special needs have access to the full curriculum.
59. Pupils have few opportunities to study vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. However, a few pupils in Year 10 do not study a modern foreign language and, alternatively and appropriately, attend work-related courses at local colleges on a day-release basis. This arrangement is succeeding in retaining these pupils in school because the courses suit their needs and aspirations well. It also provides them with additional tuition so that they work productively on GCSE coursework for subjects such as drama, English and design and technology.
60. The school is effective in making sure that all pupils, whatever their needs and circumstances, receive appropriate support. This ensures that they have every opportunity to take part in all lessons. A successful initiative is the Refocus Unit, in which pupils at risk of exclusion receive good support and encouragement to modify their behaviour so that they can return to the main class. Pupils feel that this provides a fair sanction and a clear route back to the full curriculum.

61. Senior staff and the governing body monitor the curriculum effectively to check that it meets pupils' needs and take appropriate action. They recognise the need to extend the range of courses in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form to include more work-related provision. Plans are underway to consult pupils and students about what changes need to be made to improve the vocational aspects of the curriculum so that the most appropriate courses are offered.
62. Provision for personal, social and health education is good. The comprehensive programme helps pupils to acquire a good understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship. It presents good opportunities for them to learn about, and discuss sensitively, issues relating to such topics as the misuse of drugs and matters associated with health and sex. Pupils value the personal guidance they receive as they pass through the school. Form tutors usually stay with the same group throughout Years 9 to 11. They know their pupils very well, and successfully monitor their academic and personal development. Learning mentors, funded through additional European funds, deal effectively with problems pupils might encounter, such as those with study skills, meeting targets for GCSE grades, attendance and personal situations.
63. Provision for careers education is good. Suitably, it begins in Year 9 and is part of the programme for personal, social and health education. Form tutors teach these lessons and make good use of learning materials of good quality. The local careers company provides valuable support. Its members visit the school frequently and regularly to provide guidance to small groups and individuals as appropriate. Additionally, the school makes effective use of outside agencies and its links with local industry to provide comprehensive and impartial careers advice to pupils. Pupils in Year 10 benefit from a good programme of work experience that often matches their current career preferences. Pupils valued the one-day conference that enabled them to learn much about the world of work.
64. Effective links with the community enrich the curriculum by providing guest speakers and additional activities to support the work of subjects, particularly careers education and personal, social and health education. Close links with the many partner middle schools enable pupils to settle quickly into the upper school. Curricular links are adequate and lead to a satisfactory continuity of learning from Year 8 to Year 9.
65. A good range of extra-curricular activities promotes pupils' social and academic development. Pupils have adequate opportunities to engage in further academic studies or in other areas of interest. Most subjects provide extra support outside of lessons for pupils studying GCSE courses. Pupils value the good number of musical, recreational and sports activities that occur after school. Attendance at these is generally good.

Personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

66. Provision for pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall.
67. Provision for developing pupils' spiritual awareness is satisfactory. The school's spiritual director has prepared a full range of prayers and thought-provoking activities to be used during tutorial sessions. In many classes, tutors use these well so that pupils have time to reflect upon spiritual aspects of their lives. In other classes, though, tutors make less effective use of the material and pupils have insufficient opportunities for reflection. The chaplaincy team provides good spiritual opportunities

for its members and those with whom they work. In English lessons, pupils learn to appreciate aesthetic awareness in literature and drama. In music, the beauty of music is emphasised and they discuss the effect music can have on moods. In art and design, teachers encourage pupils to be introspective and reflective in their creative work. They consider the power of the natural world in geography, reflecting, for example, on the effects of flooding. In a lesson observed in geography, pupils were moved when they were considering the differences between India and the richer Western World. In the Refocus Unit there is a clear emphasis on spiritual matters and the Catholic ethos of the school.

68. Provision for moral development is good in all subjects and particularly through the effective use of form tutors to teach the programme of personal, social and health education. The school's Christian ethos is reflected well in the school's code for behaviour. Teachers are good role models. They insist upon good behaviour, are fair in their judgements and help pupils to acquire a clear sense of right and wrong. In English, pupils increase their moral awareness in good discussions and debates about controversial issues, such as seen in a lesson discussing racial prejudice in the USA. In this lesson, pupils discussed matters freely and with much sensitivity. In music, pupils learn to respect each other's performances and to take care of the expensive instruments they use. In physical education, teachers take great care to emphasise fair play and the acceptance of decisions in games.
69. Provision for social development is very good. It is reflected in pupils' good behaviour and in the good relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers. Pupils work co-operatively and effectively in pairs and groups as seen in many lessons, particularly in English, music, art and design, drama, ICT and history. Teamwork is good in physical education. The school's Activities Week provides many valuable opportunities for pupils to extend their social and cultural development, through such events as pilgrimages in France. The programme of extra-curricular activities provides pupils with very good social experiences that help them to co-operate well with each other and to acquire tolerance. Pupils respond very positively to the encouragement from staff to support charitable causes and often take the initiative themselves to support different charities locally and internationally. Pupils respond very positively to the opportunities to exercise responsibility, for example in work to support charities.
70. Provision for cultural development is good. Multicultural aspects form part of many assemblies and other meetings when guest speakers from other faiths and cultures address the pupils. Very good displays to promote anti-racism help pupils to acquire responsible attitudes towards people of all ethnicities. In subjects such as geography and history, pupils acquire a good awareness of the multicultural nature of British society. In art and design, pupils study the art culture of other countries, and of their own. Although cultural issues are a feature of lessons in many subjects, the teaching of cultural affairs happens usually by chance rather than through planning.

Sixth form

71. Students have satisfactory learning opportunities in the sixth form. A good range of AS-level and A2-level courses meets the needs of higher attaining students. The sixth form curriculum also provides a course in the Bishop's Certificate in religious studies and for ICT at intermediate GNVQ level. For students of average and below average attainment there is a limited range of vocational courses at the school.

72. The North Northampton cluster arrangement, in which the school and four other local sixth forms and two colleges of further education combine to provide a good range of courses, ensures that students can study a wide range of AS-level and A2-level courses. The school recognises the current deficiencies both in its provision of vocational courses and of suitable courses for lower attaining students. Because the number of students staying on from Year 11 to the sixth form is quite high, at two in every three students, and contains a sizeable proportion of students of below average attainment, the school has identified correctly the need to extend the range of sixth form courses.
73. Whilst the cluster arrangement is beneficial in extending the curriculum, it places constraints on timetabling. The timetable must consist of thirty 50-minute sessions every week and subjects must be timetabled on a fixed rotation pattern. Such a system restricts flexibility in the rest of the school. In the cluster, all AS-level and A2-level subjects have an appropriate amount of six periods per week. In this school, however, because of staffing problems, five periods are allocated per subject with one additional self-study period.
74. Many of the students who complete A-level courses at the end of Year 13 subsequently enter higher education. Students whose ambitions lie outside the range of subjects offered by the school leave at the end of Year 11 and attend local colleges to pursue their chosen vocational and other courses. Nevertheless, a higher than average proportion of students choose to remain in school for their post-16 education.
75. Provision for teaching key skills is satisfactory. Communication, application of number and ICT are included suitably as part of many subjects' requirements. However, in several subjects, such as chemistry and mathematics, students receive insufficient opportunities to use ICT to extend their work. A suitable programme of personal, social and health education covers topics such as career action planning, study skills and applications for higher education.
76. Students enhance their social development through active participation in a good range of extra-curricular events that include sporting activities.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

77. The school provides a good quality of care for its pupils. Teachers know the pupils well and provide good support for their all-round personal development. Procedures to support pupils' academic development have improved and are generally good because teachers are making increasingly effective use of assessment to help pupils to improve their work.
78. The school has good and established systems that help to ensure that pupils are supported well. Pupils have confidence in their teachers and find them approachable. Pupils usually stay with the same form tutor during their time in the school. This arrangement helps to promote very good relationships between teachers and pupils and ensures that tutors know pupils' needs well. The role of the form tutor has developed since the previous inspection. The much closer link now between pastoral and subject staff is promoting academic achievement.
79. Procedures for child protection are satisfactory. The school has improved the system for induction of staff to ensure that all members of staff are fully aware of child protection procedures. The school has a good awareness of the needs of children

who are in public care. Health and safety procedures are satisfactory. Pupils who are ill or who have accidents are cared for well.

80. The monitoring of personal development is good. Regular systems, which monitor pupils' attitudes to work, ensure that pupils who slack are quickly identified. Pupils who apply themselves well are praised. This helps to ensure that pupils work hard and achieve well.
81. Subject teachers, form tutors and pastoral staff provide good support for pupils. A well-developed system of mentoring uses teachers and employees of local business to encourage and assist pupils to achieve GCSE passes at grades C or above. It also supports higher attaining pupils who become over-anxious about their examination performance. The school makes effective use of a local agency to provide careers and personal guidance to help pupils.
82. Procedures for monitoring behaviour and encouraging good discipline are good. The school has developed an effective system for managing behaviour that has succeeded in improving pupils' behaviour considerably since the previous inspection. There are good systems to reward pupils for good effort and regular attendance. The physical education department uses a good range of rewards and ensures that pupils who find physical education difficult but try hard have their efforts recognised. The large majority of teachers have good skills in managing pupils' behaviour. Through very good relationships with pupils, they promote an atmosphere of mutual respect. This helps to ensure that pupils behave well in lessons and learn effectively. Pupils' behaviour in corridors was unsatisfactory during the previous inspection. Sensible and sensitive supervision by senior staff ensures that behaviour in the crowded corridors is now good. Procedures for anti-bullying are well known and effective. Many of the pupils interviewed said that issues about bullying are followed up promptly and appropriately.
83. The Refocus Unit, to which pupils who have behaved in an unacceptable manner are sent for specific amounts of time, helps these pupils to modify their behaviour. They have their lessons in the unit and are separated from their friends. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour and receive strong moral guidance from staff. They regain their place in the normal class by behaving well. Sensible use of the unit has reduced the number of fixed-term exclusions by providing a good arrangement for pupils to continue to be educated on site while improving their behaviour.
84. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support and guidance. The special needs co-ordinator, as a mainstream science teacher, relies on learning support assistants and other colleagues to provide much of the day-to-day support for pupils. The school meets the requirements of pupils who have statements of special educational needs. It has modified the premises recently to allow access for disabled pupils in wheelchairs. Further plans include the provision of a lift to the upper floor to be completed within the current year. Files show that annual reviews of pupils' special educational needs are carried out properly.
85. Procedures for monitoring attendance are unsatisfactory and do not meet statutory requirements. Heads of year work hard to encourage pupils to attend school regularly. The computerised system is used suitably to identify pupils who have serious problems in attendance. However, systems for monitoring attendance are not rigorous or systematic enough so that the school is unable to make very early contact with parents of pupils who are absent. Systems for accounting for absence operate slowly and result in high rates of unauthorised absence, when staff do not follow up

absences in time. Records of attendance do not meet statutory requirements as the school does not produce or retain paper registers from its computerised records. There is insufficient clerical support to help the monitoring of attendance. The school has had frequent changes of education welfare officer in the past few years. All of these result in missed opportunities to recognise patterns of absence and in inaccurate recording of attendance figures.

86. Procedures for monitoring and assessing pupils' academic progress have improved since the previous inspection and are good overall in Years 9 to 11. Information from partner middle schools is insufficiently consistent to provide good bases for prediction. Instead, the school makes good use of pupils' results in standardised tests to predict future performance. This information, together with information from the twice-termly assessments of pupils' attainment and the end-of-session examinations, provides a complete record of every pupil's performance and progress in all subjects. It is available to pupils, parents, subject teachers and those responsible for pupils' personal development. This helps to ensure that pupils are performing as well as they should. Pupils who are underachieving are identified and appropriate remedial action is taken. A good mentoring programme in Years 10 and 11 aimed at pupils working at the boundaries of GCSE grades is effective in raising standards. The school makes good use of ICT to reduce the administrative burden of recording and analysing information about pupils' performance. Teachers analyse available information from assessment well and use it to set targets for pupils' improvement and, usually, to show them how to improve.
87. Form tutors and heads of year monitor pupils' personal and academic carefully. As part of this process, pupils have frequent opportunities to assess their own progress. They are able to reflect upon their personal strengths and weaknesses and how well they are doing. As a result, pupils have a very clear idea of the levels at which they are working and the grades they are likely to achieve. This helps pupils, in discussion with their tutors, to identify what they need to do to improve and the action they need to take. When pupils are having difficulties or underachieving they receive extra help and advice from staff that helps them to improve their work.

Sixth form

Assessment

88. The use of assessment to record how well students are doing and how they can make sufficient improvement to achieve their desired grades in external examinations has improved recently and is satisfactory. However, the school recognises that the good information it has about students' prior attainment and potential is not used to the same good effect in all subjects. One of the priorities of the new leadership in the sixth form is to ensure that teachers in all subjects make more efficient and effective use of assessment to set meaningful and suitably challenging targets for raising standards both of students and subject departments. In most subjects, assessment is effective in summarising achievement and informing staff and students about attainment to date. Insufficient attention is given to providing students with sufficient detail on how to achieve the targets that have been set. A few teachers, as seen in chemistry, do not take full account of students' prior attainment when planning lessons. Accordingly, they set work that is suitable mainly for students in the middle range of attainment in the class so that students of high attainment are insufficiently stretched at times, while lower attainers struggle to keep up. The accuracy and reliability of assessment vary among subjects. Students are not always aware of the

criteria that are used to assess their work and how this relates to examination grades. Therefore, they are not aware of their real potential in a few subjects.

Advice, support and guidance

89. The well-established programme of induction helps to prepare students well for entry to the sixth form. Students receive plenty of useful information and advice on the courses available to them. They receive written information of good quality and have the opportunity to sample sixth form lessons. Students have good guidance and support if they feel they need to change courses early in Year 12. Throughout Years 12 and 13 students receive good advice, support and guidance from the head of sixth form, tutors and external agencies. The effective tutorial programme ensures that students have good access to advice about university and college applications and future careers. There is less advice available for students who wish to seek employment or to follow non-degree courses. In their discussions with inspectors, students were very positive about the quality of guidance available. Very good relationships between students and staff give students the confidence to approach staff in order to share problems or concerns.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

90. The school has a satisfactory partnership with parents. It helps to support pupils' learning. Parents are pleased with the quality of education offered by the school. The school is popular and is oversubscribed in the lower years. Most parents are supportive of the school and their children's education. Other parents show little interest in the school's activities. The school serves a wide area. This causes transport difficulties for a few parents in establishing close contact between home and school. The school has a small but active Parents and Friends Association that organises regular social and fund-raising events.
91. Parents report that their children like coming to school and they are making good progress in their lessons. Parents feel that their children are developing mature and responsible attitudes and that they are expected to work hard and do their best. Parents are aware that their children are looked after well and find the school very easy to approach if they have questions or problems. Inspection findings support these views of parents.
92. A few parents are concerned about the amount of homework set. Although parents and pupils sometimes feel that the setting of homework is inconsistent, the inspection found the use of homework to be satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. A number of parents were concerned about how well the school works in partnership with parents. Inspection findings are that links with parents are good. The school is in frequent contact with parents informing them when their children are doing well or when they are struggling. The school works hard to support parents when their children have such problems as inappropriate behaviour or erratic attendance. Although parents generally thought behaviour to be good there were a few concerns about behaviour in specific classes. The inspection evidence indicated that behaviour is good both in the classroom and around school. The very few instances when pupils' attitudes and behaviour were unsatisfactory were attributable to unsatisfactory teaching.
93. The school supplies good information for parents. Before pupils join the school in Year 9 the school holds informative and useful meetings for parents. The prospectus is well designed and contains all appropriate details. It reflects the school's good standards of work and behaviour. The annual report of governors to parents complies

with statutory requirements but the writing is small and is not easy to read. Frequent and regular newsletters give parents a good picture of the life of the school. Separate subject and tutor evenings give parents ample opportunity to discuss their children's progress. Annual written reports are usually of good quality but there is variation among subjects. English reports usually tell pupils what they need to do to improve further but not all subjects are as good at showing pupils how to meet their targets.

94. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are invited to annual review meetings and usually attend. Pupils and parents are encouraged to contribute in the setting of new targets both at the review stage and in the drawing up of individual educational plans. For pupils who have been placed in the Refocus Unit as a result of serious misbehaviour, parents are expected to come to a meeting with senior staff to discuss the conditions for the pupil's return to the mainstream class.
95. Sixth form students hold positive views about the school. The school's partnership with students is good. The information provided by the school for parents and students is good. The school prospectus contains appropriate information about the sixth form. Parents can easily contact sixth form staff about any problems or concerns.
96. Students feel that the quality of education is good. Whilst teaching and support in most subjects live up to their expectations there are some variations. Students appreciate the good quality of support and guidance they receive from teachers and form tutors. Students would like to see better assessment of their work. The school recognises the improvement of assessment of students' work as a key area for development.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

97. The previous inspection in 1996 indicated that leadership and management were ineffective and required considerable improvement. The determination and commitment of the current head teacher, supported well by an effective senior management team, have enabled the school to make good improvements in recent years. The quality of leadership and management is now good and has made an important contribution to raising standards and improvements in teaching, learning and behaviour. It sets a clear direction for further improvements.
98. The head teacher maintains a good overview of the school. This has had a considerable influence on attainment and is reflected in the improvement in GCSE results. The deputy head teacher provides good support. This is evident in the effective system of monitoring that has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning by linking the professional development of staff closely to the results of performance management reviews. Other members of the senior management team share the same commitment to raising standards. In recent years the school has experienced difficulties in recruiting staff in key areas. Despite these difficulties, the school has managed to raise standards in almost all subject areas.
99. The school meets its aims well as is clear in its daily life and routines. It is committed to the all-round development of the whole person within a Christian environment. The school has a caring, purposeful atmosphere in which pupils work hard and achieve well.
100. The good quality of leadership and effective management are evident in the considerable improvements since the previous inspection. Standards at GCSE

examinations have improved. The previous deficiencies in management have been corrected. Procedures for monitoring performance are now generally good. Statutory requirements for the curriculum are now fully in place. Suitable job descriptions have been drawn up for senior staff and all staff are now clear about their responsibilities and areas of accountability. Systems of communication have improved so that all staff are kept fully informed and are able to participate in formulating the school's policies. Developmental planning has improved and is good. The school's priorities are costed suitably. Targets are now linked closely to the development plan. The previously inadequate provision for the support for pupils with special educational needs is now good. Effective financial planning has reduced the substantial earlier deficit to manageable proportions. Standards have been raised and many improvements have been secured. Good progress has been made towards resolving the key issues for action that were identified. However, the school has still not resolved the issue of the use and development of ICT in all subjects. The school has a shared commitment and the capacity to continue to make improvements.

101. The quality of middle managers was a weakness at the previous inspection. Currently, no department has unsatisfactory leadership and the management of subjects and years is good overall. This reflects the hard work and commitment of staff because a few managers have considerable responsibilities. For example, the head of English and, temporarily, the head of mathematics have other major whole-school managerial responsibilities and the co-ordinator for special educational needs co-ordinators spends much time as a teacher of science. Good management has led to improved achievement and higher GCSE results in many subjects. As a result of very good management and effective improvements in teaching in design and technology, GCSE results at grades A*-C are nearly four times higher than they were two years ago.
102. Governors fulfil their responsibilities satisfactorily. They have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the challenges that the school faces. They play a supportive role in planning for the school's improvement. Governors value and act upon the guidance of the head teacher and other senior staff and work closely with them when decisions are made. The school's development plan contains suitable priorities for raising standards. The various committees of the governing body work well in partnership with staff. The school meets all statutory requirements apart from certain aspects of those relating to the recording of attendance.
103. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is managed well by the special educational needs co-ordinator and the senior learning support assistants. The designated governor with responsibility for special educational needs has a clear overview of the school's provision through frequent and regular contacts with the department's staff. Provision has improved in a number of ways since the last inspection. A suite of dedicated rooms now accommodates well the base for learning support activities and the Refocus Unit. The school has recently made suitable alterations to the premises to accommodate pupils requiring wheelchair access.
104. Good systems for managing staff have been recognised by the award of 'Investor in People'. Successful implementation of the system of performance management has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
105. The school's financial planning is now good. The school has succeeded in reducing its debts considerably since the previous inspection. It deploys resources effectively. It spends its money sensibly. Specific funds coming into school, such as those for

- staff development and special education needs, are used for the appropriate purposes.
106. The senior management team makes good use of comparative local and national information to check how well the school and its departments are performing. Heads of department are still learning how to make best use of the available information to improve standards further.
 107. The school manages its adequate staffing, accommodation and resources well. Although the number, qualifications and experience of the teachers generally match the needs of the curriculum, there are shortages in a few areas. For example, there are insufficient teachers to ensure specialist teaching of all aspects of the physical education curriculum. This has had a negative effect on the curriculum insofar as the GNVQ course in leisure and tourism is no longer taught and the community sports leader award is no longer available in the sixth form. Recently, the school has experienced difficulties in recruiting staff in a few subjects, notably in French and mathematics. Provision of staffing to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs is good. The work of the learning support assistants is an important element in the good progress made by these pupils. The school has difficulties in recruiting supply teachers with appropriate qualifications. This has an adverse effect on standards, as observed in a mathematics lesson in which the teacher's lack of expertise meant that pupils made unsatisfactory progress.
 108. Accommodation is satisfactory. The condition of the accommodation has improved since the previous inspection. Most subjects have their teaching rooms close together. A sizeable minority of teaching in French, particularly of lower attaining pupils, occurs in non-specialist rooms. Coupled with the shortage of suitably qualified and experienced teachers in French, this contributes to current underachievement in some French classes.
 109. Staff and pupils use the library and resource centre very well to support learning. Though limited in size and having only a modest provision of ICT, it is a welcoming and popular area for private study and research, especially by sixth form students. Book stocks are quite limited and financial support is below that found in many schools. As a result, many books need to be replaced and the range of provision extended. Nevertheless, all pupils and students in Year 9 and Year 12 follow a good programme of induction for making best use of the library. They value the opportunities it offers for extending their learning. Pupils are canvassed for their views on how the library might be improved and they are encouraged to help in running it.
 110. Spending on resources has been low for a number of years, as the school has tackled its budgetary difficulties. Although resources are satisfactory overall, there is a shortage of books in a few departments. For example, the history department has insufficient textbooks and as a result is heavily dependent on reprographics and uses a lot of time to produce materials. The lack of textbooks inhibits independent study. Many departments have insufficient access to computers and software. This restricts the quality and range of the curriculum in subjects such as science, art and design, geography, French and music.
 111. Taking into account pupils' achievement, the quality of education provided by the school, the community it serves and the amount of money it receives, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

112. Good and purposeful leadership and management in the sixth form set a very clear direction for future improvement. Students benefit from satisfactory management of the local cluster arrangements, which expand the range of courses and facilities open to students. The school has, appropriately and successfully, concentrated its efforts on tackling issues identified in the previous inspection that focused on raising standards at the end of Year 11. It is now ready to turn its attention more firmly to achieving similar improvements in the sixth form. Since the previous inspection, the governing body and senior management have maintained a satisfactory overview of the sixth form so that students have continued to attain average standards that usually match expectations based on their prior attainment. The recently appointed head of sixth form has a heavy workload because attempts to recruit a suitably qualified and experienced teacher to take over from him as head of mathematics have not yet proved successful. This, understandably, places limitations on the amount of time that can be spent on managing the sixth form. Accordingly, a few developments such as improvements in the use of assessment to raise standards are taking longer to reach full effectiveness than hoped for. However, there is strong realisation of what is good about the sixth form and what needs to improve. The current aims are appropriate. They include raising standards from average to above average on advanced courses, using assessment more effectively to improve students' achievement from satisfactory to good and providing a wider range of more appropriate courses for students of average and below average attainment. Students appreciate the good support they receive from the head of sixth form and form tutors. Relationships within the sixth form are very good and the school actively promotes equal opportunities. Quality assurance through careful monitoring of teaching in Years 12 and 13 is in the early stage of development.

Resources

113. The school makes effective and efficient use of the staffing, resources and accommodation for the teaching of courses in the sixth form both in the school and within the cluster. Resources available to the sixth form are of similar, satisfactory quality to those in the rest of the school. The accommodation available to sixth formers is satisfactory. The newly built sixth form block provides spacious teaching rooms and good ICT facilities. However, the use of ICT to extend work in many sixth form courses is limited. The sixth form common room is located in the main school and apart from space to work there are few facilities available to students. Teachers in Years 12 and 13 are, for the most part, suitably qualified and experienced to teach the courses for which they are timetabled. The sixth form is cost effective in relation to the school's expenditure as a whole.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

114. In order to raise standards and to make further improvements to the quality of education, the school should include the following key issues in its action plan.

- (1) Raise standards in French by
 - improving the quality of teaching and learning in the subject;
 - raising the attainment of boys;
 - using the French language more frequently in class;
 - making effective use of assessment to show pupils how to improve;
 - improving the quality of resources and accommodation.(Paragraphs: 6, 14, 46, 196, 197, 200, 201)
- (2) Increase pupils' use and development of their skills in ICT to support and enhance their work in all subjects by
 - implementing a consistent approach to the teaching of these key skills;
 - frequently checking the effectiveness of pupils' use of these skills to assist their learning in all subjects;
 - improving pupils' access to ICT facilities.(Paragraphs: 14, 43, 47, 49, 53, 55, 110, 145, 150, 161, 184, 193, 201, 208, 228)
- (3) Improve procedures for monitoring and recording pupils' attendance so that they meet statutory requirements.
(Paragraphs: 5, 14, 31, 38, 85, 102, 132, 138, 147, 191)

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weakness should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Deal with the items of health and safety reported to the school during the inspection. (Paragraph: 172)

Sixth form

- (1) Make more consistent and effective use of information about assessment to give students clear indications about how to improve their work and to enable teachers to set work of suitable difficulty to meet the needs of students of all levels of attainment in the class. (Paragraphs: 23, 88, 112)
- (2) Extend the range of learning opportunities for students of all levels of attainment by
 - providing more vocational courses;
 - developing more courses to suit the aspirations and needs of lower attaining students;
 - increasing opportunities for students in all subjects to use ICT to enhance their work. (Paragraphs: 22, 23, 71, 72, 75, 112, 113)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 – 11	106
	Sixth form	41
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		72

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 9 – 11							
Number	1	21	51	27	6	0	0
Percentage	1	20	48	25	6	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	0	11	16	12	2	0	0
Percentage	0	27	39	29	5	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 the sixth form as each lesson represents more than two percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	626	172
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	83	6

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	14	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	63	0

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	29

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.7
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	105	85	190

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	48	52	55
	Girls	65	47	44
	Total	113	99	99
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	60 (81)	52 (66)	53 (59)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (29)	26 (43)	21 (25)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	56	78	52
	Girls	69	66	44
	Total	125	144	96
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	67 (75)	76 (74)	51 (75)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (31)	48 (37)	22 (40)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	70	92	162

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	24	54	65
	Girls	53	78	80
	Total	77	132	145
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	48 (44)	81 (91)	90 (96)
	National	48 (47)	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	36.2 (38.3)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	29	35	64
	Average point score per candidate	13.7	14.9	14.4
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	29	33	62	3	4	7
	Average point score per candidate	12.9	14.9	14	8.0	7.5	7.7
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
Parent/pupil preferred not to say

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
603	62	0
8	0	0
22	0	0
6	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
2	1	0
9	0	0
0	0	0
24	10	0
3	0	0
7	0	0
109	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: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	41.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.2

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	243

Deployment of teachers: Y9– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74
---	----

Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27.8
Key Stage 4	24.8

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2 321 806
Total expenditure	2 369 022
Expenditure per pupil	3184
Balance brought forward from previous year	21 590
Balance carried forward to next year	-25 626

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	26
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	23
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
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

* Includes teachers on temporary contracts.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	798
Number of questionnaires returned	112

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	45	47	6	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	52	2	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	63	5	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	51	17	4	2
The teaching is good.	27	61	6	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	24	56	12	4	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	43	48	4	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	46	2	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	22	51	17	4	6
The school is well led and managed.	24	61	5	2	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	57	4	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	21	58	8	1	12

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Standards rise from below average at the start of Year 9 to above average at the end of Year 11.
- Good teaching and effective management lead to very good achievement by the end of Year 11.
- Pupils are very positive about their work in English and this helps them to achieve well.

Areas for improvement

- Occasionally, teachers do not involve pupils actively in learning so that they make less good progress.
- A few pupils make unsatisfactory progress because they do not attend school regularly.

127. Pupils enter the school with below average levels of attainment in English. By the end of Year 9, pupils' work is usually at the national average. National Curriculum test results in 2001 confirm this picture of average attainment. These results were higher than those in mathematics and science. Boys attained less well against national figures than girls. Results for 2002 show a surprising and large decline in the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above and results overall were below those attained in mathematics and science. The pattern of results in recent years has fluctuated considerably and does not reflect the upward trend of national results.
128. The written work of lower attaining pupils in Year 9 is often sketchy, showing limited expression and fluency. Their spelling is weak. The majority of pupils write more easily with greater accuracy and better organisation. They make appropriate use of ICT to prepare and present their work. The best writing is lively and shows very good awareness of narrative techniques. All pupils respond well to their reading of texts such as Robert Swindell's novel, *Stone Cold*, and the Victorian melodrama, *Maria Marten or Murder in the Red Barn*. Their work on media texts and language topics is also at expected levels. Most pupils volunteer answers readily to questions in class. Their oral work in small groups is usually good.
129. GCSE results for English examinations in 2001 were above national averages. Both in English and English literature, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C was above the national average. However, a small minority of pupils could not be entered for GCSE examinations because of long-term absences. Against national comparisons with other subjects girls did well in English and boys and girls both did well in English literature. GCSE results overall were similar to those achieved in mathematics and ahead of those in science. Provisional results for 2002 are a little higher than in 2001. Results have been consistently above national averages in recent years and indicate very good achievement based on pupils' prior attainment.
130. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils write competently across a range of tasks. Lower attaining pupils write well-planned play scenes, advertising leaflets and short stories. Higher attaining pupils show in their essays, for example on Shakespeare's *Twelfth*

Night, that they have a detailed knowledge of texts and analyse how writers achieve their effects. They write polished and well-developed fiction that has good structure, vivid description and strong characterisation. All, apart from the lowest attaining pupils, write and spell with levels of accuracy that are above average. Pupils are confident speakers in class as seen when Year 11 pupils freely and sensitively discussed the impact of racial prejudice on characters in Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*.

131. Pupils have very positive attitudes that assist their work in English lessons. Almost all pupils listen carefully and behave well. They are often enthusiastic when participating in the frequent discussions and group activities. Most pupils work hard to succeed. Many of them pursue detailed research before completing assignments. They invariably have friendly relationships with teachers. Pupils find lessons less interesting occasionally, when the teacher talks at length and they are not actively involved themselves.
132. The achievement of pupils by the end of Year 9 is good. By the time that they complete Year 9, their work has improved from below average to average, as indicated by National Curriculum tests in most years. This represents better achievement over the year than might be expected. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is good compared with pupils' average levels of attainment when they enter Year 10. Their work is above average by the end of Year 11, as shown by GCSE results. This represents good achievement over two years. Boys generally achieve less well than girls compared with national figures for each gender. However, in the 2001 GCSE English literature results boys did better than they did in other subjects they sat. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language receive good support so that they make equally good progress in all three years. Pupils of high attainment and those who are gifted or talented achieve very well by the end of Year 11. Only those pupils whose attendance is sporadic or non-existent fail to make the progress expected of them.
133. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching was very good in two out of five lessons observed. Teachers know their subject very well and command the respect of pupils. They manage their classes effectively so that pupils can learn in a positive atmosphere. Relationships in the classroom are invariably friendly so that pupils are further encouraged to work hard. Teachers plan their lessons carefully according to clear schemes of work for each year, with the result that pupils learn methodically from week to week and improve their skills in reading, speaking, listening and writing. In most lessons, teachers explain the clear objectives for pupils' learning. They choose appropriate and challenging activities that encourage pupils to learn well. They generally have high expectations of pupils, who are consequently encouraged to produce their best work. In one very good lesson, Year 10 pupils in small groups were analysing and comparing newspaper articles. The class teacher introduced the lesson very well so that all pupils were clear about what they had to achieve. Working independently was a challenge for the groups and the task interested them. As a result, pupils learnt quickly in a very positive atmosphere. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils made very good progress on their Victoriana and crime unit of work. The teacher's high expectations could be seen from the opportunities given to the whole class to discuss their reading. The teacher monitored carefully the subsequent work in groups so that the less confident pupils were supported very well. This was very productive learning.
134. Pupils have below average standards of literacy when they join the school. As a result of good teaching in English and good support for pupils with special educational

needs, pupils improve their skills in reading and writing so that they are average by the end of Year 9 and remain average to the end of Year 11. Their skills in reading, writing and speaking are of a suitable standard to cope with the demands made upon these skills in all subjects. Because pupils have adequate literacy skills, teachers in other subjects do not usually plan the further development of these skills through work in their subjects. As a result, students' skills in literacy remain average rather than increase to above average. The lack of a cohesive and closely monitored policy for the teaching of literacy across subjects means that teachers in other subjects are insufficiently encouraged to promote literacy more effectively. Many pupils make good use of the limited amount and range of books in the library and resource centre to develop their reading skills.

135. The leadership of the English department is good. It shares a clear vision for English teaching with other members of the department. Responsibilities are sensibly allocated and teachers work together very well. Schemes of work for Year 9 take good account of National Curriculum requirements and current literacy initiatives. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, particularly in attainment at the end of Year 11 and in the quality of teaching. Much more is now done to improve boys' attainment and raise overall standards of literacy.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Good teaching helps pupils to achieve well by the end of Year 11.
- Pupils are motivated, learn willingly, and collaborate well with each other.
- Use of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy has helped to improve teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils in Year 9 have insufficient opportunities to investigate and solve problems.
- Non-specialist supply teaching restricts pupils' progress in a few classes currently.
- The use of ICT in lessons to broaden pupils' experiences of using mathematics is insufficient.

136. Pupils' standards are below average when they join the school in Year 9. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are usually close to average. GCSE results are average at the end of Year 11. This indicates generally good achievement by the end of Year 11.
137. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2001, results were below average in mathematics. They were similar to those in science and below those in English. In 2002, the results in national tests at level 5 and above were similar to the national average and the average for similar schools. These results are better than those in English and similar to those in science. There has been an improving but fluctuating trend in recent years that indicates results rising faster than those nationally. The relative performance of boys and girls has also varied but usually girls do better.
138. In 2001, GCSE results at grades A*-C were average. They represented good achievement when compared with pupils' previous attainment. Pupils' performance in mathematics was lower than the average of all the other subjects that they studied. Boys performed less well than girls. Results at grades A*-C for 2002 are higher and

slightly above the national average for 2001. However, lower than average rates of school attendance result in a lower than average entry for GCSE mathematics.

139. In work seen in Year 9, pupils' attainment is currently below average. However, these pupils have been at the school for less than one term. Their work to date indicates good achievement compared with their standards on entry. Higher attaining pupils show good competency in mathematics. They find prime numbers, calculate using powers of ten, write numbers in standard form, solve linear equations, expand quadratic expressions and understand the properties of triangles. They calculate measures of central tendency and draw cumulative frequency diagrams. Pupils of average and below average attainment tackle successfully a range of mathematical topics in number, algebra, shape and space, and statistics. However, missing in Year 9 is sufficient use of extended problem solving, mathematical interpretation or written explanation by pupils. The use and application of mathematics receive insufficient attention.
140. Pupils' attainment is average by the end of Year 11 and represents good achievement when compared with their prior attainment. Higher attaining pupils calculate using negative and fractional indices, analyse exponential growth and find quadratic roots by completing the square. They work out areas and volumes of common three-dimensional figures, calculate combined probabilities, and use correlation descriptively. They undertake extended tasks that demonstrate their good skills in systematic analysis and mathematical communication. Average attainers confidently tackle lower level calculations including percentages and acquire competent skills of simple algebraic manipulation. They solve problems involving bearings. Low attaining pupils, including those with learning difficulties, perform transformations in two dimensions, and, with support, draw frequency graphs and pie charts in context. Pupils' exercise books are generally well kept, and they refer successfully to previous notes and exercises when progressing to more advanced work. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language make similar rates of progress as other pupils. They have little difficulty in following the work because their knowledge of English is adequate.
141. Teaching is good overall and leads to good learning. The only unsatisfactory teaching observed was by a supply teacher who lacked expertise in mathematics. Most teaching is brisk, energetic and enthusiastic. It makes effective use in Years 9 to 11 of the suggestions contained in the National Numeracy Strategy for Years 7 to 9 and draws on pupils' own ideas well. This results in high levels of motivation among pupils and good learning outcomes. For example, learning was good in a Year 10 lesson that began by rehearsing some fundamental algebraic ideas and then utilised these to rearrange the subject terms of a variety of linear expressions. Pupils took turns to go to the board and explain their thinking. The teacher then encouraged others to offer alternative ideas. Mistakes were used constructively to promote understanding. The teacher supported individuals well, adjusting the level of challenge according to pupils' capabilities. In most lessons, teachers declare their objectives for pupils' learning and the level of work to be tackled. Most pupils make good progress because they see the point of these objectives. Pupils with special educational needs appreciate knowing what they are expected to do and make good progress with suitable guidance from learning support assistants.
142. Effective leadership within the department provides a clear educational direction, as with the adoption of the National Numeracy Strategy. This has had a positive influence on learning. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, pupils first used 'show me' boards to rehearse and sharpen their familiarity with triangles and quadrilaterals. They then

went on to apply this knowledge to the dissection of a variety of inclined squares so as to calculate their areas as a lead into the theorem of Pythagoras. This lesson, with its high levels of active involvement of pupils, interaction and focused communication, reflected the principles of the strategy well.

143. The department has also managed well the disruption caused by the long-term absence through illness of one of its teachers, by rescheduling the timetable so that all classes receive some specialist teaching. The use of ICT in mathematics teaching is underdeveloped, so that pupils' learning does not benefit from the generation of information, exemplification and immediate feedback which applications such as spreadsheets and devices such as graphics calculators can bring.
144. Several examples of pupils' competent use of numeracy in other subjects were noted in subjects, such as design and technology, English, geography, music and physical education. Teachers make satisfactory use of displays of key words to improve pupils' understanding and spelling of frequently used mathematical vocabulary.
145. One improvement since the previous inspection is the supply of textbooks and practical resources, which is now satisfactory. However, attention to the use and application of mathematics, and the use of ICT in mathematics teaching remains insufficient. Improvement is satisfactory overall.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Good teaching in Years 10 and 11 enables pupils to achieve well by the end of Year 11.
- Staff are committed to raise standards and to help pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils have positive attitudes and want to do well.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough sharing of good practice to establish a consistently good quality of teaching.
- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning is insufficient.

146. In 2001, pupils' results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were below the national average. They were also below average compared with similar schools. The results represent satisfactory achievement compared with pupils' attainment when they joined the school at the beginning of Year 9. In the past few years, the trend of improvement has been below the national one. Girls have achieved better results than boys. Results in science in 2001 were similar to those in mathematics but not as good as those in English. Results for 2002 for level 5 and above are average. They are similar to those attained in mathematics and above those attained in English.
147. GCSE results in 2001 were average. Results at the higher A*-C grades matched the national average and the results attained by similar schools. The results represent satisfactory achievement compared with pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9. Girls attained better results than boys. Results for 2002 show similar results to those of 2001. Pupils do less well in science GCSE examinations than they do in many of their other subjects. Erratic attendance by a few pupils restricts their entry to GCSE examinations.

148. Standards by the end of Year 9, seen in classes and in scrutiny of work, are below those expected nationally and are similar to those indicated by test results in 2001. They indicate satisfactory achievement based on pupils' attainment when they joined the school. In spite of grouping pupils according to their level of competence, the range of attainment remains wide in many groups. Work is not always planned to match this range of need. As a result, a few higher and lower attaining pupils do not achieve their full potential.
149. Most pupils acquire a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of topics across all aspects of the syllabus. In a lesson about selective breeding, most pupils recognised how valuable the technique is in producing animals with specific characteristics. Their knowledge of sexual reproduction and of variation was insecure and a few pupils were confused about how characteristics are passed on from one generation to another. In a lesson about acids and alkalis, most pupils explained the causes of acidity and alkalinity. Higher attaining pupils explained neutralisation in terms of removal of hydrogen ions, and turning them into water with the production of a salt.
150. Many pupils lack confidence in using basic scientific terminology because teachers do not always develop literacy skills rigorously enough. The range of written work produced by pupils is also limited. Although the work is well presented it often lacks the creativity that is associated with real enjoyment of the subject. Numeracy skills are satisfactory as most teachers pay attention to the development of graphical skills, problem solving and analysis of information. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to use or develop their ICT skills because of the lack of appropriate equipment.
151. Pupils make faster progress after Year 9, so that achievement by the end of Year 11 is good. Standards are average and are similar to those indicated by the GCSE results in 2001. Pupils in a high attaining class in Year 10 explained how air enters the alveoli of the lungs. They explained how gas exchange occurs between the alveolus and the blood in the surrounding capillary. However, their understanding of the role of haemoglobin and of oxygen release in the tissues was much less secure. A lower attaining group extended their knowledge of how the earth's atmosphere has changed over many millions of years. Through discussion, these pupils discovered how plants evolved and how the release of oxygen as a photosynthetic product resulted in a gradual but dramatic change in the composition of the earth's atmosphere. Their understanding of the consequence of this, namely the formation of the ozone layer, and of the importance of this to life as we know it today was insecure.
152. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in Year 9 and good progress in Years 10 and 11. In the lessons in which they receive good support they make the most of the opportunities provided and sometimes make very good progress. The small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language make similar rates of progress as other pupils and have a suitable command of English to understand the work. Pupils who are gifted and talented usually make good progress but in a few satisfactory lessons the work did not always stretch them sufficiently.
153. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. The teaching observed varied from very good to unsatisfactory. There is more good teaching in Years 10 to 11 than in Year 9 and consequently there is better achievement by older pupils. The differences in teaching quality between lessons produce marked differences in the pupils' responses to learning. Most lessons are planned well, start with a good check on previous work and conclude with an evaluation of what has further been learned. Praise, which helps to raise pupils' self-esteem, is common in many lessons. In the

good lessons, teachers involve pupils actively and by skilful questioning draw out their knowledge and use it to extend their learning. In the best lessons, as seen in an interesting Year 11 lesson about the combustion of hydrocarbons, the teacher questions pupils at speed and with skill and enthusiasm, explanations are clear and activities are interesting. A good range of activities, including a practical demonstration of a burning candle, in which pupils had to make their own observations and explain what they had seen, assisted learning. Pupils were encouraged to apply what they had learned to the combustion of other fuels such as methane and ethane. In many lessons in science, pupils made good progress because they responded eagerly to suitably demanding work. Progress was much slower in a few other lessons because they received too much guidance from teachers. In the lessons observed that were less than good, the teaching was often instructional, directed at the whole class, without adaptation for the highest and lowest attainers. Teachers were usually clear and articulate and produced practical work to support the topic. Whilst this more directive approach is effective in conveying information, it reduces opportunities for pupils to take any initiative, think for themselves and solve problems. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was characterised by poor planning that did not identify specific outcomes and low expectations.

154. Pupils demonstrate a good attitude to work. They clearly enjoy practical work, which is carried out competently and safely. Behaviour is good. In most classes, pupils listen carefully, but their responses occasionally lack fluency and ideas about the subject. They seldom ask questions spontaneously. When teachers provide challenging tasks in which pupils can see a clear purpose, they respond well, use their initiative and show commitment.
155. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Responsibilities within the department are not clearly defined or delegated well enough. New schemes of work for Year 9 and for Years 10 and 11 are under development. Current schemes do not always satisfactorily provide for higher and lower attaining pupils or offer enough ICT opportunities. There has been some recent monitoring of teaching but there is insufficient sharing of good practice. Whilst programmes of assessment and analysis of subject performance are improving they not sufficiently developed to raise standards further. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and learning lead to above average standards in Year 11.
- Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject motivates pupils to achieve well.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to extend the development of pupils' work is insufficient.
- The lack of a kiln means that pupils' work in clay cannot be fully developed.

156. No GCSE course in art and design has run in recent years. Pupils took a course in expressive arts instead. It is not appropriate to compare these results with national standards in art and design.

157. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average. Pupils enter Year 9 with below average skills, knowledge and understanding in art and design. In Year 9, they focus on the key skills required for drawing from direct observation. They learn how to shade to achieve tone, texture and three-dimensional effects. In a free design they learn a range of ways of creating different surface textures. They learn some of the features of pattern through a study of Asian hand painting. They continue to learn the use and power of line by studies of Art Nouveau and the work of William Morris. Pupils easily understand and appreciate by these studies and use similar ideas in their own work.
158. A greater than average proportion of pupils now choose to do art and design in GCSE. Standards in Year 11 are above average. Pupils learn to draw portraits formally, using the correct proportions for the features. This leads to successful work. They find the study of Surrealist art, particularly the work of Dali, stimulating. From these studies they learn to use more freedom and imagination in their own work on the theme of 'Dragons'. The majority of pupils show good imagination and creativity in their designs for shoes. However, a few lack confidence and are too cautious and careful, unaware of the freedom they have to experiment widely. Pupils produce interesting shoes in sculpture using clay, plaster and other materials effectively. There is no kiln to fire work in clay and this limits the type of finish that can be achieved, particularly with regard to glazing.
159. Pupils of all levels of attainment in Years 9 to 11 make good progress. Provision for pupils who are gifted or talented is good and they benefit from the good amount of individual attention available in many lessons. There is some very impressive work by pupils who have special educational needs. Boys show good interest and achieve well. All pupils benefit from individual attention from the teacher in lessons. Teaching and learning are good and lead to above average standards in Year 11. Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and they transfer this enthusiasm to their pupils. Pupils are encouraged to be bold and to experiment freely. Pupils appreciate the lively approach to all work that motivates them to try their hardest. Pupils' sketchbooks are very impressive. They explore and experiment widely, particularly with the use of fabric and a range of other materials. The lack of computers in the classrooms limits the development of work. Because art and design is taught at the same time as ICT it is not possible to use the computer rooms for art and design.
160. The subject is managed well within the expressive arts faculty. Close links with music and drama provide a good range of learning opportunities for pupils. For example, they enable pupils to be involved actively in creating scenery for school productions. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by studying the beauty and the emotional and personal aspects in art from a range of cultures.
161. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. All the good features reported then have been maintained. Standards are a little better at GCSE. There is still limited use of ICT to improve pupils' standards.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- The Catholic ethos and lessons in religious education contribute well to citizenship.
- The personal and social education programme has a clear focus on citizenship.

Areas for improvement

- Not all subjects teach the elements of citizenship identified.
- Pupils have few opportunities to write about citizenship at length.

162. Pupils of all backgrounds and levels of attainment acquire a good understanding of the responsibilities attached to citizenship. All pupils learn the key elements of citizenship from the promotion of Christian values that is a prominent feature of the school's work. The Christian ideal of community and love is at the centre of the school's aims. The religious education programme of work makes a good contribution to citizenship. It teaches a vision of living for the common good. This embodies treating others as one would like to be treated. This is seen in practice in the good behaviour around the school, particularly in areas that are not overtly supervised. Displays of pupils' work show a good understanding of citizenship under headings such as 'The most precious gift, Love, Respect and Care'. Posters promoting good attitudes about race relationships help pupils to acquire tolerant attitudes. Pupils learn the injustice inherent in prejudice and racism and the consequences for society.
163. There is good provision for education in citizenship in assemblies and in the 'Thought for the Day'. There was salutary teaching on how we depend on each other for self-esteem. In a Year 9 assembly, the nature and power of self-esteem were captured in the poem and prayer pointing out the uniqueness of each person. They gave pupils opportunities for further thought on how people need support from each other.
164. The personal, social and health education programme has been completely reviewed to include clearly defined teaching in citizenship. No lessons were timetabled during the period of the inspection. Examination of pupils' written work shows that they understand the main principles of citizenship. However, there was little extended writing in which pupils expressed their own opinions or gave an overview of each topic. There has been very good and appropriate in-service training for all teachers. They have been helped to identify how and where citizenship can be taught within each subject. However, these plans are not developed fully. No teaching of citizenship was seen within subjects apart from drama. In one drama lesson, pupils explored the consequences of crime. This included the effect on the perpetrator and her friends and associates. Pupils learned the various consequences for everyone. In many lessons, pupils often work in pairs or small groups. In this way they learn to show consideration for the rights and opinions of others.
165. There is good practical education for pupils with behavioural difficulties. There is a Refocus Unit for pupils, mostly boys, who might otherwise be excluded from school. Here they focus on their own responsibilities and duties and thus learn to be more responsible. All pupils spoken to, including students in the sixth form, say that there is great emphasis on rights, responsibilities and the consequences. "Always consequences," they say with some fervour.
166. Management is good, under the direction of an assistant head. Citizenship has an appropriate priority within the curriculum. Planning is good overall within the personal, social and health programme of work. There is a need for more planning in several subjects so that they can teach the aspects of citizenship that relate to their own subjects.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Very good management of the department has helped to improve GCSE results substantially.
- In resistant materials and graphic products, pupils use ICT well to enhance their work.
- Good teaching and effective learning enable pupils to complete products of good quality.

Area for improvement

- Standards in food technology are below those in other material areas.

167. Pupils enter the school in Year 9 with standards that are below average. By the end of Year 9 they are achieving well and attain average standards. Pupils make good progress and continue to achieve well through Years 10 and 11 and attain standards that are above average by the end of Year 11. The work seen shows that pupils achieve better in resistant materials and graphic products, in which subject specialists teach them, than they do in food technology, in which the teaching is non-specialist. Improvements in staffing have been a major contributory factor to the considerable improvement in standards since the previous inspection.
168. In Year 9, pupils rapidly acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to help them to design and make products using a good range of tools and materials. By the end of Year 9, they have a good understanding of the various stages involved in the design process. This knowledge is not developed as well in food technology in which pupils have few opportunities to use the process. Pupils are good at generating a range of design ideas from which they select the best one to make a product. The annotation and drawing of quick sketches to show their initial design ideas are very good. Pupils show good skill when using tools and materials, for example when making a crank and slider mechanism in metal for a desk tidy. Pupils work well in pairs and groups. They discuss ideas for a promotional leaflet on fruit and vegetables in graphic products and arrive at a corporate decision. Pupils in all the material areas have a very good knowledge of requirements for health and safety and practise these when working.
169. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 apply their good knowledge of the design process to make products of good quality. They use ICT well when designing and making and to enhance the presentation of their work, except in food technology in which ICT is underused. In a Year 10 class, pupils used software to manipulate an image and to redesign an existing product, in this case a torch. Pupils display good practical skills in resistant materials and graphic products and satisfactory skills in food technology. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, make generally good progress and achieve well. Scope exists, however, to increase the provision of modified materials, particularly for the gifted and talented in order that their potential is realised fully. Pupils have numeracy and literacy skills that are sufficient for the needs of the subject. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are supported well by teachers and make similar progress to the other pupils.
170. GCSE results in 2001 for grades A*-C for pupils taking the full course, who were almost exclusively girls, were well above national average but slightly below their performance in other subjects. Owing to staffing difficulties, boys were entered for the short course in resistant materials. They attained above average results. GCSE

results for 2002, when all entries were for the full course, are above average but show variation between the material areas. These results are a substantial improvement on results in 2000 when they were well below average. They show pupils achieving higher standards than predictions based on prior attainment.

171. Teaching is good overall throughout the school. Of the lessons observed one third were satisfactory, nearly two thirds were good and the rest were very good. Teaching has improved under the very good leadership and management of the head of department appointed two years ago. He has put into place effective strategies to teach the National Curriculum, to monitor and assess pupils' work and to improve teaching and learning. Pupils now have a good attitude to learning and behave well. This is because the work is varied, meets their needs and is made interesting. Teachers make pupils aware of what constitutes high standards, often using examples or demonstrations of practical skills. Pupils receive good feedback on their current level of work and what they need to do to improve. Teachers manage the pupils well. Good relationships between teachers and pupils promote learning. Teachers make effective use of praise and target setting to encourage and motivate pupils to learn well. Seeing their work on display around the school motivates pupils.
172. Standards have risen considerably and there has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. A few issues identified in the previous report persist. A few large groups of pupils are taught in very cramped accommodation and pupils have to share computers and equipment in the practical rooms. This slows their progress. A few health and safety issues have been identified to the department. AA

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are above the national average.
- Good teaching leads to good learning.
- Pupils work hard and make good progress.

Area for improvement

- The use of ICT to support learning is not developed fully.

173. In 2001, GCSE results at grades A*-C and at A*-G were above the national average. Boys' results were above the national average for all boys. The proportion of A* grades was above average. The proportion of pupils' attaining A*-C grades has been above average for the past three years. In 2002, GCSE results indicate above average attainment. Pupils' achievement, based on their previous level of attainment, is good. Pupils gained similar grades in geography as those they attained in other subjects.
174. Standards in geography at the end of Year 9 are above the national average. Teachers' assessments show an above average pattern over the past three years. Pupils develop good geographical skills in finding places on maps and in using and interpreting statistical information. They use statistics well to show good understanding of the differences in stages of development between India and the United Kingdom. Their knowledge and understanding of geographical ideas improve. Higher attaining pupils give good reasons to explain why earthquake casualties vary in countries at different stages of economic development. Lower attaining pupils' written work is more descriptive but their answers in class show good understanding. They

explain verbally why volcanic eruptions are found around the Pacific Ocean. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. Many understand some quite complex geographical terms. However, their written work is often inaccurate in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Girls and boys make similar rates of progress.

175. Standards of work seen in Year 11 seen during the inspection are above average. Overall pupils are achieving well. The good support that teachers and support staff give to pupils with special educational needs enables these pupils to make good progress. Higher attaining pupils make good progress because they respond positively to the challenging nature of the work that is set. This is evident in the good use of demanding statistical work in pupils' coursework. Higher attaining pupils and pupils of average attainment use statistical techniques effectively to draw valid conclusions. Lower attaining pupils have difficulty with the mathematical ideas but persevere so that, although their work is of a lower standard, they make good progress. Many pupils use ICT well to present and enhance their coursework with graphs and word processing. Most pupils have a good understanding of geographical terms because of the emphasis that their teachers place on this. For example, pupils in Year 10 could explain the formation of raised banks on the flood plains of rivers.
176. Pupils' attitude towards geography is good. They work hard and are keen to improve their work. They work well together in class. Pupils are very willing to contribute to discussion.
177. The quality of teaching is good. Learning is also good. A major strength is the regular reinforcement and emphasis that teachers place on the points that will get marks in examinations. As a result, pupils have good recall of these points. Teachers prepare lessons well and push the pupils along so that they maintain interest and involvement. They use probing questions well to make pupils think. Teachers control classes well in a firm yet friendly and supportive manner. As a result, behaviour is good. Pupils work hard because the teachers expect them to do so. Occasionally, the main learning points are not made clear and the tasks that the pupils have to follow are not explained thoroughly enough. As a result learning is inhibited. Pupils' work is marked thoroughly although specific comments on how to improve their work are not always included. Homework is set regularly. Appropriate tasks are set for research and further study.
178. At the time of the inspection there was no head of geography. In spite of this the department is led and managed satisfactorily on a temporary basis. Examination results, and the progress pupils make, remain good. Information from assessment is used adequately to set targets and to monitor progress. Teachers do not use ICT sufficiently as an aid to pupils' learning. Teaching and learning are not monitored systematically because of the other responsibilities held by the temporary head of department. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. KIA2

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards in GCSE examinations represent consistently good achievement.
- Effective teaching leads to good progress by pupils.
- Positive attitudes and good behaviour by pupils contribute to their learning.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient books to support learning and independent study.
- Departmental planning does not set clear enough targets for raising attainment.

179. Attainment in history in Year 9 is average. Pupils of below average attainment write mainly short answers to describe historical events and to give causes and results. The majority of pupils select and organise information to produce longer pieces of structured writing. Pupils of above average attainment write long answers in which they explain causes and consequences and draw conclusions of their own. Often, boys take less care with their work than girls and they develop their ideas less fully in writing. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of the National Curriculum topics they have studied. Their understanding of these topics is often good.
180. Attainment in GCSE examinations is above average. In 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was well above average and every pupil who entered gained at least a grade G. In 2002, results indicate above average attainment, with girls' attainment higher than that of boys. Over the past four years, results have always been above average with some variation year on year. The number of pupils entered for GCSE in history is low and there are variations in the capability and prior attainment of successive year groups. Pupils' grades in history were broadly similar to those that they gained in other subjects. A very small number of pupils are entered for an alternative certificate course rather than full GCSE.
181. In Years 10 and 11, the standards of work seen were above average. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the GCSE topics studied. Most use historical concepts and terminology correctly. Pupils make effective use of historical sources to extract information and interpret it. Higher attaining pupils evaluate sources for reliability and usefulness and identify their limitations. Pupils of average attainment make evaluations of sources for bias. Pupils of below average attainment use sources but rarely evaluate them. Most pupils deploy their knowledge and understanding effectively in written work of a good standard.
182. Pupils throughout Years 9 to 11, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Their achievement in relation to their previous attainment is good. The very small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language make similar rates of progress.
183. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have a very good command of their material and they present it well in language that pupils understand. They use questions skilfully to check and develop pupils' understanding. Teachers have high expectations and frequently challenge pupils to think for themselves and to develop their ideas. They manage their pupils well. Pupils respond by making a good effort in class. They sustain concentration and take their work seriously. Behaviour is good. Lessons are planned well and teachers usually explain the learning objectives so that pupils can judge for themselves the progress they have made.
184. Teachers help pupils to acquire a good historical vocabulary by frequent and effective use of displays of key words. In Years 10 and 11 there is a clear focus on developing the skills that the pupils need for examination success. Teachers set work that meets the needs of pupils of all levels of attainment in the class. They set appropriate homework that is used effectively to extend learning. They make good use of the limited resources and produce reprographic materials of good quality to help pupils to learn quickly. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and assess it thoroughly so that pupils have a clear understanding of their own performance and progress. Pupils are less clear, however, about their targets for attainment. Teachers make limited use of

ICT to help pupils to develop skills of individual research and decision making. Pupils have few opportunities to enrich their learning through visits to places of historical interest.

185. Effective leadership and management in history ensure a shared and successful commitment to raising standards. Good schemes of work lead to consistency of work across classes. The department's limited resources are managed well. Systems for monitoring pupils' progress keep teachers and pupils informed about progress. A few of the department's policies lack clear information about how they should be implemented. Priorities are appropriate but the plans lack clear targets for raising attainment. Staffing is a real strength. All history lessons are taught by specialist and experienced teachers. However, resources are insufficient. The supply of books to support learning is inadequate and makes it difficult for pupils to study independently.
186. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Teaching and learning remain good. Examination results have improved from just below average to above average.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths

- Good management in the department helps pupils to achieve well.
- Good teaching leads to good learning.
- Pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes assist their learning.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils have to share computers. This restricts time available to them for independent research.
- A few pupils underachieve because they do not attend school regularly enough.

187. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average. Most pupils have only limited experience of a few aspects of ICT. They make good progress in Year 9 so that by the end of the year, pupils' attainment is average. GCSE results in 2001 were well above the national average. They represented very good achievement for the pupils concerned. In 2002, GCSE results indicate similar attainment and very good achievement. In 2001, pupils attained higher GCSE grades in ICT than those they attained in most other subjects.
188. Pupils in Year 9 have suitable skills in word processing. They have a good knowledge and understanding of different methods of obtaining information and how to use and present this information appropriately and to good advantage. They build and interrogate databases successfully, the quality of these varying according to pupils' prior attainment. In Year 10, in accordance with GCSE coursework requirements, pupils construct complex spreadsheets containing a wide variety of formulae. They test these well to determine the validity of their designs and enhance them over time to provide further information for supposed 'clients' in the world of commerce and industry. Year 11 pupils, having progressed, have very good skills in making models using a variety of ICT tools. In particular, they use spreadsheets very effectively and have particularly good skills in such aspects as computer-aided design, virtual reality and expert systems in control technology.

189. Pupils achieve well in ICT because teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons well to contain a good range of activities that maintain pupils' interest and involvement. The aims of lessons are clear and frequently shared with the pupils. This enables pupils to know when they have achieved what was expected of them and to gauge their progress. Pupils assist their learning because they are keen to learn and often do more than is asked of them. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils give pupils the confidence to tackle the challenging and difficult tasks that require them to adopt a rigorous approach to their work. For example, pupils worked well in pairs and small groups to highlight the relative merits of a range of software applications. They did this well, using correct terminology and working independently of the teacher most of the time. In another lesson, pupils worked well in testing the reliability and validity of their spreadsheets. When the testing highlighted flaws in their designs or formulae they persevered and supported each other to achieve successful results during the lesson. Pupils improve their work well because they have positive attitudes to ICT. They are motivated equally in theoretical and practical work. Teachers assess pupils' work effectively, mark it well and provide good written commentaries. Thus pupils have valuable information to help them to make progress.
190. The only drawback to maintaining the good pace of learning is the lack of sufficient computers in any one room. Pupils have to move to other rooms or share facilities and this wastes valuable time.
191. Good behaviour by pupils contributes to a purposeful climate for learning in ICT classes. However, in Years 10 and 11 mainly, the inadequate attendance of a few pupils hinders the continuity of their learning and restricts standards.
192. Effective leadership and management provide detailed schemes of work that form a suitable base for good teaching and learning. Appropriate procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the department, including regular lesson observations, have resulted in improved standards at GCSE. Information from assessment is reviewed annually with the aim of adjusting and enhancing the curriculum to meet emerging needs. All teachers involved in the teaching of ICT have good knowledge and understanding of the subject and its applications. Pupils' learning in ICT is supported well by the effective work of the technical staff.
193. Although the use of ICT to help pupils to develop their work in other subjects has improved since the previous inspection, few subjects provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to use and develop their computing skills. In design and technology, the use of ICT is a contributor to the good standards achieved. In a few subjects, such as geography, English and French, pupils use word processing to improve the presentation of their work. At times, pupils successfully access the Internet for personal research and to provide information for their coursework. However, for the most part, the amount and quality of the use of ICT in other subjects are too reliant on individual teachers' enthusiasm for and expertise in ICT. In subjects such as science, insufficient resources for ICT and limited access to computing facilities restrict the range of learning activities.
194. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The range of provision has been increased in all years. Statutory requirements are now met. Separate provision for ICT has been introduced for all pupils throughout Year 9. GCSE results have improved considerably. Appropriate courses are available for sixth form students. Computing resources have improved and a technician has been appointed to provide additional support.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in GCSE examinations by girls were well above average in 2001.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and behave well in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Standards attained by boys in GCSE examinations were well below average in 2001.
- The use of assessment is ineffective to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential.
- The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory overall.
- Inadequate resources and accommodation restrict learning opportunities for pupils.
- Pupils rarely use French to increase their confidence and competence in speaking and listening.

195. Standards attained in French at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are below average. In 2001, GCSE results at grades A*-C matched the national average. However, whereas the proportion of girls achieving grades A*-C was well above average, the proportion of boys achieving A*-C grades was well below average. In 2002, GCSE results at grades A*-C fell. Pupils do better in other subjects than they do in French.
196. At the end of Year 9, teachers' assessments in 2002 indicate that pupils attained standards that are well above average. However, in work seen in the current Year 9 standards attained are below average overall. This represents underachievement by the majority of pupils. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils have a limited range of vocabulary and structures. They are not confident in speaking and responding spontaneously. Higher attaining pupils display a good understanding of grammar and apply rules successfully in writing and in speech. Average and lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs rely heavily on written notes and prompts. This has an adverse effect on their pronunciation and independence in using the language for themselves.
197. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and are concerned to do well. They listen attentively in lessons and concentrate on tasks set. When asked to work in pairs they do so sensibly. When required to complete routine tasks in French, they respond positively. When they are required to listen to the teacher for lengthy periods or are not involved directly in activities, a few pupils have difficulty maintaining interest. However, they display enjoyment and are keen to participate when games are used to practise new language. In a few lessons, in which control and management of pupils were unsatisfactory, pupils behaved poorly and did not listen to the teacher.
198. The quality of teaching and learning overall is unsatisfactory. In more than two out of every five lessons observed the quality of teaching was unsatisfactory and led to unsatisfactory progress. In these lessons, expectations of the teacher were too low or control and management were unsatisfactory.
199. There are considerable strengths in teaching but they are not consistently applied across the department. In most lessons observed, teachers' control and management of the pupils were good and pupils responded positively. Objectives were usually clear and shared with pupils. Teachers used review at the end of

lessons effectively to evaluate progress and to reinforce new language. In the more effective lessons, they conducted activities in French. This was effective in providing pupils with good role models and in developing speaking and listening skills. In the good lessons, the teacher ensured that resources were matched well to pupils' needs and that activities provided achievable steps in learning. Pupils had opportunities to practise new language informally in small groups and pairs. As a result, they grew in confidence and competence in using the language themselves. Pupils made the best progress when they used the language to gather and give information and reported their findings to others. They learned well when given the opportunity to practise new language in games.

200. Pupils did not make sufficient progress in a few lessons because the teacher was not sufficiently familiar with the requirements of the National Curriculum and external examinations. In these lessons, activities did not take sufficient account of previous learning so that expectations were inappropriate. The progress of lower attaining pupils and pupils with learning difficulties is hampered by inappropriate emphasis on reading and writing to the detriment of speaking and listening. Pupils did not make adequate progress in developing listening and reading skills when opportunities were missed to explain and reinforce techniques during feedback sessions.
201. Resources available to the department are inadequate. Textbooks are inappropriate and out of date. Access to ICT facilities is satisfactory but the department does not have appropriate software to support and extend learning in French. Accommodation in the specialist area is good but a few classes are taught away from the specialist area in a variety of rooms. This restricts the variety of learning experiences provided because equipment and resources have to be moved around the school. Pupils in these classes do not benefit from support provided through display. Assessment and monitoring procedures are satisfactory but assessment information is not used effectively to plan for the progress of groups of differing attainment in lessons. As a result, expectations are sometimes inappropriate and lead to lack of progress in lessons.
202. There has been insufficient progress since the previous inspection. The school has had difficulties in recruiting staff. Pupils' progress has been affected adversely by a lack of continuity of suitably qualified teachers. This is still the case. Leadership and management of French are satisfactory. New leadership of the department since September has identified appropriate priorities for development and taken necessary action to halt the decline in standards. Senior managers and the local authority's advisory service have provided appropriate guidance and support and the department has a clear vision of the way forward. Departmental policies are now clear and are being applied consistently. This has already had a positive influence upon pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards the subject in most lessons. Future plans to develop teaching and learning and to achieve consistency across the department are appropriate.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Good teaching helps pupils in Year 9 to achieve well.
- The positive attitudes of pupils promote good learning and achievement in Years 10 and 11.

Area for improvement

- The provision for computer-aided music making to enhance pupils' skills is inadequate.

203. Standards of attainment of pupils entering Year 9 are below average. By the end of Year 9 most pupils have attained standards that are average. Attainment of pupils at the end of Year 11 is slightly above average overall. This progression represents good achievement.
204. Because pupils enter the school from an unusually large number of feeder schools their musical experiences are very varied. A few have had instrumental tuition and can read musical notation. Most pupils have had very little contact with music. Their skills in performing and composing are below, and in many cases well below, average on entry.
205. During Year 9, pupils work very hard to accumulate fluent practical skills and to gain the necessary supportive knowledge of musical repertoire and styles. After less than one term in the school, pupils in Year 9 are making satisfactory progress. They understand and interpret the basic concepts of music, such as rhythm and pitch and describe these using correct technical terms. They perform accurately in a group and compose simple music. They listen to a wide range of music and appraise it confidently. Recent assessments by teachers show that most pupils are achieving National Curriculum level 5 by the end of Year 9. This indicates a good improvement in standards and achievement since the previous inspection.
206. Standards of attainment are above average for most pupils who continue the study of music in Year 10. Most are competent performers, on keyboard, guitar, drum-kit and woodwind instruments. Many pupils are developing good technical skills to realise their creative ideas in composition. Their appraisal and evaluation skills are good.
207. Pupils in Year 11 demonstrate average attainment. They have developed a good variety of skills in performing and composing. In previous years, numbers entering GCSE examinations have been small. Results have been average and pupils have gained similar grades in music to those attained in other subjects. More pupils are now choosing to study music for the GCSE examination, reflecting the growing popularity of the subject and its rising profile in the school.
208. Although many pupils can use computers competently, the lack of computers and sequencing resources in music restricts pupils' development, particularly in gaining fluent skills in musical notation.
209. Learning is good overall. Teachers help pupils to understand the lesson's aims and desired outcomes and the standards that they are expected to achieve. They set realistic deadlines so that pupils make productive use of time and resources. The good quality of relationships and mutual support between teachers and pupils help pupils to develop skills in teamwork and leadership. In class, the teacher closely monitors and supports pupils' progress and helps them to improve by providing informative feedback. The system for tracking pupils' progress provides useful information that helps pupils to review their progress and, in discussion with the teacher, to decide what to do to improve. Pupils understand and value this arrangement.

210. Although teaching is good overall, the teacher occasionally plays too prominent a part in whole-class activities. As a result, pupils do not always have sufficient opportunity to participate in discussion, review, analysis and evaluation. Searching questioning by the teacher usually tests pupils' understanding or retention of a topic. While most tasks set for Year 9 are adjusted appropriately for pupils of lower attainment, they occasionally do not provide suitable extension potential for higher attaining pupils or those who are gifted or talented.
211. Pupils' good behaviour, attentiveness and concentration contribute much to their good progress. No examples of negative attitudes were observed during lessons. Pupils are benefiting from a new and wide-ranging scheme of work, which includes contact with much multicultural music. Their opportunities are enhanced by a developing extra-curricular provision of instrumental lessons and ensembles. The quality of teaching and coaching in these activities is very good. Pupils have wide access to musical workshops and opportunities for performance outside of the school. The good leadership and management of the subject have ensured that these developments have been put in place very quickly. They are already improving standards and the quality of provision. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching and learning ensure very good achievement in Years 10 and 11.
- Very good relationships contribute to pupils' very good attitudes and good personal development.
- Very effective leadership of a committed team supports high standards.
- High participation in extra-curricular activities enhances pupils' standards in physical education.

Areas for improvement

- In Year 9, assessment does not always show pupils how well they are doing and how to improve.

212. Pupils enter the school with slightly below average standards but have a varied range of experiences. By the end of Year 9 they are consistently achieving the expected level in the required activities. This represents good achievement. Assessments by teachers in 2001 indicated above average standards. Pupils achieve well because of the good teaching and the clear expectations for participation and hard work established in this first year. In Year 9, standards of work seen after less than one term at the school are average.
213. Standards are above average by Year 11. In lessons, pupils have a good understanding of how to prepare for activity and are conscientious in doing so. They have good skills of performance and play games with energy and enthusiasm. Pupils judge the quality of a performance well and make sensible suggestions for improvement. They present written work with care and organise notes well. This work demonstrates that pupils have sound literacy skills. Work of lower attaining pupils shows a good grasp of basic principles. Higher attaining pupils make good links between their own practical work and theoretical aspects of study. All pupils enter for

GCSE or Certificate of Achievement examinations. In 2001, GCSE results at grades A*-C were well above the national average and all pupils gained a pass in the range of grades A*-G. Pupils did better in physical education than in the other subjects they studied. Boys did better than girls because they scored more highly in practical tests. Results for GCSE were the highest of all subjects. This repeats the trend in recent years of well above average results. The proportion of pupils entered was above the national figure. Results in Certificate of Achievement were equally good with the great majority of entrants attaining a merit or distinction. Achievement is very good for pupils of all levels of attainment and ethnicity. Progress is very good as pupils improve their overall attainment to well above average by the end of Year 11.

214. There is very good equality of access for all pupils. Those with identified learning needs make good progress. They benefit from the clear demonstrations of skill and very good individual encouragement provided by other pupils and the teachers. Pupils with behavioural needs succeed in the well-ordered and challenging atmosphere of lessons. Talented pupils make good progress through the many opportunities for competition after school.
215. Very good attitudes to the subject are evident throughout the school. High levels of participation in activities out of hours are recognised through the Sportsmark award this year. Behaviour is good. Pupils listen carefully and respond with enthusiasm. Physical education makes a very good contribution to personal development through an emphasis on fair play and working together.
216. Teaching is very good overall. It is good in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Lessons have a clear structure because teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject and their planning skills to devise interesting activities. Pupils make very good progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11, because lessons proceed at a very good pace and challenge them to do their best. In an excellent football lesson, Year 11 pupils made particularly good progress because of their high level of attention and activity. The game at the end was played with energy and commitment. Very good relationships among pupils and with the teachers contribute to the confidence and enjoyment of pupils of all capabilities. Well-directed questions from teachers that require pupils to talk about their work contribute to pupils' development of oracy skills. Pupils develop their literacy skills and increase their learning because teachers mark the written work well with helpful comments that help pupils to improve their writing. In Years 10 and 11, pupils have good information about how well they are doing in physical education. In Year 9, however, assessments are not used sufficiently in lessons for pupils to know how well they are doing and what to do next to improve in the subject. Teachers pay satisfactory attention to assisting the development of pupils' numeracy and ICT skills.
217. Very good leadership and management support the high level of commitment of the staff and the achievement of pupils. There is a very clear vision for the development of the subject. Evaluation of the departments' performance results in positive action and improvement. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Improvement since the previous inspection is good because teaching is now very good and standards have risen.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A - E		% gaining grades A - B		Average points score (mean)			
						Old system		New system	
		School	National	School	National	School	National	School	National
Chemistry	4	100		50		3.5		45	
Biology	3	67		33		1.7		23	
Physics	2	100		50		3.5		45	
Art and design	8	100		63		3.4		44	
Music	2	100		50		3.0		40	
Theatre studies	12	93		25		2.5		34	
Geography	6	50		0		0.7		12	
History	5	80		40		2.4		36	
Religious studies	8	88		13		2.1		30	
Psychology	15	67		27		2.1		37	
Sociology	12	75		25		2.3		31	
Eng lan and lit	18	89		11		2.4		33	
Eng lit	18	100		56		3.6		46	
Communication studies	16	94		44		3.2		41	
Product design	13	92		46		3.0		39	
General studies	21	71		10		1.3		19	

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A - E		% gaining grades A - B		Average points score (mean)			
						Old system		New system	
		School	National	School	National	School	National	School	National
Mathematics	7	57		0		3.0		40	
Chemistry	5	100		0		5.2		72	
Biology	2	100		50		7.0		90	
Physics	1	100		0		4		60	
Theatre studies	2	50		50		4.0		50	
Geography	8	88		13		5.0		65	
History	2	100		0		4.0		60	
Religious studies	4	100		25		5.5		75	
Psychology	8	88		38		5.3		70	
Sociology	7	100		43		5.7		77	
Eng lan and lit	12	100		25		5.3		76	
Eng lit	8	100		13		5.0		70	

Communication studies	8	88		38		5.3		70	
French	2	100		0		4.0		60	
German	1	100		0		2.0		40	
General studies	21	71		10		1.3		19	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, chemistry and biology. Work was sampled in physics. Only a small number of students currently study physics in Years 12 and 13. Students are achieving satisfactorily. Standards of work seen matched expectations based on prior attainment at GCSE and A-level examinations. In the one lesson observed, the quality of teaching was good, with students engaged fully in the variety of planned activities. The students had a satisfactory knowledge of the subject and produced good plans for an investigation to determine the electric charge on water.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teachers provide good guidance to individual students in and beyond lessons.
- Achievement matches expectations based on students' prior attainment.
- Students have positive attitudes, work hard and support each other's learning well.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to use ICT for research.
- Students' folders are not organised well to provide suitable records of work for revision purposes.
- The lack of a re-sit GCSE course in mathematics restricts the range of learning opportunities.

218. The department provides courses at AS-level and A2-level in Years 12 and 13. Currently, the lack of GCSE re-sit courses at the school restricts the range of learning opportunities for students in the sixth form. The subject usually attracted a good number of students on the AS and A2-level courses and rates of retention were good. However, the introduction of revised A-level arrangements and courses during 2001-2002 led to less than one third of students continuing into Year 13.

219. A-level and AS-level results have been below average in recent years. The results reflect the very wide range of prior attainment of students and indicate satisfactory achievement overall.

220. In work seen and in classes observed in both Years 12 and 13, students' attainment was below average and indicates satisfactory achievement based on their prior attainment. In pure mathematics, students are competent in work involving polynomial functions and binomial expansions. They recognise and use trigonometric identities appropriately and have a suitable knowledge and understanding of co-ordinate geometry. Their work shows good application of calculus in optimisation problems. In statistics, they are confident in using and interpreting the binomial and normal distributions. Students relate the use of these statistical terms to modelling situations

that happen in everyday life. Their skills in graphical work are generally used well to assist their work in all aspects of the mathematics syllabus as seen, for example, in a Year 13 lesson on volumes of revolution, in which progress was good. However, particularly in Year 12, a few students organise their records of work poorly. Their files contain an indiscriminate mix of topics from across the whole syllabus, and relatively few items of marked work. These records are of limited use for future reference and revision purposes.

221. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In most lessons, the teacher carefully rehearses students' relevant prior knowledge and sets out the staged development of new knowledge, drawing on students' own ideas throughout. In a lesson seen in Year 12, the general term and sum of an arithmetic series were reviewed effectively before students moved on to consider the similar situation for geometric series. In this class, the teaching moved by stages from the use of easily recognisable examples to thinking in the abstract. This helped students to appreciate the mathematical principles underpinning resultant formulae. Occasionally, as seen in a Year 13 lesson, the teacher rushes the work on the board and draws rough graphs that are not easy to understand and result in confusing students. Students' learning is affected adversely at times by the untidy presentation of some of their work.
222. Students' attitudes make a positive contribution to learning in all lessons. They show a determination to succeed and a willingness to support each other in their learning. They find teaching staff helpful both within and beyond lessons. As confirmed by Year 13 students, teachers now provide students with a more structured approach to cover the work in the different modules than last year. This is helping students to make appropriate progress as a result of frequent checks that the requirements of the syllabus are met fully. Students can check how well they are doing through frequently set assignments that are marked and returned promptly.
223. However, the teacher directs nearly all learning. Students have few opportunities to carry out research-based assignments as a preparation for higher education. The use of ICT to support students' learning is limited. Year 13 students made effective use of computing software to improve their skills in graph plotting at an early stage in their course. They have since made very little use of ICT resources such as software in calculus, graphic calculators, symbolic manipulators or statistical packages to inform and cross-reference their learning.
224. Satisfactory management of mathematics in the sixth form enables students to make the progress expected of them. Systems to assess students' work have improved and provide them with suitable information about their progress. Procedures for monitoring teaching and sharing good practice are satisfactory. Teachers have become more familiar with the requirements of the new examinations at advanced level. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Good tracking of students' attainment and progress supports their learning.
- Good liaison with the cluster schools over teaching and planning assists continuity of learning.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers provide few opportunities for students to take an active part in their own learning.
- Resources are inadequate. ICT is used insufficiently to assist independent learning in chemistry.

225. Chemistry is taught to AS and A2-level in Years 12 and 13 as part of the curriculum provided by the cluster arrangement. A teacher from a different school teaches four of the six lessons taught weekly in Year 13 off site. Few students choose to study the subject at advanced level. Rates of retention on the courses in Years 12 and 13 are satisfactory.
226. The small number of students who entered the examinations at AS and A2-levels in 2001 achieved well below average results that matched expectations based on prior attainment at GCSE. A-level results remain similar to those attained at the time of the previous inspection. Results in 2002 are higher, with all students gaining pass grades both in AS and A2-level examinations. However, no students achieved A or B grades at A2-level.
227. Standards of work seen reflect the wide range of attainment in the classes and indicate satisfactory achievement to date. Higher attaining students are attaining above average standards and are on course to gain high grades. Students in Year 12 who start the AS course with modest GCSE grades are generally achieving satisfactorily but often lack confidence in their work. These students experience difficulty in understanding and using effectively the important areas of chemical formulae and equations. They are not very competent in using mathematical skills such as rearranging equations, units and powers of numbers. Students in Year 13 have a good understanding of oxidation and reduction and chemical equilibrium. They discuss intelligently and confidently the structures of organic molecules.
228. The quality of teaching by the school's teaching staff is satisfactory overall. Teaching uses well the very good expertise available to plan lessons and to arrange learning activities in proper sequence. A lack of variety in the methods of presentation and the limited amount of opportunities to participate actively restrict progress in many lessons. There is too much emphasis on the use of photocopied materials and the course textbook. Whilst this is helpful to most students it does not encourage them to develop independent learning skills that would be helpful to them in their current and future studies. The use of computers in teaching and learning limits the range of learning activities. The department has only a few computers dedicated to its use and the range of software is limited. Students respond well to their studies and are kept fully informed about their progress. Appropriate homework exercises are set frequently and regularly and assist students' learning. Teachers' marking is thorough and often shows students how to improve.
229. Leadership of the subject is satisfactory. The current sharing of teaching of the subject within the cluster has a slightly restricting influence on the overview of the subject. However, there is good liaison between the various schools to assist the continuity of students' learning. Procedures for the assessment and monitoring of students' progress are effective in setting suitable target grades for individual students and reviewing them regularly. The provision and range of reference books and CD-ROMs to assist students' learning are unsatisfactory and hinder learning. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

Biology

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

Strengths

- New and effective leadership has a positive influence on teaching and learning.
- In the best lessons meticulous planning ensures students are challenged to give their very best.
- Students' positive attitudes and behaviour assist their learning.

Areas for improvement

- The sharing of good practice in teaching is insufficient.
- Marking and checking of work and the attention to note taking are sometimes ineffective.

230. The department offers courses at AS and A2-level in Years 12 and 13. Numbers choosing these courses have been low. In 2002, numbers choosing to study biology in Year 12 are the highest for many years. Rates of retention on the courses have been good.
231. A-level results for 2001 were well below the national average. Results were higher in 1999 and 2000 but the number of entries to the examinations were very low, making national comparisons inappropriate. Of the six students that entered in 2001, none gained the higher grades A and B, and three obtained lower grades D and E. Half of the students failed to achieve a grade. Two students were entered for the examination in 2002 and results were better. AS results in 2001 and 2002 were well below average. The AS-level results reflected the wide range of attainment among students and were poor in 2001 and satisfactory in 2002.
232. Standards of work in Year 13, as seen in lessons and written work, are below average. Students' achievement in relation to their GCSE results is satisfactory. Students have a reasonable understanding of basic biological facts and concepts such as respiration and photosynthesis. Their understanding of the theory is insufficient to enable them to attain the highest grades. Students' practical skills are below average because they have too few opportunities to do practical work, particularly that in which they are required to predict, plan and evaluate their own work.
233. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course. Their achievement matches expectations based on their all-round GCSE performance. Students' knowledge and understanding of the properties and role of enzymes are good. Practical and investigative skills are developing well. This is a result of the increased opportunities for students to make their own predictions based on their scientific knowledge and understanding, and to plan and evaluate their own experiments. This was observed in a very good lesson in which students planned and carried out an investigation of the effect of pH on the enzyme catalase.
234. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. It varies from very good to unsatisfactory. The very good teaching is reflected in the very good quality of students' learning in those classes. The best teaching has high expectations of what students are capable of achieving, has clearly-planned, stimulating activities and is imaginative in the choice of activities used to explain ideas. This was observed in lessons such as one in which students were looking at the science behind various preservation techniques used to prevent decay in foods.
235. Occasionally, the teaching of theory was narrow in its approach and led to satisfactory rather than good progress. The teacher tended to do the work and the

lessons lacked stimulus and excitement. These lessons lacked some of the features of the good lessons, such as the active involvement and participation of students in their own learning and the provision of a variety of learning activities that made students think. Marking is of an inconsistent quality. Work in a few files goes mostly unmarked and the teacher does not point out corrections or omissions. This hinders the learning of these students.

236. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new teacher with responsibility for biology has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within the subject area. There is a clear understanding of the purpose of the course and how to teach and assess it. Improved monitoring and evaluation of students' work is leading to higher standards in attainment in some classes. Schemes of work are under-developed. Monitoring of the curriculum and of teaching is not effective enough to improve the consistency of teaching and to raise standards further. The guidance given to students on note taking is not as thorough as it could be in a few lessons. Standards are beginning to improve in Year 12. There is limited use of ICT because of shortage of equipment. Satisfactory improvements have been made since the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Students develop good skills of independent learning through effective use of ICT.
- Students' very good attitudes and commitment lead to work of very high quality.
- Very good teaching has resulted in much improved and very good examination results.

Areas for improvement

- Students in Years 12 and 13 are reluctant to speak at length when addressing the whole group.
- A few students in Year 13 have weak listening skills.

237. The department provides AS and A2-level courses in product design. These courses were introduced for the first time in 2001 after an absence of courses in design and technology in the two previous years. Retention rates on both courses are high. The courses meet the needs of students and are resourced adequately. Currently, the course in food technology does not progress into the sixth form thus providing a restricted choice for students.
238. Standards of work seen in the two courses are well above average. In 1999, results for students on the traditional A-level course were low. AS-level results for 13 students in 2002 are above average and indicate very good achievement with a high number of students achieving grades A or B. All but one student achieved a grade. Performance in this subject compares favourably with students' performance in other subjects.
239. Standards in the sixth form in this subject were not reported at the previous inspection. Standards in the work seen in Year 13 are well above average and show

very good achievement. The majority of the group are on target to achieve the highest grades in the A2-level examination. Students have a very good understanding of the design process. They use this knowledge very effectively to generate and communicate design ideas and to explain why they have chosen to use particular methods and processes. Coursework folios are completed to a very high standard. Students work independently and make good use of ICT as a tool when designing and making products. For example, the designing of a low table in the shape of the school's logo, an ichthus (fish), involved trying out various alternative ideas using very sophisticated computing software to assess the viability of these ideas. Products made by students are designed well and finished with very good attention to detail. Although students willingly reply to the teacher's questions that are directed at the whole class, they tend to give short answers and do not justify their comments. In individual discussions with the teacher, they discuss their work at length and show a good critical awareness of their work.

240. Students in Year 12 are achieving very well. There is a further increase in numbers on the previous year. In one lesson observed, they used a computer-aided design package to design a point-of-sale display for a product that they had made previously. They showed a keenness to learn new skills and quickly grasped the techniques of this demanding task to produce their drawings. They worked co-operatively and productively when using computers. A few students were too eager to forge ahead on their own and had not listened carefully to the teacher's advice and, as a result, experienced difficulty when working. They benefited from the teacher's good guidance at a later stage in the lesson. The products made were of a very good standard and showed much creativity and originality. The highest attaining students make use of computer-aided manufacture programs and special effects like lighting to enhance their designs. Students in this group are on target for A and B grades in the AS-level examination. This represents very good achievement based on prior attainment.
241. Teaching is very good and helps students to make very good progress in lessons. Teachers plan the work well and in good sequence to maximise students' learning, to maintain their motivation and concentration and to build very effectively on prior attainment. Experienced subject specialists fully conversant with the requirements of the examinations teach them. Students are made aware of what they need to do to achieve high marks. Assessment is thorough and students receive constant feedback on their performance. Students feel well supported, learning is rapid and they make very good progress.
242. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The new courses have been introduced very successfully. The monitoring and evaluation of the subject's performance are effective in helping to raise standards. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Insufficient workshop accommodation coupled with timetabling difficulties result in students having alternate use of workshop facilities with Year 9 pupils. This has an adverse effect on standards because work cannot always be carried out sequentially. Students are committed to their work and overcome this difficulty by using the facilities after school to undertake practical work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The focus was on information and communication technology.

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

Strengths

- Students' keen interest in the subject enhances their learning.
- Good management is helping to improve students' achievement.

Areas for improvement

- A few lessons do not proceed at sufficient pace to enable students to learn quickly.
- A few low attaining students do not have good enough writing skills to improve their attainment.

243. A satisfactory range of ICT courses is offered. These include AS-level and A2-level and a GNVQ course at intermediate level. A substantial, and increasing, number of students choose ICT courses. Rates of retention on these new courses are good.
244. No two-year A2-level courses in ICT have been completed. AS-level results in 2002 indicate below average attainment. However, the achievement that most of these students made based on previous GCSE results was satisfactory. Most students completed the AS-level course. GNVQ results at intermediate level in 2001 were average.
245. Standards of work seen are below average. Students in Year 13 are achieving satisfactorily based on their attainment in AS-level examinations results. Students are now clearer about what they have to do to improve their marks as a result of the department's recently improved methods for teaching the course and for arranging the work in a logical sequence. A particular strength is the good booklet that includes appropriate information and questions related to examination standards. Students feel that they are making more progress this year. Their ICT skills are good because they have straightforward access to computers and use them extensively during non-teaching time. All students use the Internet to carry out sophisticated and detailed research. However, the written work of low attaining students is not specific and accurate enough to gain good marks in examinations. Higher attaining students produce work that is relevant and detailed. They present compelling arguments to explain why specific items of ICT equipment would be needed in a commercial organisation. The project work of students in Years 12 and 13 shows good understanding of ICT solutions that can be used to tackle a particular problem and how a database can be used to analyse information. Students following the GNVQ intermediate course are making satisfactory progress. Most can relate the use of ICT to a particular purpose, such as developing an appropriate presentation for a particular audience.
246. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching is now, and suitably, focused more closely on examination standards. Teachers give good advice to every student on how to improve their work. Students speak well of this support. Teachers have appropriate knowledge of their subject and use it well to provide suitable background information to the students as well as to advise on how best to use ICT for particular purposes. The best lessons have a good variety of stimulating tasks and involve the students fully in discussions to which they contribute enthusiastically. However, in a few A-level lessons the pace of learning is slow because students are not pushed to complete their work by a set time. At times, GNVQ lessons do not provide enough challenge to the students to extend their knowledge and understanding.
247. Students' attitudes to ICT are good. Their high level of interest enhances their learning. They willingly give assistance to each other. Good relationships with their teachers assist students' learning. The management of ICT in the sixth form is effective in helping to raise standards. Procedures for assessment have improved and are good. Students have realistic targets to aim for and their progress is

monitored effectively. The monitoring of teaching and learning is good. There is a clear focus on improving attainment as seen by the recent improvements in students' achievement. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on physical education.

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching challenges students successfully to achieve well.
- Very good relationships ensure students have very good attitudes to learning.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment does not focus sufficiently on setting students targets for improvement.
- The period of study time to supplement taught lessons is not always used well.

248. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are average. This is the first year of A2-level teaching and the second of AS-level teaching. In 2001, a small number of students were taught off site and not by teachers from this school. These A-level results were well below the national average. In 2002, provisional AS-results indicate below average standards. However, students achieved slightly above what might be expected, compared with their previous performance. This represents good achievement.

249. In Year 13, students have a good understanding of the energy systems used by the body during exercise. When considering how to improve a performance they recognise the issues of stress in sport and how to counteract this. In Year 12, students show a satisfactory knowledge of how physical education developed in this country. They understand and apply the principles of measuring individual fitness. Students in both years use technical language accurately. Written work for students of all levels of attainment is organised well and supplemented by additional research material to extend the work covered in lessons. Higher attaining students use this research material to shape and inform their own opinions. Lower attainers usually reproduce research material in the same form as they found it. Insufficient use is made by students of the separate weekly period of study that is intended to extend their work in the subject. Students use ICT well to extend learning through use of the Internet for research, CD-ROMs for revision and video cameras for analysis of performance. Year 13 students make a good contribution in discussions in class. They have good skills of communication. Year 12 students are more reticent. Teachers are aware of this and use methods that develop the confidence of Year 12 students to express personal ideas and opinions.

250. Students have very good attitudes and positive views about the course. Physical education is increasingly popular. Almost all students completed the course in Year 12. Many continue into Year 13. Relationships with teachers are very good. Physical education makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.

251. Good teaching and learning enable students to achieve well. Teaching is often very good. Students make very good gains in understanding and knowledge because teachers plan interesting and challenging lessons. Teachers employ a wide variety of methods that motivate and encourage students to be independent learners. They use their very good knowledge of the subject to promote students' learning, as seen in the

skilful way they use class discussion to help students to clarify their ideas. Teachers have a wide knowledge of modern sport and use this to give telling examples, as in a discussion on the management of stress in competitive situations. Teachers mark students' work thoroughly and regularly. However, these assessments and target grades are not used sufficiently to help improvement. Leadership and management of the committed team are very good. There is a clear determination to raise standards. Planning for the new courses has been exemplary. The potential for further improvement is good. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. New courses have been introduced successfully and recruitment to them rising. It is unfortunate, and to the regret of students, that the vocational leisure and tourism course have been discontinued because of pressure on staffing.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design. Two lessons for students studying music in Years 12 and 13 were sampled. In both lessons, good teaching helped students to make good progress. The positive attitudes of the students help them to attain standards that are above average. This represents satisfactory progress based on their prior high GCSE grades.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching leads to above average standards.
- Students achieve very well because they are enthusiastic and committed to their work.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not use ICT enough to raise standards further.
- Lack of provision for clay work hinders the development of skills in ceramics.

252. The department provides courses at AS-level and A2-level in Years 12 and 13. Numbers choosing to study these courses are satisfactory and rates of retention are good.
253. Standards in the AS-level examination were very poor in 2001. This was due to severe difficulties in staffing. The students were without a teacher for a great part of the year. In 2002, results improved substantially with almost half the students gaining A or B grades. All students achieved a pass. The staffing difficulties were rectified with the appointment of a specialist teacher for the 2001/2002 academic year.
254. The standards seen in AS and A2-level work are above average. Students in Year 12 have made good formal studies from direct observation. They display good technical skills in drawing with impressive use of shading to achieve tone and texture. Much of the work seen has a creative, modern approach. Students experiment well with plaster casting to compose three-dimensional pictures using a wide range of objects and materials. They are aware of the possibilities of developing this work further. They use materials well in unconventional ways. They mix natural forms and man-made objects to create original effects.
255. In Year 13, students are working imaginatively on their highly individual, chosen themes. They explain their ideas and the development of their work very well both orally and in writing. They research their work in considerable detail and depth. Their

written notes are often incorporated into the design of their work in imaginative lettering that contributes to the tone of the themes. This adds to the tone and emotional effect and to their personal responses to the themes. There is some exquisite work in pen and ink that is clearly of A-grade standard. As at the time of the previous inspection there is a prolific output of preparatory work in sketchbooks and through homework.

256. In comparison with their GCSE grades students achieve well in art and design. They build impressively on their skills in drawing and painting and in three-dimensional, conceptual art. They show great commitment to their art as is seen in the depth, quality and extent of their research.
257. Teaching and learning are good. They are often very good. The teachers pass on their enthusiasm to the students and motivate them to work hard and creatively. There is a vibrant quality about the work and commitment of staff and students. Students value the encouragement to experiment and to be individual in approach. They say that “there is nothing you can’t do” in art. They describe the teaching as “fantastic” and say that their teachers give them lots of ideas. They value the fact that teachers lend them their own books. This helps to extend their learning.
258. Assessment is ongoing in all lessons. The teacher keeps careful and suitably detailed notes on the work of each individual. This helps students to reach their targets and work at an appropriate pace.
259. The subject is managed well within the expressive arts faculty. Many students incorporate poetry and great writings into their themes. This adds to the emotional and personal quality of the work. In this way the subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. All the good features reported then are maintained. There is still limited access to ICT facilities.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography. In the one history lesson sampled, the quality of teaching and learning was very good. The lesson challenged Year 12 students to think for themselves and to develop their analytical skills. Attitudes were positive and relationships very good. Students analysed a question effectively and their attainment was good. In the one psychology lesson sampled, teaching and learning were good. The lesson was planned well to engage Year 13 students' interest and to involve them actively in their learning. Clear progress was made. Students' attitudes were positive, relationships were very good and students collaborated very well.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Students have good attitudes to the subject that enhance their learning.
- Good opportunities in fieldwork help students to understand the work better.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of specialist teaching at A-level is not always adequate.
- Teaching provides too few opportunities for students to use ICT to support learning.

260. Geography courses to AS and A2-levels are provided. Most students complete their courses. The numbers choosing geography vary. There is currently a good take-up for the AS-level course but fewer following the A-level course. Rates of retention on courses are satisfactory.
261. A-level results in 2001 were below average. Results have fluctuated between well above average and below average over the previous three years. The progress that students made at A-level in 2001, as measured from their prior attainment at GCSE, is satisfactory. Results in 2002 were similar to those in the previous year and were satisfactory compared with students' prior attainment. AS-level results in 2001 were well below average and unsatisfactory. Results at AS-level in 2002 indicate higher attainment and satisfactory achievement.
262. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are below average. This represents satisfactory achievement from the grades students obtained at GCSE. In Year 13, students describe physical and human geographical processes well but are less competent in explaining these in detail and with valid illustrations. Most describe fully the effect of the speed of a river on the nature of the material that it carries. Only the higher attaining students explain clearly the relationships between the rivers' slope, its speed and the characteristics of the river channel itself. However, all students relate their fieldwork on rivers to the theory of meander formation. This is due to the good investigations that their teachers organise. Year 12 students are making satisfactory progress. This is particularly so for the substantial number who did not take geography in Years 10 and 11. Teachers ensure that skills are developed carefully. For example, Year 12 students understand why settlements develop in particular places because teachers use Ordnance Survey maps well to illustrate the concepts.
263. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. Accordingly, students make satisfactory progress with their learning. The best lessons move the students on quickly so that their interest is maintained. Challenging questions from the teacher make the students think and analyse the topic in hand. Teachers place good emphasis on consolidating students' knowledge of the main points that they need to know. As a result, most students understand specific geographical terminology. Good planning of the course enables students to build up their knowledge well as they move from Year 12 to Year 13. However, the lack of sufficient specialist teaching limits the progress made by students, especially in Year 13, in which the demands of the A-level course are greater. Teachers set appropriate targets for students' grades. However, teachers do not automatically discuss students' performance with them or provide enough specific advice on how students can improve their work. Students are encouraged to use the Internet for research but the use of ICT as an integral part of teaching throughout the sixth form courses is limited. This restricts the range of learning activities in lessons.
264. Students' attitudes to the subject are good. This good level of interest makes a substantial contribution to their learning. They feel that they are making progress and this encourages them to persevere.
265. Leadership and management of the sixth form courses are satisfactory. The department is managed well on a temporary basis. However, the overall monitoring of students' progress throughout all parts of their courses, and the teaching they receive, is insufficient to ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature. Lessons were also sampled in English language, English language and literature, and communication studies. Mainly good teaching and very good attitudes from students led to good learning in all three subjects. As a result, standards attained are at expected levels.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Teachers' enthusiasm and very good knowledge of the subject help students to learn well.
- Students are very positive and work hard in order to gain good examination results.
- Good leadership and management of the subject help students to achieve well.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not always try to involve quieter students in class discussion.
- In a small number of lessons students learn less well because teachers do almost all the talking.

266. Results in 2001 in the AS and A2-level examinations were above national averages. Provisional results for 2002 are at similar standards and reflect students' consistently good performance and achievement in English literature over recent years.

267. In work seen, students are attaining above average standards that indicate good achievement when set against students' previous all-round GCSE performance. Students generally show good knowledge when discussing texts in class. Their work on poetry, such as that of William Blake, is detailed and analytical. They write well-developed essays on Sheridan's *The Rivals*, making very good use of detailed background study. Higher attaining students write fluently about Shakespeare's *Othello* and demonstrate a clear grasp of underlying themes. Lower attaining pupils, particularly in Year 12, initially find texts such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* difficult to write about but they make rapid progress as a result of good teaching and their own judicious use of the Internet and other resources. In Years 12 and 13, students' skills in reading and writing are good and help them to achieve good standards in literature. They listen well in class as indicated by their good responses to the teacher's questions and their informed contributions to discussions in class and in groups. Most students are competent speakers, apart from a few lower attaining students who are reluctant to contribute orally at times.

268. Students are positive about their English work in the sixth form and over 60 of them choose to follow one or other of the courses on offer. Students particularly like English literature. Very few students drop out of the course before completing it. Attendance is generally good although the achievement of a small number of students has been affected by absence from lessons. Relationships with teachers are very good. Students enjoy lessons apart from the small proportion in which they are talked at, rather than being involved themselves. They enjoy the challenges offered and work hard to achieve their above average examination results.

269. Set against their levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form, students achieve well over two years. The work of students by the end of Year 13 is above average, having

been average when they entered the sixth form. In 2001, the A2-level results were better than in almost all other subjects. Recent results have been consistently high in English literature compared with those in other subjects.

270. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and pass on their enthusiasm to students so that they learn readily. Teachers provide a good and interesting range of stimulating activities to ensure that lessons proceed at a brisk pace. They make very clear to students their high expectations. Students respond well and learn quickly. Teachers plan lessons effectively with clear objectives for learning. Occasionally, they focus less well on the needs of lower attaining students and are sometimes unaware how well those who do not participate in class discussion are progressing.
271. The good leadership and planning of the head of faculty help students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment to succeed. The department has developed imaginative schemes of work and effective procedures for tracking students' progress. Good examples occur of teachers sharing ideas and strategies in order to raise standards. Teachers provide good support, advice and guidance for students about their work and aspirations in the subject. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and standards are higher.