

INSPECTION REPORT

BROUGHTON HALL HIGH SCHOOL

West Derby, Liverpool

LEA area: Liverpool

Unique reference number: 104713

Headteacher: Mr G. Murphy

Reporting inspector: Mrs G. Salter-Smith
8329

Dates of inspection: 17th – 21st March 2003

Inspection number: 249682

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Female
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Name of chair of governors:	Mr J. Hartley
Date of previous inspection:	27 th January 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Broughton Hall High is a voluntary aided Catholic comprehensive school for girls aged 11 to 18 years. The school is bigger than most schools with 1268 pupils of which 202 are in the sixth form. The school has increased in size significantly since the previous inspection and is popular and oversubscribed. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Pupils come from a wide range of circumstances including those less advantaged. The vast majority of pupils are white British with only a small number from ethnic minority backgrounds including Asian, Caribbean and Chinese. A small number of pupils do not have English as their mother tongue but none of these pupils is in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is below average as is the number with a statement of need. Most of these pupils have moderate or specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). A smaller number have emotional and behavioural difficulties, hearing impairment and physical difficulties. The attainment on entry to the school is below average overall, although for students in the current Year 13 their attainment on entry was closer to average. The school has Technology College status, has been a Beacon School since September 2002 and plays the lead role in a Network Learning Community. In addition to the School Achievement Award in 2002 and 2001, the school has gained Arts Mark Gold, Healthy Schools Award, Investors in People and the Merseyside Recognition of Quality Awards.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Broughton Hall High is a very good school. Standards are above average by the age of sixteen and average at the age 14. These standards represent very good achievement in relation to below average starting points. Pupils achieve higher standards than those expected of them because teaching is very good in Years 7 to 11. The school's emphasis on raising awareness of how pupils learn has resulted in pupils' very positive attitudes towards study and the school. Very good leadership and management promote a strong Catholic ethos of care, support and high expectations in all areas. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Results in national tests taken at age 14 and in GCSE examinations in 2002 were well above average when compared with schools with pupils of a similar background. Results and current standards of pupils' work represent very good achievement.
- Pupils are keen to learn, enjoy lessons and achieve very well owing to very good teaching.
- Outstanding leadership of the headteacher, with very good support from management at all levels, has created an excitement across the school about how pupils learn. There is a commitment and determination to succeed in raising standards.
- A very good range of courses and learning activities both within and beyond lessons supports pupils' personal development and academic progress.
- The very good levels of care and support help pupils to succeed.

What could be improved

- Pupils lack confidence in their oral skills.
- Although very good overall, in around one in four lessons the quality of teaching was satisfactory and could be improved.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the previous inspection of January 1997 improvement has been good. Standards have improved, especially in Year 11. The quality of teaching has improved. The school has maintained a very positive atmosphere in which the vast majority of pupils are eager to learn and take a full part in the life of the school.

The school has responded to all the issues raised and made significant improvements in the provision for information and communication technology (ICT).

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and 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	B	A	B	A
A-levels/AS-levels	Not known	C	*	

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

In the 2002 national tests taken by pupils aged 14, results were average when compared with all schools and all girls. When compared with pupils from similar backgrounds, based on the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, results were well above average. The trend of improvement in the school's overall results for pupils aged 14 is in line with the national trend. Results in English were above the national average for all schools and for girls. They were higher than the average results in mathematics and science. However, when compared with schools with pupils of a similar background, results in English and mathematics were well above average and in science they were above average. Taking into account the below average attainment on entry to the school and the backgrounds of the pupils then these results reflect very good achievement. The results are broadly reflected in current average standards of work. In Year 9, current standards or work in English and science are above average and in mathematics they are average.

The school has received the national Schools' Achievement Award on the basis of its significantly improved results at GCSE in 2000 and 2001. In 2002 the school out-performed the challenging targets it set for performance in GCSE. Based on average points scored and the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades, the 2002 GCSE results were above the average for all schools and for girls nationally. These results were well above average when compared with schools having pupils of a similar background. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five A* to G grades was well above average for all schools and similar schools. The overall trend of improvement in GCSE results is broadly in line with the national trend. Taking into account the attainment on entry and the background of these pupils then these results reflect very good achievement for pupils at all levels of prior attainment. The results broadly reflect the current above average standards of work. Current standards are well above average in English and science and average in mathematics. Results and current standards of work in the sixth form are average and these standards represent good achievement in relation to students' prior standards.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning from Year 7 onwards. Pupils are confident, feel secure and enjoy school knowing that the school will respond to every individual's needs. They respond well to the rewards provided for good achievement in all aspects of school life.
Behaviour, in and out of	Very good. The school sets high standards of behaviour and pupils respond very

classrooms	well. They behave in a sensible and mature manner in lessons and around the school. Pupils are trusted to spend social time without direct supervision. Exclusion is below average and the school is rigorous in applying its policies.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils often take charge of their own learning. They are willing to take on responsibilities within the school community. Relationships between one another and with staff are very good. The school is a harmonious environment where there is much mutual respect.
Attendance	Good. Rates of attendance are improving and are slightly above average as a result of the school's very good arrangements for monitoring absence and the rapid response and support for individual pupils.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Around one third of lessons observed in Years 7 to 11 were very good or excellent and around three quarters of the lessons were at least good. Almost all lessons were at least satisfactory. Examples of excellent teaching were seen in English, geography, ICT and physical education. The proportion of teaching that is at least good is higher in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9.

The school has a very strong focus on and commitment to improving the quality of learning and teaching. Pupils know how best they learn and teachers are increasingly taking account of these attributes in planning lessons. The development and use of ICT is a further major influence on raising the quality of teaching and learning. The very best lessons are characterised by an excellent range of teaching approaches that engage the pupils in learning at a good pace and ensure that they take a great deal of responsibility for their own learning. In most lessons relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and based on high expectations. Teachers know their subjects well and have a good understanding of how pupils learn. Teachers successfully challenge pupils of all levels of prior attainment and they plan to meet the needs of all pupils. Lessons are very well planned and structured and the purpose of each lesson is shared with pupils from the very start. Teachers mark work regularly. Their very useful comments give a clear idea of what to do to improve. Homework is set regularly and is most often a challenging extension of the lesson. Good attention is paid to improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across subjects. Pupils with special educational needs receive very good support from teachers, classroom assistants and learning mentors. The overall very good teaching has a significant impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. Many pupils are excited about learning. Most pupils enjoy lessons and are industrious. In this school, pupils find it "cool" to learn. The vast majority of pupils are keen and want to do well. More satisfactory lessons were seen in Years 7 to 9 compared to Years 10 and 11. In satisfactory lessons, activities are less demanding, lack variety and pace is sometimes slow.

Good teaching and learning in the sixth form is characterised by teachers' very good relationships with students and their high expectations of them; effective support for individual students; good subject knowledge and detailed planning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
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The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The breadth of courses provided meets the needs of all its pupils. The rich variety of activities out of lessons supports learning and develops pupils' wide ranging interests. The provision for personal, social and health education and careers is excellent. The curriculum meets all statutory requirements.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Pupils with special educational needs play a full part in school activities. Teachers, learning mentors and support assistants provide very good support.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. The small number of pupils for whom English is a second language are very well supported and make very good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The Catholic ethos and the school's clear mission pervades all areas of the school. The school is committed to providing very good opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through high levels of care, high quality teaching, a broad curriculum and many additional activities.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The very strong pastoral care system includes close monitoring and support for pupils' social, personal and academic needs. Help for individuals is always available. The school pays careful attention to health, safety, security and child protection.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher's excellent leadership, supported by a very good management team, is having a significant effect on improving the quality of learning and teaching and raising standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The governing body is very well informed of the school's performance. The governors bring a good range of expertise to their work. They are highly committed and effective in guiding and supporting the work of the school. They fulfil their statutory duties in all respects.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school analyses its performance in national tests and examinations closely. It uses this information to raise aspirations and expectations among pupils, staff and parents. The quality of teaching is checked through performance management arrangements, but the observation of teaching by managers is not frequent enough to ensure consistency in the high standards expected.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The very good provision of ICT equipment is used well to support learning across the school. The school applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents say their children are happy in school and behave well. Teaching is good and staff in the school are approachable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small minority of parents think that their children do not get the right amount of work to do at home. A small minority of parents do not think that they are well informed about how well their daughters

- Leadership and management are good.
- Pupils respond well to the school's high expectations. They make very good progress and are helped to become mature and sensible.

are getting on.

Inspectors agree with the positive comments made by parents. Inspectors found that homework is set regularly and that it supports learning and pupils' achievement well across the school. At times the school's plan for homework is not closely followed by all teachers and this can result in pupils receiving homework in uneven amounts. Inspectors found that parents are well informed of their pupils' progress at regular intervals. There is a considerable gap between the opportunity to meet parents in Year 7 and in Year 8 but the school provides regular written feedback on progress in between these meetings. The school is quick to respond to parents' concerns and requests for an update on progress.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

BROUGHTON HALL HIGH SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is predominantly female, and has 2 male students. Numbers total 202, with 26 more students in Year 12 than in Year 13. No student is at an early stage of acquiring English as an additional language. Five students have special educational needs, two of whom have a statement. There is a good range of subjects taught including Advanced Subsidiary (AS), Advanced Level (A2), Advanced vocational subjects (AVCE) and two General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses. The school has, in the past year, introduced six new courses in the sixth form. Students are admitted to AS, A2 and AVCE courses with minimum entry qualifications of five A* to C grades at GCSE, and to vocational courses with five GCSE grades at A* to G. Approximately two-thirds of pupils continue into the sixth form, and few join from other schools. Standards of entry to the sixth form are slightly below average.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The quality of education in the sixth form is good. Students generally achieve well in relation to their previous attainment. Current standards of work are average. Results in 2001 were average, and in 2002 results improved. Teaching is good, and students' attitudes are positive. The sixth form is successful and cost-effective. The majority of students goes on to higher education both in the local area and, increasingly, further afield.

Strengths

- In most subjects, students achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Students have positive attitudes towards their study and relationships are very good; many students undertake responsibility for organising work and activities with younger pupils.
- Standards are improving as a result of very good leadership and good management.
- A very good range of courses is enriched by many additional opportunities.
- Very good individual guidance and support enable students to develop confidence and self esteem.

What could be improved

- The irregular attendance of some students in some subjects adversely affects their achievement.
- The proportion of very good and excellent teaching is not as high as in most schools.

- Students' oral skills are underdeveloped.

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. Results at Advanced level are average and students make satisfactory progress from GCSE. Lessons are well planned, and assessment in class is very good. AS results are below average.
Biology	Good. Standards are improving as a result of good teaching and the positive attitudes of students. Results were average in 2001, and Advanced level results improved in 2002.
Physics	Good. Results in 2000 and 2001 were above average although in 2002 they dropped. Standards of work in Year 13 are above average but in Year 12 they are slightly below. Overall, teaching and learning are good. The department is well led and the number of girls choosing to study the subject is increasing.
Design and Technology	Good. Standards are average, but students achieve better results than would be expected from their GCSE results. Teaching is good. Students have positive attitudes. The subject is well led.
Business Studies	Good. Results are below average but better than can be expected from students' GCSE results. Teaching and learning are good. Students are choosing to study business in increasing numbers.
Information and Communication Technology	Satisfactory. After poor examination results in 2002 standards have improved and are now average owing to improved teaching. Students are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their GCSE results. Teaching is satisfactory but the quality of some coursework is not high enough.
Health and Social Care	Good. Teaching and learning are good and students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE grades.
Performance Studies	Good. Standards of attainment are average, and students achieve well in relation to their GCSE grades. The department provides good opportunities for students to broaden their experience through its programme of theatre visits and extra-curricular activities.
History	Satisfactory. Examination results are improving and are in line with prior attainment. Classroom teaching is good, but standards and students' progress suffer from students' irregular attendance.
Religious Studies	Good. Standards are average. Students achieve well because of good teaching and because they have good attitudes to the subject. Assessment is a strength.
Psychology	Satisfactory. AS examination results are satisfactory in relation to students' prior standards. Teaching is good. Students are learning to apply the scientific process to human behaviour.
English	Very good. Standards are above average, and students achieve well as a result of lively, well-informed teaching, very good assessment of their work, and an extensive programme of enrichment activities.

French	Good. Standards are above average. Teaching is good. Students have positive attitudes and make good progress.
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Lessons were seen in eight other subjects. Teaching was very good in lessons seen in AS level media studies, A-level chemistry, A-level government and politics; and in a key skill numeracy lesson; it was good in AS level Spanish and in A-level geography, and satisfactory in AS dance and in general studies. Lessons seen in three of the range of enrichment courses were well managed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. Students are well advised about their choice of courses. Procedures for assessing their academic progress are very good. Work is carefully marked, and students know how to maintain or improve their standards of attainment. Form tutors and subject teachers monitor individual progress closely and are quick to recognise underachievement and give support. All students benefit from very effective support and guidance. Both preparation for entry to university and careers guidance are very good.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good leadership has resulted in a steady rise in numbers of students entering the sixth form and improving standards. Strengths and areas for improvement are well known, and results are carefully analysed. The school's strategies for developing the range of approaches to learning are beginning to make an impact on teaching in various subjects but there is some teaching that can be improved further. Good implementation of the performance management system supports the overall commitment to improvement. Management by the recently appointed director of sixth form studies is effective. Students' progress is carefully monitored, and support for their educational and personal development is very good. The governing body's understanding of the work of the sixth form is very good. Statutory requirements are fully met. The principles of best value are met, and the sixth form is cost effective. Support for the very small number of students with special educational needs is very good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are well taught and well challenged by teaching. • They are helped to study independently. • They are well supported by teachers' readiness to give help and advice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printed information could be clearer. • They are not well informed about their progress. • They are not sufficiently well advised about future options. • They are not treated responsibly as young adults. • The school does not respond to their views.

Inspectors agree with students' positive views about the challenge, support and accessibility of advice available from teachers. Recent changes to the presentation of printed information has improved its clarity. Inspectors found that the quality of information about students' progress and the advice offered about future options is very good. In discussions held during the inspection, students' views contradicted those expressed in the students' questionnaire. Their views were closer to inspectors' views. They recognised that the school makes good efforts to treat students as responsible adults, and that, through the medium of the school council, the school is willing to listen and to respond to students' opinions.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

1. Results in national tests taken at age 14 and in GCSE examinations in 2002 were well above average when compared with schools with pupils of a similar background. Results and current standards of pupils’ work represent very good achievement.

2. In the 2002 national tests taken by pupils aged 14, results were average when compared with all schools and all girls. When compared with pupils from similar backgrounds, based on the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, results were well above average. Overall results were similar in 2001. The trend of improvement in the school’s overall results for pupils aged 14 is in line with the national trend.

3. In 2002, results in national tests taken by pupils aged 14 in English were above the national average for all schools and for girls. They were higher than the average results gained in mathematics and science. However, when compared with schools taking pupils with a similar background, results in English and mathematics were well above average and in science they were above average. When comparing the proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels with national averages and with similar schools they are equally favourable with similar differences between English and mathematics and science. Taking into account the below average attainment on entry to the school and the backgrounds of the pupils, then these results reflect very good achievement. These results and the very good achievement they represent are broadly reflected in the current standards of work.

4. In English, current standards of work in Year 9 are above average. Higher attaining Year 9 pupils write very assuredly. They demonstrate a clear understanding of how to compare and contrast two different pieces of writing. They clearly identify the purpose of travel guides with apposite examples. They analyse the purpose of “impressionist” writing and the effect of phrases very well. Average and lower attaining pupils have a good grasp of the key points about the characters in “Twelfth Night”. In a discussion during a lesson, average attaining pupils knew the details of the different episodes concerning the identities of Viola, Cesario and Sebastian. They have a good knowledge of the plot and understand and can use the term “dramatic irony”. Standards of speaking and presentation are not as high as standards of knowledge and understanding of the play. When giving presentations pupils are not always audible and lack confidence.

5. In mathematics current standards of work in Year 9 are average overall. Above average pupils demonstrate good work on changing subject and formulae, straight line graphs and simultaneous equations. There is less evidence of their involvement in solving problems. Average attaining pupils have a secure understanding of percentages. Their investigative work on the relationship between circumference and diameter is well presented and understood. Lower attaining pupils show an understanding of basic fractions and decimals but there is limited application of this knowledge evident in work books. Expectations of pupils in mathematics have been raised and there is a proportion of pupils currently working at Level 8, well above the national expectation for that age.

6. Current standards of work in Year 9 science are above average. Pupils are on course to achieve better results in national tests than in the previous year when staffing difficulties depressed the results for at least one group of pupils. Above average pupils explain the outcomes of investigations in their own words clearly and usually refer to scientific principles in their explanations. For example, they show a good understanding of the production of electricity through chemical reactions in the write up of the investigation. Average attaining pupils show a good understanding of the links between photosynthesis and

light intensity through well planned investigative work. Lower attaining students use everyday examples to demonstrate chemical reactions such as the formation of acid rain. In some of the investigative work of pupils of all levels of attainment, hypotheses are not always clearly stated nor are the outcomes of investigations fully explained in scientific terms.

7. The school has received the national Schools' Achievement Award for the past two years on the basis of its significantly improved results at GCSE in 2000 and 2001. Based on average points scored and the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades, the most recent GCSE results in 2002 were above the average for all schools and for girls. These results were well above average when compared with schools having pupils of a similar background. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five A* to G grades was well above average for all schools and for similar schools. The 2002 results were not as high as in 2001, which were well above the national average and very high when compared with similar schools. This is because there was a corresponding dip in the attainment on entry to the school for those pupils. The school lost a proportion of the highest attaining girls in their feeder primary schools to a local independent school that became co-educational. The overall trend of improvement in GCSE results is broadly in line with the national trend. Taking into account the attainment on entry and the background of these pupils then these results reflect very good achievement for pupils at all levels of prior attainment.

8. In 2002, results in science and religious education were well above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in science is very high when compared with schools with pupils from a similar background. The results in science were particularly pleasing because a very high proportion of pupils was entered for the double award examination compared with other schools. Similarly, a far higher proportion of students were entered for religious education than is found in most schools. Compared with most of their other subjects, pupils achieved better grades in science and dance.

9. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in English in 2002 was similar to the national average and in mathematics was above average. When compared with schools with pupils of similar backgrounds then these results were above average for English and well above average for mathematics. Results in English dropped when compared to the previous year. This is explained partly by the difference in the attainment on entry of the pupils but also by staffing difficulties that affected some groups.

10. Below average results in art and design, business, ICT and child care have all been identified by the school for improvement and action has been taken. Different courses are followed in ICT, a vocational course has replaced child care, new appointments have been made in business and ICT and the buildings currently under construction will provide improved accommodation and working environment for art and design.

11. Overall, current standards of work reflect the most recent examination results. Standards in English are improving and are currently well above average. Standards in mathematics are average overall and in science they are well above average. In English, higher attaining Year 11 pupils carry out a high powered analysis of a scene from Wuthering Heights in which they show very good understanding of the characters of Heathcliffe and Catherine and the depth of their attachment to each other as revealed through the imagery. Lower attaining pupils know what to look for when analysing a literary text, and they use technical terms accurately in preliminary discussions. They use lexicons and dictionaries productively in making comments on different writing styles.

12. In mathematics, higher attaining Year 11 pupils show good competency in algebra. In a lesson and work seen, average attaining pupils could be stretched more. Overall, there is little evidence of interpretation and problem solving work.

13. In science, higher attaining Year 11 pupils show a very good understanding of the solar system in their explanations of the birth date of a star. Average attaining Year 11 pupils have good understanding of how diseases are carried by genes from one generation to the next. Investigative work contributes to pupils' understanding in all areas of science although, at times, lower attaining pupils do not refer fully to scientific concepts in setting out hypotheses and explaining outcomes of investigations.

14. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make similar progress to other pupils. They achieve equally well because of the high quality of care and support that they receive from teachers, classroom assistants and learning mentors. The school's arrangements for identifying and meeting their needs are very successful in enabling them to take examinations at appropriate levels. Most achieve a good level of success, sometimes exceeding the targets in their individual education plans.

15. Pupils are keen to learn, enjoy lessons and achieve very well owing to very good teaching.

16. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Of the 37 lessons observed across Years 7 to 11, around one third were very good or excellent and around three quarters of the lessons were at least good. Almost all lessons were at least satisfactory. Examples of excellent teaching were seen in English, geography, ICT and physical education. The proportion of teaching that is at least good is higher in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. There are more satisfactory lessons in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11.

17. The school has a very strong focus on and commitment to improving the quality of learning and teaching. This is having a significant effect on the overall quality of teaching, pupils' aspirations and attitudes towards learning and ultimately their achievement. The school has carried out a great deal of training with all staff and some parents to raise awareness of how pupils learn and how this may influence approaches to teaching. Across the school pupils are aware of what type of learner they are and teachers are increasingly taking account of these attributes in planning lesson activities. A further major influence on raising the quality of teaching and learning is the development of the use of ICT. The very good provision of computers, interactive whiteboards and appropriate software is helping to bring greater variety to approaches to teaching.

18. The very best lessons are characterised by an excellent range of teaching approaches that engage the pupils in learning at a good pace and ensure that they take a great deal of responsibility for their own learning. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and based on high expectations. Teachers know their subjects well and have a good understanding of how best pupils learn and develop understanding.

19. In an excellent Year 11 English lesson, the teacher maintained a very good balance between group work and whole class work. Groups were well organised and the needs of gifted and talented pupils were well met. An excellent introductory activity engaged the pupils quickly and tested their prior learning. In a whole class analysis of a scene from 'Wuthering Heights', the teacher kept the whole class session moving at a brisk pace, continually challenging pupils, probing more deeply into the author's intentions.

20. In an excellent Year 7 geography lesson, pupils worked in groups to sort out the relationship between size of settlement and the number of shops. The teacher's very careful planning ensured that pupils considered complex issues step by step and that they had plenty of opportunity to discuss their reasoning with each other before sharing ideas with the class. The teacher ensured that all pupils were involved and contributed. The depth of their discussions and contributions to the class discussion reflected the success of this approach. Pupils gained confidence in oral presentation and, due to the teacher's clear guidance, they used the technical language of the subject correctly.

21. In an excellent physical education lesson, Year 9 pupils took a great deal of responsibility for their own warm up, planning tactics, reviewing them and setting themselves targets for improvement. Learning was maintained at a good pace throughout and very good probing questioning encouraged pupils to think broadly and deeply in solving the problems posed. Excellent relationships established very high expectations and an open atmosphere where pupils felt confident in giving their opinions and ideas and

that it was all right to make mistakes. Pupils were very supportive of each other and were comfortable in giving helpful feedback to each other on their work. This level of review and discussion amongst each other about their work helped to build confidence.

22. In an excellent Year 11 ICT lesson, all the pupils were fully engaged in working on their own pieces. The pupils were highly industrious and very well motivated to achieve success in the course. The teacher had prepared them extremely well so that the pupils knew exactly what was expected of them in the lessons and in this part of the course. Every pupil had clear individual areas for improvement. Very good questioning helped pupils to review their knowledge and understanding of health and safety issues relating to the use of computers and the teacher ensured that pupils drew on their own experiences.

23. Lessons are very well planned and structured and the purpose of each lesson is shared with pupils from the very start. Most teachers make use of the whiteboards available in almost all teaching areas to share the lesson objectives with the class. Consequently pupils have a very clear understanding of what is expected of them lesson by lesson and over longer periods of time. Lessons are purposeful and, in the best lessons, teachers frequently refer back to the lesson's objectives to check progress in learning.

24. Teachers mark work regularly and their very useful comments give pupils a clear idea of what to do to improve. The setting of targets for every pupil in every subject ensures that teachers and pupils know very clearly what they are expecting to achieve. The school's marking system is closely tied in to assessment and target setting. Consequently pupils know whether they are on track to achieve their target or not after each piece of work is marked. Not all pupils carry out the corrections that teachers request of them.

25. Homework is an important part of pupils' learning and achievement. Homework is set regularly in most subjects, though not all teachers keep rigidly to the timetable proposed and sometimes the amount of homework becomes uneven over a week. Homework is most often a challenging extension of the lesson. Pupils frequently are required to carry out research or to plan work to share with others in future lessons. Pupils have ready access to the school's learning resource centre and many make good use of its facilities at lunchtimes and after school. Teachers make good use of the pupils' planners to communicate with parents about progress.

26. Teachers use a good range of approaches in most lessons and they successfully challenge pupils of all levels of prior attainment. They ensure that learning for all pupils moves on at a good pace. In history, for example, debates are well structured and teachers ensure that all pupils contribute; higher attaining pupils are challenged to explain the terms they use. Most teachers are skilled in posing open-ended probing questions to encourage depth of thought. In art lessons, pupils are encouraged to use their own ideas and make their own decisions in creative processes. Teachers often use a variety of ways to help chart and order pupils' thinking or summarise areas of knowledge. For example, "spider diagrams" and "mind maps" constructed by pupils help many to clarify areas of knowledge and understanding in geography and science. In mathematics, a good range of activities encourages pupils to work out solutions for themselves and gives them "thinking time" before responding, but there are times when learning is not moved on quickly enough.

27. The school has benefited from the emphasis on improving approaches to teaching and learning brought about through the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy. Relevant and engaging "starter" activities are adopted in many lessons. Lessons are well structured often following recommended structures. Good attention is paid to improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across subjects.

28. Pupils with special educational needs receive very good support from teachers, classroom assistants and learning mentors.

29. The overall very good teaching has a significant impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. Many pupils are excited about learning. They are highly motivated and most pupils enjoy lessons and want to do well. In this school, pupils find it "cool" to learn and the vast majority of pupils are keen and interested in doing well.

30. Outstanding leadership of the headteacher, with very good support from management at all levels, has created an excitement about how pupils learn. There is a commitment and determination to succeed in raising standards across the school.

31. Leadership and management are very good overall. The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He maintains a firm emphasis on raising standards and the quality of teaching and learning, all within the school's strong Catholic ethos of respect, care and a commitment to provide the very best educational opportunities for every pupil. A strong sense of community has been created in which all staff are committed to the ethos of the school. Results are improving especially at GCSE and in the sixth form but there is no complacency. The school recognises that it is embarked on a journey of improvement and development. It has a determination to succeed which is fuelled by commitment and energy.

32. On arriving at the school over three years ago the headteacher, with the support of governors and managers, recognised areas for improvement within an already successful school. An early focus was to improve the numbers of pupils continuing their education into the sixth form and to raise the standards achieved by students in the sixth form. Other priorities included broadening the curriculum to build in opportunities for pupils to continue education from age 14 to 19, especially average and lower attaining pupils; to raise the quality of the teaching and learning across the school; to work effectively with partner primary schools to develop an interest in learning from an early age; to improve the access and use of ICT across the school and to re-organise the composition of senior management to enable initiatives and improvements to be implemented successfully. Much progress has been made in all these areas. Additionally the school has embarked on a number of further initiatives all focused on the major aim of improving learning and teaching. These include the renewal of Technology College status, becoming a Beacon School and leading on the formation of a Network Learning Community.

33. A coherent well-planned approach to raising standards is outlined in the school's development plan which is very clearly focused on improving the quality of learning and teaching. The plan is a very useful tool used in guiding the actions to be taken. All staff contribute to the plan, and subject and pastoral areas share the school's priorities. Heads of department and heads of year manage their areas of the school very well and there is a shared commitment to improving pupils' experiences to ensure their success. Senior managers have clear roles and responsibilities. They are responsible for checking that key areas of the school development plan are implemented and are effective. All parts of the plan relate back to the school's overall focus on improving approaches to learning. A member of the senior leadership team has responsibility for co-ordinating the variety of initiatives across the school relating to teaching and learning to ensure that they are well focused on the school's priorities. The school's performance management arrangements are closely linked to the whole school priorities. Seventy per cent of the teaching staff have performance targets that relate to improving approaches to learning and teaching. All these arrangements are leading to raised standards. The stringent use of assessment information to set challenging targets for individuals, teaching groups, subjects and the whole school has also been a major influence in raising the aspirations of pupils, parents and staff.

34. The very good programme of professional development, closely linked to the school's priorities and performance management arrangements, provides extensive training on approaches to learning and teaching to the school staff and to a network of schools, including feeder primary schools. It is having a major influence on improving attitudes to learning and approaches to teaching. The school is developing a reputation for being at the forefront of development in approaches to teaching and learning and the staff are frequently invited to share experiences with other schools. The constantly improving use of ICT through the Network Learning Community initiative is especially useful in ensuring that professional development is experienced widely, particularly with feeder primary schools, and through a range of different media.

35. The headteacher and senior managers are very ably supported by a committed and experienced governing body. They have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and are very well informed by the school's managers. They fulfil their statutory duties. A good range of

expertise among the governing body ensures that the right questions are asked when major decisions are made. The school's finances are very carefully managed and the school ensures that the principles of best value are adhered to.

36. A very good range of courses and learning activities both within and beyond lessons supports pupils' personal development and academic progress.

37. The curriculum provision is very good in Years 7 to 11. It is broad, balanced and relevant and is accessible to pupils of all abilities, aptitudes and backgrounds. The curriculum is well managed and has improved in quality since the previous inspection. It has been a major concern of management to ensure that the courses offered by the school and the learning activities are relevant to pupils' needs, interests and well being. Groups are carefully organised so that the needs of all pupils, included those deemed as gifted and talented, are well met. The curriculum is under constant review and the school has further plans to bring in more courses to ensure continuity of learning between the ages of 14 and 19, especially for lower attaining pupils. Statutory requirements are fully met.

38. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are taught all subjects of the National Curriculum, plus religious education. In addition, provision includes drama and a second modern language. Citizenship is now included in the programmes for personal, social and health education (PSHE), and religious education. As part of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, the school provides catch-up lessons in literacy and numeracy in Year 7 and booster classes after school in English, mathematics and science for pupils in Year 9. The mentoring programme introduced last year for underachieving pupils in Year 8 has proved so successful that plans are underway to extend the programme into Years 7 and 9.

39. In Years 10 and 11, apart from a small number of lower attaining pupils for whom a good alternative programme is in place, all pupils study a good range of subjects to GCSE. These include English, English literature, mathematics, science, religious education, a modern foreign language and a design technology subject. Pupils choose two further subjects from a range of options, which includes a number of vocational courses. All pupils take a vocational course in ICT, some studying out of hours for GNVQ. The success of the out of hours provision for ICT has led to numbers in Year 10 rising to over 70. The school is planning to expand its provision of vocational courses and has recently appointed an assistant headteacher with responsibility for continuity in education 14 to 19. Very good careers guidance is included in the excellent PSHE programme and all pupils undertake work experience placements.

40. The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities, which include art, dance, drama, music and sport. Subject departments offer 'drop-in' homework clubs after school each week and, during the Easter holidays, the school runs a full programme of booster and revision classes for pupils in Years 9 and 11. As well as school productions, musical evenings and theatre visits, pupils have exciting opportunities to take part in local events and competitions, sometimes involving working with local artists. Annual visits abroad include the World War 1 Battlefields and the Spanish Watersports holiday. Many pupils take part in the activities provided and their learning is significantly enhanced.

41. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. It pervades the life of the school and supports pupils' personal development very well. The school sets out its intentions very clearly in its mission statement, although there is no whole school policy. The school chapel is used regularly for assemblies and as a place for private prayer and reflection and, through the many opportunities she provides both within and outside the school, the school's full-time lay chaplain has a clear impact on pupils' spiritual development. Year assemblies and form tutor periods make a good contribution overall to pupils' personal development, though the quality is variable. For example, during the week of the inspection, very good opportunities were provided for some pupils to reflect on spiritual, moral and social issues related to the outbreak of war with Iraq, whereas for others there was little opportunity for reflection or for pupils to be actively involved.

42. Pupils develop very well in a social and moral sense as they move through the school. They learn about the difference between right and wrong and they respond very positively to teachers' high

expectations for work and behaviour. Within the curriculum, moral issues are explored very effectively in the programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE), as well as in many other subject areas. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to face up to and think about moral issues, for example in history, when discussing the moral dilemma of warfare. School and year councils provide pupils with an effective forum for debate and decision-making, thereby developing their leadership skills. The school's very good community links encourage pupils to take an active role in the life of the parish and to help others less fortunate than themselves. For example, pupils studying GCSE music work with a local school for the blind and partially sighted and pupils in Years 8 and 9 are currently learning sign language. Pupils are generous in spirit and support many charities through their fund-raising activities. Social provision is enhanced by a good range of clubs and sports teams, as well as by residential visits at home and abroad. The quality of relationships seen in the school is testimony to the very good provision.

43. Provision for pupils' cultural development is very good. Both within the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities, pupils have many opportunities not just to appreciate their own cultural traditions but also to learn about the diversity of European and non-European cultures and traditions. Art, music, dance, English, history, religious education and PSHE including citizenship, are just some of the areas which contribute so well to developing pupils' cultural awareness.

44. The very good levels of care and support help pupils to succeed.

45. Standards of care and support throughout the school are very high. Throughout the day, from the early morning breakfast club to the activities provided after school, pupils' well-being is paramount and the teachers and all other members of the school staff provide help and support in response to any pupil's specific needs. Form tutors and year heads all know their pupils well. They keep a close check on pupils' personal and academic development and progress, providing frequent encouragement and support to individuals. Form tutors and heads of year work very effectively with their form and year groups to promote the positive ethos of the school and give encouragement and support through the use of the school's well regarded rewards system. They communicate regularly with parents sending letters of praise to many deserving pupils each half term in addition to communicating concerns. The learning mentors and classroom assistants provide very effective individual support in class and at any other time. Staff in school work very effectively with parents and carers to help pupils through any difficulties they face. The excellent provision for personal, social and health education and for citizenship enables pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own welfare, academic progress and personal development and to make well-informed decisions about their present and future lives and their responsibilities as citizens. The school, together with the governing body, has very good procedures to provide for the health and safety of everyone on the school site and on school visits. Child protection procedures are in place and all staff know what to do if they have any concerns.

46. Assessment procedures are excellent and use of assessment is very good. Information on pupils' performance is used extensively to monitor their progress and to improve teaching and learning. All staff have access to this data through the computerised central record system. The school uses information from the primary schools to assess pupils on entry and to set targets. Pupils have targets for every subject and their progress is measured against these targets on a day-to-day basis through the marking of homework and classwork. Progress from entry in Year 7 to the end of Year 9 and Year 11 is rigorously monitored on an individual pupil basis, by teaching group and for the whole year group.

47. The school's assessment policy emphasises respect for the worth of each individual. Teachers are positive and encouraging as they identify ways in which pupils can improve. Assessment at the end of each unit of work includes a teacher and a pupil comment; parents are also invited to comment. The half-yearly monitoring cards and annual reports give a National Curriculum level or a GCSE grade for each subject and these are compared with the pupil's target.

48. Pupils who are doing well and those who are underachieving are identified through the half-termly "commendations and concerns" procedures and effective action is taken. There are very effective mentoring programmes for pupils in Year 8 and Year 11; these will be extended into Years 7 and 9 next

year. The success of these programmes is evaluated. Some pupils would benefit from earlier mentoring in Years 10 and 11. The school is aware of this and has plans to extend the Year 11 mentoring programme into Year 10.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

49. Some pupils lack confidence in their oral skills.

50. There is a good emphasis on using the technical language of subjects and in many lessons there are good opportunities for pupils to discuss their work with the teacher and each other. Higher attaining pupils often speak clearly in their presentations or readily extend their answers to teachers' questions. However, in a number of classes, standards of speaking are not high. Pupils are not always very audible when presenting their work. Pupils are tentative and unclear in their response, often using very short answers. Reading aloud is fluent but not always audible and lacking in expression. In some lessons there are missed opportunities to encourage pupils to talk about their work.

51. In around one in four lessons observed the quality of teaching is satisfactory.

52. There are some lessons where teaching can be improved. More satisfactory lessons were observed in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. In some lessons the pace is slow and there is not enough rigour and challenge in the learning expected of pupils. Sometimes this is because parts of the lessons are led by the teacher for too long a period and there is not enough variety in the learning activities. Sometimes the work set is not demanding enough for pupils and they find it too easy. In other lessons there is not enough step-by-step guidance provided by teachers to take pupils through new and difficult procedures, for example, when using computers. A lack of preparation and planning led to a lesson where pupils spent too much time preparing materials rather than using them to investigate a problem. Occasionally pupils' restlessness is not checked quickly enough; this combined with a lack of pace and challenge results in pupils not achieving enough. Sometimes resources such as overhead projectors are not well used or the lack of blinds makes viewing computer screens or whiteboards difficult.

53. Through performance management arrangements, teaching is observed regularly by team leaders. Senior managers and heads of department monitor teaching through the scrutiny of pupils' work and analysis of results. From time to time senior managers monitor teaching through direct observation. However, there is no regular system in place whereby teaching is observed in relation to monitoring standards across subjects or the school. In order to ensure consistency in the high quality of teaching across all areas the arrangements for monitoring the quality teaching need to be more rigorous.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

54. In order to raise standards and the quality of education further the headteacher, governing body and staff should:

Main School

- improve pupils' oral skills by:
 - providing more structured opportunities for pupils to talk clearly and audibly about their work with the teacher and each other;
- See paragraph number 4, 50.
- improve the quality of teaching in satisfactory lessons by:
 - ensuring that lesson activities place appropriate demands on all pupils;
 - continuing to develop teachers' awareness of how pupils learn;
 - continuing to develop the use of a variety of relevant teaching approaches that support learning at a good pace;

- making the arrangements for monitoring teaching by heads of department and senior managers more rigorous;

See paragraph numbers 52, 53.

Sixth form

- improve the attendance of some students by:
 - making the systems to monitor attendance in lessons more rigorous;
 - making clear to students the relationship between achievement and attendance;See paragraph numbers 60, 125, 134, 135, 139, 150, 156, 166.

- raise the quality of already good teaching even further by:
 - ensuring that all subjects give opportunities for students to work independently and think for themselves;
 - bringing more rigour to the arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching;
 - ensuring that the work on developing teaching and learning has a clear focus on sixth form study and that it is considered across all sixth form subjects;
 - increasing the variety of learning activities and teaching approaches used in lessons;
 - continuing to develop the use of ICT across subjects;See paragraph numbers 79, 82, 83, 111, 112, 113, 114, 124, 130, 197, 198.

- improve students' oral skills by:
 - providing more structured opportunities for students to discuss their work with each other and the teacher;

See paragraph numbers 111, 113, 114, 125, 137, 156, 171, 188.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	37
	Sixth form	60
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		61

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	4	9	15	8	1	0	0
Percentage	10.8	24.3	40.5	21.6	2.7	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	7	30	21	1	0	0
Percentage	1.7	11.7	50	35	1.7	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1066	202
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	232	21

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	99	5

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	12

Attendance

Authorised absence

%

Unauthorised absence

%

School data	7.6
National comparative data	7.8

School data	0.7
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	N/A	220	220

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	172	159	145
	Total	172	159	145
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (73)	72 (62)	67 (69)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	37 (33)	45 (39)	30 (31)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	177	170	166
	Total	177	170	166
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	80 (79)	77 (62)	75 (67)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	45 (51)	46 (39)	37 (31)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	N/A	196	196

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	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	116	188	191
	Total	116	188	191
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	59 (68)	96 (98)	97 (99)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results	GCSE point score
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Average point score per pupil	School	43.3 (47.6)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School 2001	Number of candidates	1	60	61
	Average point score per candidate	160.0	199.0	198.3

School		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
	Number of candidates	1	59	60	0	2	2
	Average point score per candidate	160.0	200.6	200.0	N/A	50.0	50.0

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1234	36	
White – Irish			
White – any other White background	19		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean			
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian			
Mixed – any other mixed background			
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani			
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi			
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background			
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2		
Black or Black British – African			
Black or Black British – any other Black background	6	2	
Chinese	2		

Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

1
3

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	82.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	24
Total aggregate hours worked per week	713

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.6
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	22.9
Key Stage 4	20.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	12.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
	£
Total income	4038372
Total expenditure	4042956
Expenditure per pupil	3216
Balance brought forward from previous year	318398
Balance carried forward to next year	313814

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1268
Number of questionnaires returned	249

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	49	5	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	58	39	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	52	41	4	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	40	45	13	2	0
The teaching is good.	49	45	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	46	13	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	35	3	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	35	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	34	51	11	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	53	41	1	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	55	39	3	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	40	6	2	9

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

55. Overall attainment at the start of the sixth form is slightly below average. Standards in the sixth form are average overall and students' achievement, i.e. whether the standards students reach are as expected based on their prior attainment, is good. In the thirteen subjects inspected in depth, standards were above average in biology, physics, health and social care, English literature and French. Achievement is good in business education, biology, design and technology, psychology, English literature, French, health and social care, performance studies, physics and religious studies. There were no subjects in which standards were below average or achievement less than satisfactory. Good teaching and very good support and individual guidance helps students to achieve well. Poor attendance and students' underdeveloped oral skills affect progress in some subjects.

56. Advanced level results have been broadly in line with the national average since the previous inspection. The average points score declined between 1999 and 2001, but improved significantly in 2002. This improvement was because of curriculum changes, which resulted in matching students to courses more successfully. The best results in 2002 at A-level were in English literature, French, performance studies, religious studies and textile technology; the lowest results were in design and technology, information technology and physical education. In 2001 the best results were in chemistry, physics and religious studies; the lowest results were in art and design, communication studies, French and general studies. Value-added analysis shows that progress from GCSE is satisfactory. Students perform particularly well at GCSE in relation to their attainment on entry to the school and in the sixth form they build steadily on this attainment. Overall students in the sixth form achieve well in relation to the standards expected of them.

57. The Advanced Subsidiary (AS) results were below average in 2001 and declined further in 2002. The percentage pass rate in 2002 was particularly low in art and design, mathematics and psychology. The best results were in chemistry, English literature, French and health and social care. Standards seen in the current Year 12 show improvement due to a better match of students to courses and better guidance to students during the selection process.

58. The school sets realistic and challenging targets for individual students in every subject based on DFES predicted grades and then adds challenge. These grades are amalgamated to give group, department and whole school targets. In 2002 most students met the targets set for them and achieved the, sometimes ambitious, results expected of them.

59. Overall rates of retention are good and have improved due to the broader range of courses and improved guidance to Year 11 pupils. Most students finish the courses they embark upon. However, in mathematics a higher proportion of students leave the course than in other subjects during Year 12 and only small numbers continue on to Advanced level in Year 13. Some students with modest attainment at GCSE find the work very difficult despite additional support offered by teachers. Seventy-eight per cent of students progress on to higher education and for the first time one student has gained a place at Oxford.

60. Students follow a key skills course in Year 12 and many achieve Level 2 and 3 awards, though the number doing so has gone down in 2002 compared with 2001. The greatest success is in Level 2 ICT with 24 students reaching the level. Around 14 students achieved success at Level 3 in most other skills. Written communication is often good and better than students' oral skills. In most subjects students have opportunities to discuss and share their ideas and higher attaining students are often confident and articulate. However, in a number of subjects including mathematics, performance studies and religious education some students are reticent speakers and there is a lack of clarity and audibility in their spoken contributions. In discussions in some lessons students need much prompting and guidance from the teachers.

61. Overall standards of numeracy are satisfactory. Students use numeracy well in mathematics and apply their skills successfully to their Advanced Level work. In modern foreign languages students interpret and analyse statistics competently; in biology students apply their numeracy skills to magnification and timing; in health and social care students calculate body mass index to a satisfactory standard. In chemistry students manipulate equations competently.

62. Most students are competent in using computers to support their learning. Most students use the Internet suitably for research and many present their work well using word processing and graphics. There are some subjects where although ICT is used, it is limited and in need of further development.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

63. Students' attitudes towards work and towards life in the sixth form are positive. Although a minority disagrees, almost all students feel valued as young adults, and would happily recommend the sixth form to younger pupils. They are satisfied with the range of courses on offer, and are content with the school's efforts to meet their abilities and aspirations. They consider themselves suitably challenged by the work they are set, and recognise teachers' commitment to supporting their efforts in gaining qualifications for their future careers.

64. Many students develop good personal study skills and work independently. Access to information and communication technology and library facilities is good, and very well used. Students are permitted to work in classrooms while other lessons are taking place, an arrangement which permits them to set an example of good study habits to younger pupils. However, in some lessons students are very passive and do not contribute a great deal. At times, they lack confidence in offering answers and opinions and some seldom challenge the views of their fellow students.

65. Through initiatives such as the Young Enterprise scheme and the annual musical production, students make the most of many opportunities to work together, developing very good teamwork skills.

66. Relationships between sixth form students and younger pupils are very good. Students are aware of their responsibilities to younger pupils, and set good examples of behaviour, tolerance and sense of purpose. Many help younger pupils in various subjects, notably in the paired reading scheme. Very good working relationships are established with teaching staff such that students feel comfortable approaching teachers for extra help when it is required.

67. Students are aware that regular attendance and good punctuality are attributes which will be important to their future success in life, and the vast majority are conscientious about maintaining reliable habits. There is, however, a small minority whose attendance and poor punctuality have adverse effects on their attainment and progress. In history, physics, business studies, health and social care and performance studies, irregular attendance and erratic punctuality affect the learning of a minority of students. Attendance in the sixth form is broadly satisfactory.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

68. The good quality of teaching is a major reason for students' overall good achievement and the good rate at which they learn. Of the 60 lessons observed, almost all were satisfactory or better and more than two in every three were good or better. Although around one lesson in eight was very good or excellent the proportion of these lessons is lower than is found in most sixth forms. One unsatisfactory lesson was not well planned and the activities were undemanding; the pace was slow so that students did not make sufficient progress. The quality of teaching is good in most of the focus subjects.

69. The table below identifies the quality of teaching and learning in each focus subject.

Focus subjects	The quality of teaching and how well students learn in Years 12 and 13
Mathematics	Satisfactory
Biology	Good
Physics	Good
Design and Technology	Good
Business Studies	Good
Information and Communication Technology	Satisfactory
Health and Social Care	Good
Performance Studies	Good
History	Good teaching and satisfactory learning
Religious Studies	Good
Psychology	Good
English	Very good
French	Good

70. Very good relationships between teachers and students are a strong feature of the teaching. Teachers know their students very well and have well established working relationships with them based on high expectations of effort and progress. Consequently students want to work hard and be successful.

71. For example, in a good Year 12 mathematics lesson, relationships are very good. Students work hard and sensibly and are keen to do well. The teacher encourages students to participate and explain their answers. When students are unsure the teacher teases the answers out of them and then gives plenty of practice to consolidate the methods.

72. Detailed planning and secure knowledge of the subject are further strong features of teaching. Planning takes account of students' different levels of prior attainment so that the tasks and activities are a good match to students' needs and they learn at a good rate. The purpose of lessons and the longer-term aims of the courses they follow are made very clear to students so that they know what is expected of them in lessons and for personal study. Lessons are purposeful and productive. Teachers generally ensure that activities in lessons move on at a good pace and so students make good progress in acquiring new knowledge and skills and developing a good depth of understanding across the subjects. Questioning is often very good and probes students' understanding and reflects teachers' high level of subject knowledge. Teachers' secure knowledge of their subjects enables them to give very clear explanations and set out learning of complex issues in manageable chunks. Teachers are very clear on examination board requirements and ensure that students are well prepared for examinations.

73. In some lessons good attention is paid to developing basic skills such as communication. There is good emphasis across subjects on learning and using the correct technical language. In some subjects students are required to share their opinions, question each other and, from time to time, make more formal presentations. These activities not only help students to gain personal confidence in oral presentation, they also help students to strengthen their understanding when they are required to explain their views and opinions or question others.

74. For example, in a very good media studies lesson on the media coverage of British newspapers, students were required to present their chosen topics and then to question the presenters. Students were successful in presenting their case with commitment, confidence and passion. The teacher constantly challenged students' attitudes and opinions, encouraging them to consider issues deeply and from a moral perspective. Students' oracy skills varied but the teacher knew the students well and kept them all focused and involved, ensuring the level of challenge was appropriate for all. A very good pace was maintained throughout the lesson through the use of clear time targets for each activity.

75. There are two teaching groups for the teaching of application of number for those students in Year 12 who enter the sixth form without higher grade GCSE in mathematics. The one lesson observed showed very good teaching, carefully building students' confidence with numeracy and making learning fun. Numeracy skills are taught satisfactorily across subjects such as modern foreign languages, biology, physics, chemistry and health and social care.

76. Good systems for assessment, high quality of marking with specific guidance for individuals and regular homework are further positive features of the teaching.

77. For example, students' work in health and social care reveals work that is thoroughly marked according to the assessment criteria of the exam board, and students are provided with review summary sheets at the end of every unit of work clearly outlining areas for improvement.

78. Students are highly motivated and apply themselves to study and research diligently. They work well in lessons and, in many subjects, are developing a good range of study skills to help them to learn independently. The high quality of assessment and marking ensures that students have a clear knowledge of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Regular analysis of assessments by subject and pastoral staff makes sure that any underachievement is recognised quickly and further support is given unstintingly. The small number of students with special educational needs are well supported, especially those with medical difficulties, and they make progress at a rate similar to other students. The small number of students with English as an additional language are not in the early stages of learning the language. However, they are well known by their teachers and the well structured teaching, with good attention paid to technical language, supports their acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding at a rate similar to other students.

79. There are a number of ways in which teaching that is already satisfactory or good can be improved further. In some subjects not enough attention is paid to helping students develop some of the basic skills, particularly communication and ICT. For example, in design and technology students do not have precise enough guidance on responding to written technical questions. In mathematics some students' writing skills are weak and they need more guidance. Occasionally basic errors in spelling and grammar are not picked up in marking. More common are the missed opportunities for group discussion or for students to contribute their views and thoughts during introductions and explanations in lessons.

80. ICT is used well in many subjects to support learning such as in history, business and English. For example, interactive whiteboards and projectors are used to enhance classroom-based activities and the Internet is used well for research. Data loggers are used in physics.

81. For example in a very good investigative physics lesson, the teacher used a data logger to plot a graph of discharge against time when a capacitor is discharging. This helped to reinforce what had been learnt earlier in the lesson through the very good standard of investigative work carried out by the students.

82. However, there is still more scope for the use of ICT across subjects such as mathematics, biology, physics, design and technology, religious studies and French. This is sometimes due to a lack of software. The full potential of ICT to support learning has not yet been fully exploited.

83. The school's focus on improving approaches to teaching and learning is beginning to have an impact on lessons in the sixth form but there are still lessons where the variety of teaching approaches used is limited. In these lessons students do not have enough opportunity to discuss issues or consider matters in depth, or they are not encouraged to carry out work on their own. Sometimes questioning is superficial and does not challenge students' understanding. At times there is too little questioning of students to test their knowledge. Occasionally teachers give too lengthy explanations so that the pace of learning slows and students are not required to think for themselves. Although most subjects ensure that higher attaining students are challenged, in biology not enough extension work is provided to make appropriate demands of

the gifted and talented students. The written resources used by teachers are generally suitable and enrich students' learning.

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

84. The school responds to students' expression of preferred courses and constantly reviews the curriculum offered in order to provide for the different needs and abilities of students. Over the past two years, six new courses have been introduced. In terms of breadth, balance and relevance, and in the quality and range of opportunities, the curriculum for students in the sixth form is very good. Twenty-five subjects are offered at AS and A-level, and there are vocational A-level courses in business, health and social care, information technology and science. Students in Year 12 choose four AS subjects, or a combination of AS and a single or double award AVCE. In Year 13, students go on to take either three A2 courses, or a combination of A2 subjects and a single or double award AVCE. There is a good amount of taught time allowed, with each advanced level subject receiving five hours. In addition, all students' study is enhanced by courses in key skills in communication, application of number and information and communication technology in Year 12. All Year 12 students take AS general studies and in Year 13 they all take A2. Provision is also made for students to follow a one-year intermediate level GNVQ course in business and in health and social care, from which students may go directly into employment in their chosen area, or go on to a vocational A-level course. All students follow a course in religious education in both Years 12 and 13; this is an improvement on the previous inspection when in this respect the school did not fulfil its statutory requirements. Only a comparatively small number of students fails to complete courses they take in the sixth form.

85. The school continues to examine the appropriateness of the sixth form curriculum and is looking to extending the range of vocational courses and to providing increasing opportunities by improving links with Cardinal Heenan High School.

86. An extensive programme of enrichment courses is available for students in Year 12. These include Duke of Edinburgh award schemes, sports leadership certification, Young Enterprise schemes and business awareness courses. Students also have opportunities to choose preparation for teaching. Information technology students help in local primary schools and other students have work placements in local hospitals. Courses in first aid and in personal presentation skills also operate, and the school has established courses leading to students obtaining the European computer driving licence, and qualifications in speed typing. Students receive very good careers education and guidance as part of their tutorial time.

87. The provision for students' personal development including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Through the medium of the school council, led by the head girl and two deputy head girls, students are able to take some responsibility for looking after younger pupils, and for their own environment. Sixth formers help with paired reading schemes, Young Enterprise students prepare advice booklets for younger pupils, and others are involved in the organisation of the school's annual musical production. Students take part in the many events organised by the school's lay chaplain for spiritual reflection or charity events.

88. Opportunities created by the school for students' contact with the world-wide community are outstanding. Students of modern foreign languages take up work placements in France and Spain. Students on the business course recently visited New York. At the time of the inspection preparations were under way for a visit to a school in Shanghai. Students taking history visited the war crimes trial in The Hague, and government and politics students visited the European parliament. During an annual residential visit to London students visited the House of Commons and the prime minister's residence in Downing Street.

89. Very good links are established between the sixth form and institutes of higher education. In addition to the established links with Liverpool University, John Moore's University, Hope University and Edge

Hill University College, students are well informed about universities in other parts of the country, and each year several students take up places in Newcastle, Leeds, Warwick and Manchester, amongst others. Good contacts are established with representatives from the local business community, who visit the school from time to time. Students of physics have made very useful contact with a local hospital, where they were able to learn of the applications of the radioisotope process they had been studying to the treatment of cancer. In business studies, students have good links with local businesses, and the successful Young Enterprise initiative effectively complements their taught curriculum.

90. Provision for equality of opportunity in the sixth form is very good. The school makes extensive efforts to meet the different needs of its students. At the time of the inspection the school was concerned with supporting a student with severe health problems, providing a flexible timetable and extra teaching to ensure that she would be able to take up the offer of a place at university. More able students, including those identified as having gifts and talents, are well supported. They are encouraged to attend revision classes, and many students are offered help with costs of travel, theatre and concert tickets and, where applicable, instrumental lessons. However, more extension work is needed for very able students in biology.

91. Provision for students' personal, social and health education is very good. As part of the enrichment programme, fitness classes are organised, and other aspects of the programme offer opportunities for social development, by taking part in a range of extra-curricular activities and visits in the local area and further afield. Regular services and easy access at all times to the school chapel provide well for students' spiritual development, but the quality of time for reflection during tutor periods is inconsistent.

92. The school offers a wide range of enrichment activities, and students take part in a number of extra-curricular activities.

93. Students enjoy the friendly atmosphere of the sixth form and the pleasant environment in which they can socialise. Although some feel that they were not always treated as young adults with views which should be listened to, the majority feel they are given every encouragement to develop confident, independent attitudes. Most students realise that habits of regular attendance and punctuality are important both to their academic success and to their future careers, and are conscientious in these respects.

94. Students appreciate the school's efforts to enrich their experience outside the taught curriculum. They valued opportunities for learning first aid, for taking the sports leadership award, for attending summer schools run by university departments, and for taking part in visits to other countries. Some had visited Spain as part of their work experience, those taking business had visited New York, and others were preparing for a visit to Shanghai. Relatively few take part in team sports. Students reflect the school's ethos of care and concern for the wider community, and take initiative for a substantial amount of charity fund-raising.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

95. Procedures for assessing students' work are very good. Students' work is marked regularly and assessed against examination criteria. At the start of their sixth form courses students take part in a self-assessment exercise to ensure that information about courses is fully understood and that their capabilities match their aspirations. At the end of the first half term, each student has an extended discussion with the form tutor, reviewing progress in the light of set targets. The recently introduced monitoring card system provides students and teachers with on-going information about attainment and progress. Underachievement is recognised very quickly and where concerns arise, students have individual discussions with their subject tutors and with the director of sixth form, and parents are contacted. At the beginning of Year 13 each student has a report which reviews overall performance in AS courses.

Students feel very well supported by the school's assessment system, and spoke appreciatively of the prompt and constructive way in which their work is marked, and of the accessibility and willingness of staff to discuss issues raised and give additional support where it is needed.

96. Examination results are analysed closely by the school's senior management and within each subject. As a result of this analysis the school as a whole and within departments is taking steps to adjust the courses offered to better match students' needs, interests and prior attainment. As a result more students are gaining success on the courses they have selected than in previous years.

Advice, support and guidance

97. The arrangements for students' educational and personal support and guidance are very good, enabling them to make an informed choice of studies in the sixth form and opportunities beyond the sixth form. Students are informed about opportunities in the sixth form early in Year 11; this is followed by a questionnaire to determine the likely demand for different courses, and to examine any need for collaboration with other post 16 institutions. A parents' evening followed by a sixth form open evening, a careers' convention and a series of interviews, culminate in an individual interview with the school's senior management team. Informed by students' personal tracking documents and Year 11 report, senior managers are able to provide sound advice based on their knowledge of the individual student's strengths and weaknesses. At present the school does not offer students "taster sessions" in sixth form subjects. Places on courses are subject to review after the results of the GCSE examinations are known. These recently improved arrangements for ensuring that students make the best choice of course in the sixth form have resulted in more students gaining success in the courses they take.

98. Careers advice for students is very good. Careers guidance is given during tutorial time, and staff from Connexions are readily available to provide advice; visits to universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, take place regularly, and students are helped with techniques for interviews and given advice on university courses. Information is collated and provided by means of an "occupations" booklet, and from various websites. Students attend the higher education conference, careers conventions and local job market events. In addition, a graduate student mentor visits the school, former school students return to discuss their university experiences, and display boards in the sixth form area carry information about university summer schools and open days.

99. Students are particularly appreciative of the help and support they receive from all staff, and of the ease with which members of the senior management, the director of sixth form studies, form tutors and subject teachers can be consulted. They spoke appreciatively of the quality of pastoral guidance they receive, and of the academic rigour with which they are taught. Most students work very hard, responding to teachers' high expectations of them. Students are encouraged to develop good habits of independent study. A graduate mentor visits the school to provide advice on study skills.

100. Attendance is checked both on a daily basis and lesson by lesson, but there are no systems for ascertaining that students who register with their form tutor attend all their classes. The school is aware of this gap in communication, and is looking to develop more efficient systems. Students who develop patterns of irregular attendance are identified, and the school makes great efforts, by regular contact with both student and parents, to overcome the problem. However, there remain a significant number of students whose progress is adversely affected by poor attendance.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

101. Leadership and management in the sixth form are very good. Members of the senior management team and the governing body ably support the vision and clarity of educational purpose of the headteacher's leadership. The headteacher has correctly held a clear focus on raising standards in the sixth form. Through strategic planning and subsequent action the school has successfully broadened the courses available to students, improved the guidance they receive before entering the sixth form and

ensured that support and guidance offered to students during their study is of high quality. As a consequence of these actions the numbers of students staying on in the sixth form has improved significantly, more students are successful on the courses they have chosen and there is greater continuity in learning and provision between age 14 and 19.

102. The recently appointed director of sixth form studies has developed a good system of communication with sixth form tutors to ensure that day to day monitoring and support of students is effective. Tutors meet on a weekly and half-termly basis to discuss pastoral and curriculum issues. The sixth form is monitored regularly by the headteacher and governors. Progress is discussed formally each month with the headteacher, and the governing body receives a report each term. Documentation is extensive and meticulously maintained. Subject departments are generally led and managed well, although at the time of the inspection there was no co-ordinator for performance studies. Information about students' overall progress is readily available, and the quality of pastoral support is particularly strong, but the system for checking students' attendance at all lessons is not as effective as it could be

103. The overall quality of teaching in the sixth form is monitored through the performance management system and by scrutiny of results and students' work within subjects. As a result of the school's initiative for developing a close awareness of learning and different approaches to teaching, teachers of sixth form subjects have become aware of the relevance of the issues for students as well as for pupils in the main school. However, procedures for monitoring and supporting learning and teaching across subjects are not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that managers are fully aware of differences in the quality of learning and teaching in all areas. Best practice is not yet shared consistently to ensure that standards of teaching are raised in all areas.

104. The sixth form is cost effective and the principles of best value are well met. The school sets itself challenging targets and compares itself with similar institutions locally and nationally in doing so. The school ensures that it gains the best value in major purchases, for example, by insisting on high quality ICT network cabling and ownership of wireless ICT equipment. Together with the governing body finance committee, the school justifies its spending decisions particularly with regard to the courses it runs in the sixth form. Communications with parents and the student body are well established. Students are encouraged to express opinions and to share responsibility for taking care of and improving their facilities. Meetings with the head girl and her two deputies, and with sixth form council representatives, are held monthly.

Resources

105. The sixth form is well staffed in most departments and teachers are appropriately experienced and qualified. However, the school is temporarily without a permanent music teacher. Until recently, French has suffered from discontinuity in staffing. There is good technical support, particularly in biology, which benefits from a specialist biology technician. Although generally satisfactory, accommodation problems occur in some departments. In English, for example, the head of department has no office, and some members of the department have a very large number of room changes, causing organisational difficulties. In biology, the lack of sufficient specialist accommodation means that some lessons have to be taught in ordinary classrooms. The unsatisfactory accommodation for science and design and technology will be resolved when the new buildings are complete. Resources in most areas are good, and provision for ICT is generally very good. However, in biology the lack of sufficient software limits the effective use of ICT in improving teaching and learning. There are insufficient specialist text-books in health and social care, which does not have a dedicated departmental budget.

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

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

The tables below show 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 point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	7	43	*	0	*	0.7	*
Biology	33	85	*	27	*	2.2	*
Business Education (V)	1	100	*	0	*	3.0	*
Business Studies	25	84	*	20	*	2.1	*
Chemistry	26	85	*	54	*	3.0	*
Design and Technology	9	100	*	11	*	2.1	*
English Literature	39	97	*	31	*	3.0	*
French	9	89	*	44	*	3.2	*
Geography	9	89	*	22	*	2.2	*
Government and Politics	12	92	*	33	*	2.3	*
Health and Social Care (V)	6	100	*	50	*	3.0	*
History	15	87	*	13	*	2.1	*
Information Technology	33	64	*	0	*	1.2	*
Mathematics	28	54	*	18	*	1.4	*
Performance Studies	9	100	*	33	*	2.8	*
Physics	20	90	*	35	*	2.4	*
Psychology	22	36	*	5	*	0.8	*
Religious Studies	25	88	*	16	*	2.2	*
Spanish	9	67	*	11	*	1.3	*
Textile Technology	7	100	*	14	*	2.7	*

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	12	83	*	25	*	4.8	*
Biology	18	100	*	33	*	5.9	*
Business Education (V)	3	100	*	33	*	4.7	*
Business Studies	10	100	*	0	*	5.0	*
Chemistry	18	100	*	16	*	5.1	*
Design and Technology	3	67	*	0	*	3.3	*
English Literature	23	100	*	52	*	7.3	*
French	2	100	*	100	*	10.0	*
General Studies	31	100	*	13	*	5.0	*
Geography	2	100	*	0	*	5.0	*
Government and Politics	8	100	*	13	*	4.2	*
Health and Social Care (V)	28	100	*	4	*	4.6	*
History	12	100	*	25	*	5.0	*
Information Technology	11	36	*	0	*	1.5	*
Mathematics	4	75	*	50	*	5.5	*
Music	1	100	*	0	*	6.0	*
Performance Studies	7	100	*	57	*	6.8	*
Physics	10	90	*	20	*	4.4	*
Religious Studies	6	100	*	67	*	7.7	*
Science	2	100	*	0	*	4.0	*
Spanish	5	100	*	40	*	6.8	*
Physical Education	2	50	*	0	*	1.0	*
Textiles Technology	8	100	*	50	*	7.0	*

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	3	100	*	67	*	0	*
Health and Social Care	8	100	*	63	*	0	*

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

106. The focus was on mathematics, physics and biology, but chemistry was also sampled. In chemistry, examination results were well above average in 2001, and students' achievement was very good. In 2002 there were significantly fewer A and B grades at A-level. One lesson was observed, in which the teaching was very good. The lesson was very well planned and the teacher communicated very effectively. This led to students carrying out the practical work confidently and with understanding.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teachers' lesson planning, marking and assessment are thorough.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work.

Areas for improvement

- Results at AS level were below average.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to discuss and explain their reasoning in depth.

107. The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were average but the proportion of students who achieved grade A or grade B was lower than that seen nationally. In 2002 there was a higher proportion of A and B grades, but a lower overall pass rate. Over the past three years, students have performed less well in mathematics than in their other subjects. Analysis of the 2001 and 2002 A-level results indicates that, overall, students performed satisfactorily on the basis of their prior attainment with a few achieving less well than expected. Overall, the results represent satisfactory achievement in relation to prior standards at GCSE.

108. AS results in 2001 were below the national average and over two fifths of students did not achieve a pass grade. AS results improved slightly in 2002, although the number that attained a grade A or grade B remained low and the proportion of students who did not pass remained high. Although retention rates are generally satisfactory, a significant number of students terminate their study of mathematics at the end of Year 12. These results represent unsatisfactory achievement. However current standards of work in Year 12 have improved.

109. The standard of work seen in Year 13 is average and in line with standards attained in 2002. Standards seen in Year 12 are also average and better than those attained in 2002. These standards represent satisfactory achievement in relation to prior standards at GCSE. Students in Year 13 apply their

algebraic skills competently in their pure mathematics lessons. In statistics they apply their knowledge and understanding to their coursework to test the fit of a normal distribution and to set up and test hypotheses. In Year 12, analysis of students' work in pure mathematics shows progression from GCSE algebra to work involving the sum of higher powers and including arithmetic and geometric progressions. However, there is not much evidence of work at the level of A or B grades.

110. Above average students confidently use the relationships between trigonometrical functions in simple proofs. They use calculus confidently and can use logarithms in the solutions of equations. Students of average or below average ability are less confident with calculus and experience difficulty with integration of composite functions. These students are more successful with statistics and are able to calculate standard deviation and measures of skew, and find probabilities using normal distribution tables. The standard of presentation of students' work is invariably good. The standard of coursework is satisfactory overall, but some students display weak writing skills.

111. On the basis of lessons seen, discussions with students and a scrutiny of their work, teaching is satisfactory overall. In three of the four lessons observed it was at least good. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives and include appropriate use of homework. Teachers build carefully on prior learning and break new work into small sequenced steps to facilitate understanding. The best teaching fully involves students through interesting examples at a good pace. For example, a very good lesson on game theory involved students in a simulation of the decisions facing big businesses as they strive to retain their share of the market. In this lesson students developed their understanding of game theory and applied graphical, numerical and algebraic techniques to the solution. At each stage the teacher checked the students' understanding by requiring them to explain their methods. As a result, students' learning was good. However, in some lessons there is insufficient involvement of the students during the explanation, or the questioning is superficial. Consequently, opportunities are lost to share and discuss ideas and for students to explain their reasoning. As a result, students do not extend their understanding of new work sufficiently and learning is limited. Overall, there is too little variety in teaching strategies. For example, the potential for using ICT to enrich and support learning is rarely utilised. Teachers give very good one-to-one support in class and give freely of their time outside class to help students with their homework.

112. Students' work is regularly marked and assessed. Marking is generally thorough and is followed up in lessons with the whole group or individually as appropriate. The marking of coursework shows very detailed comments to help students improve; however, basic errors in grammar and spelling are not always picked up. Students feel they are well informed about their progress and how they stand in relation to their target grades.

113. Students' learning is satisfactory overall, and sometimes good. Students are attentive, work hard and take care to set their work out clearly showing their methods. They have very good relationships with their teachers and respond well to the very supportive teaching. They invariably display positive and mature attitudes to their studies and are confident in seeking one-to-one help when required. They find teachers approachable and are very appreciative of their availability. However, students are sometimes too passive in class and reluctant to answer questions. Their answers are often superficial and they are not pressed to answer in more depth or to explain their reasoning. As a result, opportunities to develop a solid understanding of concepts are missed and students do not learn as well as they should.

114. The mathematics department is well led and managed and students' achievement is starting to improve. Teaching and learning are monitored through lesson observations and by examining students' work. Care is taken to match the courses offered to the needs of the students. Arrangements for guiding students onto the most relevant courses have improved and so success at AS level is improving. The department now offers decision mathematics as well as pure mathematics and statistics to better match students' needs. The pace and structure of Year 12 lessons are being closely monitored in order to improve AS results. Teachers use performance data to analyse results and to measure the progress of individual students and of teaching groups. Since the last inspection examination results have improved, but there is still more to be done, and there is still a need for more opportunities for students to discuss their work.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and promotes effective learning.
- Assessment, monitoring and target setting are good.
- Students are well motivated.

Areas for improvement

- Extension work for gifted and talented students is too limited.
- There is not enough software to enable ICT to be used extensively in lessons.

115. The GCSE A-level results in 2001 were average overall and the number of students achieving the higher grades was also average. In 2002 there was a slight improvement in the results. The AS level results for 2001 were average, but there was a slight decline in these in 2002.

116. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average and better than those suggested by the examination results. These standards are achieved because of good teaching and the very positive attitudes of the students. In relation to their standards at the start of the sixth form the achievement of students is good and they make good progress as they move through the sixth form.

117. Students in Year 13 make good progress in lessons and are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. They have a clear understanding of the role of bacteria and viruses in the spread of infectious diseases and can explain how this can be prevented. They understand the structure and function of the kidney and how it controls water levels in the body. Students in Year 12 demonstrated competence in the preparation of microscope slides to view and identify the stages of cell division in a root tip. Work in their folders shows that these students are able to explain the properties of biological molecules, such as carbohydrates and proteins, and their importance to living organisms.

118. Teaching in biology is good overall, enabling students to learn well. Teachers show very good subject knowledge so that they are able to give clear explanations of facts and promote the confidence of the students. They display an enthusiasm for the subject, which is passed on to the students. Lessons are well planned, have a brisk pace and include a variety of teaching and learning styles to maintain students' interest. Reviews at the end of each lesson help to consolidate learning. Students share ideas and help each other and teachers question them frequently during lessons to establish and reinforce knowledge and understanding. Students are encouraged to find things out for themselves and then present the information to their peers either orally or in the form of poster work, therefore developing their independent learning skills. Teachers take care to promote the literacy skills of students by emphasising relevant terminology and they practise numeracy skills by the interpreting data from graphs, such as those produced by the study of populations in the ecology module. There are pleasant working relationships between teachers and students during lessons so that students feel able to ask questions if they need to. Marking of students' written work is thorough and conforms to the school marking policy. It is appropriately annotated, giving clear guidance on areas for improvement. Regular testing takes place during and at the end of modules of work and is used to review students' target grades, which are subsequently shared with them and their parents. Homework is set and marked regularly and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons. Some students need to further practise their examination techniques and the department is working towards building up a bank of questions appropriate to the new examination specifications to help this. More extension work needs to be developed for gifted and talented students. The use of ICT in lessons is underdeveloped but this is an area that the department hopes to remedy through the purchase of more software.

119. Students learn well and make good progress in lessons because of the good teaching, and also because they are mature and highly motivated. Many of them need to do well in biology to achieve their career aspirations, which further motivates them. They respond well in lessons and rise to challenges as shown during question and answer sessions and are keen to contribute to class discussions. They work co-operatively together in lessons and help each other and share ideas in a mature and sensible way. Retention rates are good.

120. The department is well led and managed and the new head of department is keen to maintain high standards. There is a good team spirit among the staff, who support each other and share information and expertise. There is a clear focus on direction and teachers are committed to improving the achievement of students. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Monitoring of staff takes place through lesson observations, examination of planners and informal discussions. Assessment and record keeping are good. All staff are biology specialists enabling them to teach lessons with confidence. Accommodation is good, but is insufficient, as some lessons have to be taught in classrooms. Resources are good, although more software needs to be purchased in order to develop the use of ICT. The department receives good technical support from a specialist biology technician.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Standards in Year 13 are above average in all aspects of students' work.
- The department is well led; clear policies and procedures for securing improvement are in place.
- The relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Students use their good mathematical skills well to improve understanding, particularly in Year 13.
- Very good assessment procedures are well used to chart students' progress.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of teaching in lessons is variable and not of consistently high quality. In Year 12 the pace of work is sometimes too slow; it lacks the clear direction to keep the students sharply focused on short and long-term targets.
- Some students do not attend lessons regularly enough which affects their progress.

121. The GCE A-level examination results in 2000 and 2001 were both above the national average. In 2002, 10 students took the examination; nine gained a pass grade and two gained A or B grades. Overall these results were lower than the two previous years but they were affected by the poor attendance of a few students. Students taking physics usually obtain grades that are similar to those they obtain in their other subjects. The results are broadly as expected considering the students' GCSE grades. Twenty Year 12 students took the AS-level examination in 2002; 90 per cent obtained a pass grade and seven students obtained grades A or B. This large number of entries is particularly rewarding for the department as it bucks the national trend of falling numbers of students, particularly girls, taking the subject. Fourteen of the 20 who took the AS level are continuing with the A-level course. 2002 AS results are similar to the previous two years with only a small proportion of students failing to obtain a grade.

122. Standards of work of current students in Year 13 are above average with all students well on track to obtain the higher grades at A-level. Effective teaching is enabling these students to continue the good progress they made in Year 12 and they are achieving well in relation to their AS and GCSE grades. Year 13 students use their good mathematical skills to solve problems and gain understanding. For example, they were able to gain a good appreciation of simple harmonic motion through mathematical equations and graphs.

123. Standards in Year 12 are slightly below average and below what could be expected from students' GCSE grades. In particular, their skills of investigation are not sufficiently well developed. For example, students have difficulty in predicting what might happen in an investigation and in formulating an hypothesis from their results. Their measurements are often not precise enough.

124. The quality of teaching in the four lessons observed was variable, ranging from unsatisfactory to very good but, taking into account the students' work files, teaching overall is good. Students experience an appropriate range of activities which contains a good balance between investigations and theory. Teachers are enthusiastic, giving much personal attention to individual students who respond well. They enjoy a very good relationship with students and a good working environment is established. In Year 12, students do not always concentrate as well as they should both in lessons and on the longer term goals. Some are insufficiently well prepared for formal examination assessments. Occasionally the pace of work is too slow, the work set does not match the students' earlier learning and the teaching does not give sufficient direction in order for students to make maximum progress. However, in the best lessons the teacher's very good subject knowledge enabled the topic to be presented in an interesting and challenging context. This was evident in a Year 13 lesson on the charging and discharging of a capacitor through a resistor. Students explored this for themselves in a practical situation and discovered that charge varied exponentially with time. The lesson culminated with the teacher demonstrating to the whole class, using a digital projector, how a computer can be used to plot data from the same investigation and draw the resulting exponential graph almost instantaneously. This impressive demonstration effectively reinforced the students' own learning.

125. There is a close correlation between students' learning and the quality of teaching. Students are attentive and respond well to the teachers' prompting. However, in Year 12 they are not confident in asking questions which would extend their learning further. Not all the students attend regularly and this naturally affects their learning. The potential of ICT to enhance and extend learning is being exploited to a limited extent.

126. Since the previous inspection there have been some significant improvements. The number of students opting to study physics has increased significantly and the AS and A2 examination results are usually above average. Very good assessment procedures have been introduced which are used well to identify students who are underachieving. Extra tuition is often provided for these students. There are some good links with local organisations. A visit to the local hospital was particularly useful in consolidating the work done in school on radioactive isotopes with how they can be used in hospitals to diagnose and treat cancer patients. There is a clear vision of where the department is going and what needs to be done to raise standards further.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

127. The focus was on design and technology in which two courses are taught: product design in textiles technology and product design in three-dimensional products. No other courses are taught in this curriculum area.

Design and Technology

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results.
- Standards in textiles are above average.
- Teaching is good.
- Students have positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- Students' performance in written examination papers is lower than in their coursework.
- Students make limited use of CAD/CAM.
- Accommodation is currently unsatisfactory.

128. Both the A and AS level examination results in 2001 were average and students achieved as well as expected from their GCSE results. A level results in 2002 were similar to 2001 but students achieved better than expected from their GCSE results. AS level results in 2002 were not as high as in 2001. The results of those taking the product design textiles course were higher than those taking the three-dimensional product design course. Overall there is a trend of improvement. Most students who commence the courses take the examinations.

129. Overall standards of the current Year 13 students are average and of Year 12 students above average. Much of the improvement in Year 12 results from a revision of the scheme of work to include a range of projects after evaluating students' performance in 2002. In both years, students analyse design requirements thoroughly but this does not always affect their designs sufficiently. Visual research is usually good, for example, one student drew ideas for a dress from images by Klimt. Fashion drawing is mostly of a high standard but three-dimensional drawing lacks fluency. Students produce a good range of ideas and make good use of modelling and prototypes to develop them. For example, students used a sequence of quarter-scale card models to evaluate both the appearance and stability of their designs for flat-pack tables. The use of CAD/CAM is under-developed. Products are made to a high standard in all materials. Students achieve less well in the theory examination papers because their written responses lack precision. Overall, students are achieving well.

130. Teaching is good overall and students learn well because of the thorough individual help they receive from teachers. This help extends to extensive extra-curricular provision after school and at other times. There are good, supportive relationships between teachers and students. Lessons are well planned and usually have clear objectives but do not give sufficiently precise guidance about responding to written technical questions. Teachers make good use of external visits, for instance to the clothes show and to Urbis, to extend students' experience of design. Teachers have made good use of advice from the examination board to guide students towards the achieving the criteria required for good marks but this has also led to some routine designing.

131. Students have positive attitudes to the subject and mostly enjoy developing their designs. Those with limited prior experience of materials because they studied the graphics products course in GCSE work hard to catch up successfully. They set themselves high standards of presentation, but in the case of some textiles folders this interferes with the communication of information. They are able to explain the development of their projects well.

132. The management of the subject is good. There is a clear direction for the development of the subject and a commitment to improvement by a cohesive team of teachers. Consequently students achieve well in the sixth form courses established since the previous inspection. Accommodation is currently unsatisfactory but new facilities are under construction. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

BUSINESS EDUCATION

133. The focus was on the A and AS-level courses and on the AVCE course. Four students took a GNVQ intermediate course which was not sampled as it is being phased out at the end of this year.

Business Studies

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned, students know what they have to do and they make good progress from a below average starting point.
- Students find the course attractive and are opting to study it in increasing numbers.
- Very good assessment procedures are well used to enable students to progress.
- Strong links with local organisations assist students' learning.
- A rich curriculum which meets students' abilities and aspirations.

Areas for improvement

- Some students do not attend lessons regularly enough and their progress is affected.
- Students are too often passive in lessons because there are not enough opportunities for group discussion.

134. A-level examination results for the last five years have matched the average or been below average. In 2001 they were below average; they improved slightly in 2002. Students taking business usually obtain grades that are better than those they obtain in their other subjects. Considering the students' GCSE grades and that many students had not studied business before, these results represent good achievement. At AS-level the results in 2002 showed a significant improvement on those in 2001. A large number of students, 25, took the examination with 85 per cent passing and 20 per cent obtaining a Grade A or B. This represents good achievement despite a small number of students being absent from lessons for a significant proportion of the time. Eighteen of these students have continued with the subject in Year 13. Results in the AVCE examination have been consistently below average although overall they represent satisfactory achievement and they are improving.

135. Standards of work of the current Year 13 students on both A-level and AVCE courses are broadly average. They build on their Year 12 work and continue to achieve well despite a significant amount of absence. Some students are on track to achieve the highest grades. The A-level course work covering the factors influencing the choice of location for siting a business was of a very high quality. On the AVCE course some students produced very good and detailed reports of the factors which interrelate to affect the success of a business. In general, although students have an appropriate knowledge, their understanding of how this knowledge is applied in different business contexts is limited.

136. In Year 12, standards of work of the students on the A-level course are average overall but a significant proportion is on track to achieve the highest grades. On the AVCE course standards are lower but all the students who attend lessons regularly are achieving well taking into account their individual target grades based on GCSE performance. The best work was often linked to case studies of businesses that the students could relate to. Work was weaker where a detailed analysis of financial matters was required.

137. Teaching is consistently good and this is the main reason why students achieve well. Lessons are very well planned and the students know what they are expected to learn. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and they provide good support material that helps students with their revision. Good use is made of ICT to enhance and extend students' learning. Teachers enjoy good relationships with their students and this facilitates discussion. However, a few students lack confidence to discuss issues in an open forum and they would benefit from more opportunities for small group discussion. In addition, this type of activity would, on some occasions, have aided better understanding. Marking of students' work is very good; it is regular, frequent and constructive giving clear pointers for further improvement. Assessment records are comprehensive and are well analysed to identify any underachievement.

138. The formal curriculum offers students of all abilities and aspirations a good choice of courses. Close links with local businesses and a successful Young Enterprise scheme effectively complement the taught curriculum.

139. Students have positive attitudes towards learning. They are attentive, keen to succeed and support each other well. They remain on task and, when given the opportunity, show initiative in trying out new techniques. The further raising of standards is hampered by the non-attendance of some students for reasons other than sickness and tardiness in meeting deadlines for the completion of work. The school is aware of these difficulties and is attempting to overcome them. The department consists of enthusiastic and committed teachers who are well led. This is an improving department that is constantly reviewing their work in order to secure further improvements.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

140. The focus was on information and communication technology. No other courses are taught in this curriculum area.

Information and communication technology

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Standards of work have improved this year and are now average.
- Teaching strategies have been effectively modified and improved.

Areas for Improvement

- Examination results in 2002 dropped significantly.
- Some aspects of project work are not sufficiently rigorous.

141. The A level examination results in 2001 were average and students achieved as well as expected from their GCSE results. In 2002 the A level results were much lower than in 2001 and students did much worse than expected from their GCSE results. The AS level results were well below average in 2001 and similar in 2002, in both cases being much lower than expected from students' GCSE results. Most students who start the courses complete them.

142. The standards of work of current students in both Years 12 and 13 are average and their achievement is satisfactory because teaching strategies for both examination papers and coursework have been improved. The improvement in standards is confirmed by the recent unit examination results that are above average for Year 13 and average for Year 12. Students now thoroughly analyse the individual manual systems on which their projects are based and propose appropriate computer systems to replace them. They produce outlines of their systems but these often leave several areas to be resolved during the implementation stage. Performance criteria and indicators tend to be vague such as "trace a member of the club quickly" rather than the quantitative "trace a member within four clicks". Students have sound knowledge of spreadsheets and databases and usually use one of these in the development of their systems. However few projects use a range of programs within a suite and include data flows between packages as appropriate at A level. Students include extensive documentation and printouts when presenting their projects but the sequence of development and reasons for decisions are not always made clear. Students' knowledge of the context and use of ICT and their ability to respond to written questions is satisfactory. Overall, students are now achieving satisfactorily.

143. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. The improvement in teaching resulting from analysing the reasons for recent poor results is a key factor in the improved standards. More attention is now given to the analysis of systems. Students are helped to take a more individual approach to projects through thorough individual teaching and discussion of the alternative ways of achieving the system requirements. They could be further encouraged to consider potential weaknesses in their designs. Teachers are qualified in the subject and have sound technical knowledge. In some lessons the teacher relies too much on a technological presentation without making sufficient use of questioning to test students' understanding. Marking is thorough.

144. Students' learning is satisfactory overall. They mostly work hard individually on their tasks but are sometimes more reluctant to work in groups where ideas and processes need to be communicated and tested. They can explain the purposes of their systems and how they have developed but they usually have not considered the possible weaknesses rigorously enough. They express satisfaction with their course and the support they receive.

145. There have been significant changes in management of the subject in the last year involving a period of temporary leadership. The new head of department only took up his post at the beginning of this term hence revised management systems are just being established. However, the actions taken during the period of temporary management to improve standards have been effective. Furthermore, decisions have been taken to introduce an AVCE course to more closely meet the needs of students. The facilities for the subject are very good and enable students to use up-to-date systems regularly both within and outside lessons thus helping to raise the standards of their projects. Establishment of the subject and the raising of standards this year indicate satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

146. Physical education is taught at AS level but no lessons were sampled.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and social care

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good; a variety of approaches to teaching and learning promotes learning.
- Students are well motivated.
- Good links with external groups broadens students' experiences.

Areas for improvement

- Results in the examined units of work are too low.
- The number of higher grade passes at GNVQ and A-level are not high enough.
- Accommodation and resources are not sufficient for the expanding numbers.
- The department does not have its own budget.

147. In 2001 all students passed the Intermediate GNVQ with three of the twelve students achieving a merit. This was below average for the number of higher grade passes. In 2002 all students achieved a pass with five of the eight students achieving a merit, which was an improvement over 2001. Under the new AVCE system, in 2001 sixty three per cent of students achieved a pass at A-level although there were no passes at the higher grades and there were only eight candidates. In 2002 all students achieved a pass, but few gained higher grades. In 2002 the results at AS level were an improvement on those achieved in 2001. In view of their starting points at the beginning of the sixth form the achievement of these students is good. Students who start the course generally complete it and take the examinations.

148. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average and reflect the most recent results. Students in both Years 12 and 13 are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. Year 13 students have a good understanding of the ethical issues relating to IVF treatment and sensibly discussed some topical cases using recent newspaper articles for reference. Evidence from their folders shows that they can explain the various stages of child development and are aware of the effects of smoking, drugs and alcohol on the body. Students in Year 12, studying a unit on the promotion of health and well being, were able to design a healthy lifestyle for a case study, involving an overweight person leading a sedentary way of life. These students are able to explain the use of standard measuring instruments such as peak flow meters and blood pressure monitors. The written work of both years is well presented and shows competence in the use of ICT skills.

149. Teaching in health and social care is good, so the students learn well. The teachers have good knowledge of the course requirements so that they are able to help and advise students on their

assignments and are keen to help them improve their grades. Lesson aims are clearly stated at the start of lessons so that students know exactly what they are to learn and progress is reviewed at the end of lessons. Lessons are varied and different teaching styles are used to maintain the interest of the students. There are friendly relationships between staff and students so that students always feel able to ask for help if they need it. Teachers encourage class discussions and take care to ensure that all students become involved. Students are encouraged to undertake personal research and make use of local facilities such as hospitals and nurseries to promote their independent learning skills. One afternoon per week is devoted to this type of work so that students gain first hand experience of care settings and clients. A visiting speaker is a regular feature in lessons. Marking of students' work is thorough and review sheets provided for coursework are comprehensive and give advice on how to improve grades. Students are fully aware of their progress and so are their parents. The head of department interviews any student who is thought to be underachieving.

150. Students make good progress in lessons and learn well because of the good teaching and because they are highly motivated. They are responsive in lessons and interested in the work they do. Their written work is well presented and shows that they take a pride in it. They have a mature approach to sensitive topics. Many of them wish to pursue a career in a caring profession and can appreciate the relevance of the work that they do. They work well together and help each other. They are less successful in their examined units than they are in their coursework assessed units and these are affecting the overall final grades, so some improvement needs to take place in this area. Attendance and punctuality are a problem with some students, particularly those on the GNVQ course, which also affects results.

151. The department is well led and managed and the head of the department is keen to continue to improve results. High standards have been maintained for several years and the staff work well together. Effective monitoring of staff ensures consistency of marking. The accommodation is satisfactory and is well equipped with computers, but expanding numbers mean that more space and computers and general resources will be needed in the future. The department needs more specialist textbooks for reference purposes.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

152. The focus was on performance studies. Art and design, dance and media studies are also taught. Art and design was not sampled. The number of students taking art and design increased significantly in 2002 and the results improved from well below average results in 2000. One Year 12 dance lesson was seen in which the teaching was satisfactory. Results at Advanced level were below average in 2001 and no students took the examination in 2002. Media studies is a newly introduced course. One lesson was sampled in Year 12; the teaching observed was very good and so students were learning rapidly. Students were constantly challenged and they had very good opportunities to carry out their own research and present ideas to each other.

Performance Studies

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

Strengths

- Learning is good as a result of good teaching.
- Students achieve well.
- Students benefit from an enriching programme of extra-curricular activities and theatre visits.

Areas for improvement

- Students' practical skills are limited.
- Students' skills in oral presentation are not well developed.

- Some irregular attendance adversely affects the standards of attainment of a minority of students.

153. Results in the A2 examinations in 2002, the first year in which students were entered at this level, were very pleasing, with more than half of those entered obtaining grade B. No comparison with national averages is yet possible. In the AS examination, results in 2001 were above average, with most students obtaining grades in the range A to C. In 2002 results improved and all students obtained grades in the range A to C. Students do better in performance studies than in most other subjects they take, and they do well in relation to their below average standards at the start of the course. Their achievement is good. In the three years of its existence, most students who have commenced the AS course in Year 12 have completed the A2 course in Year 13.

154. Current standards of work in Years 12 and 13 are average. Most students have secure theoretical understanding of the dramatic traditions of Brecht and Stanislavski, which they incorporate in their devised drama. They use subject language well, recognising the contribution made by each of the art forms of drama, dance and music in expressing and communicating ideas such as tension and irony to an audience. They refine their work through trial and error and constant evaluation. In both Year 12 and Year 13, written accounts of the research and compilation of the community drama topic showed clearly the amount of research undertaken and the developmental processes involved. Students taking the music option in Year 13 courageously tackled the challenge of mastering the basic techniques of composing to create suitable music for their presentation on the Beatles generation. In a lesson on jazz dance, students identified the characteristic features of dance which portrayed isolation and loneliness, and the contributions made by the bleak stage set, costume and lighting in reflecting the historical and social climate of the back streets of New York in the 1980s.

155. Principal weaknesses lie in practical skills in music and drama because of students' lack of experience beyond the classroom in these areas. Students in Year 12, presenting scripted extracts from "Top Girls" by Caryl Churchill, competently represented the essential features of characterisation, but their skills in vocal control, range of dynamics, communication by gesture and body language, and use of space are limited. Students who have chosen the music component as part of the course are well supported in their efforts to learn new music. However, the quality of performance suffers from lack of good technical control, and, because of their undeveloped aural and ensemble skills, some have difficulty in holding independent lines when singing numbers in three parts.

156. Students' attitudes are very positive. They enjoy the course and have a great appreciation of the support, advice and guidance readily available from staff. They work well together, although some are reticent about expressing their ideas or challenging the views of others during discussion sessions. Work is generally completed conscientiously. One or two individual students have poor habits of punctuality, causing loss of time during lessons when they need to be given extra attention in order to catch up. The irregular attendance of a similarly small number not only adversely affects their own attainment, but also creates difficulties for other students' practical presentations.

157. Teaching and learning are good. All three components are well taught. Teachers are well informed about the requirements of the examination syllabus, students are well known, and lessons are properly planned to take account of students' different abilities. In practical sessions, students are encouraged to plan and contribute, exploring ideas and developing independent lines of thought. Occasionally, too much time is given to lengthy explanations at the expense of targeted questioning, and students' thinking skills are not sufficiently challenged. As a result, students are not given enough opportunity to improve their oral skills by organising their ideas and presenting their opinions clearly and precisely. Assessment is good; students' work is carefully marked, with helpful comment and grade indications in line with examination criteria. Students' progress is reviewed against their set targets and monitored by regular individual interviews.

158. At the time of the inspection there was no co-ordinator for performance studies, but a member of the senior management team ably manages the work of the department. Assessment systems are good: audio and video tapes are used to record students' work, each unit is individually assessed, and in addition

to oral feed-back, students assess their own and each other's work. Regular meetings to review students' progress identify underachievement quickly. Effective monitoring of teachers' work ensures standards of marking are consistent. A wide range of opportunities, in the nature of theatre and concert visits, extra-curricular activities and visits by members of the profession to conduct workshops in dance and costume greatly enriches students' experience.

159. In order to improve further, the department should consider ways of improving students' practical and oral skills, and should aim to increase numbers taking the course.

HUMANITIES

160. The focus was on history, religious studies and psychology. Geography and government and politics were sampled.

161. Very small numbers of students took geography and in 2002 the two students who took the A-level performed well compared with most of their other subjects. In 2001 no students took the A-level course. Numbers taking AS are increasing and in 2002 nine students took the course and all but one passed. The 2002 results at AS and A-level represent satisfactory achievement in relation to students' prior standards at GCSE. In the lesson seen, well-planned teaching involved students in a variety of activities which challenged them to search for information, analyse it and share their findings. The teacher's probing questions ensured that students considered the issues in depth.

162. Results in government and politics A-level were above average in 2001 but declined in 2002. There are no national figures available to enable a comparison with the national picture. The 2002 AS results showed significant improvement on the 2001 results. In 2000 and 2001, students gained better grades in government and politics than they did in most of their other subjects. In the lessons observed very good teaching encouraged students to analyse in depth and students are confident in explaining the essential differences in structures of government and their implications for governing.

History

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

Strengths

- Good teaching includes a variety of teaching activities; student discussion and independent learning are actively encouraged.
- Close attention is paid to the requirements of the examination.

Areas for improvement

- Not all students attend regularly enough and their progress is affected.
- Some students are not well organised in taking notes and organising their folders.

163. Small numbers of students took A-level history in 2001 and so a comparison with national averages is not statistically viable. However, students did not achieve well in relation to their prior standards at GCSE. AS results in 2001 were in line with students' prior standards. In 2002, results at A-level improved and students achieved satisfactorily in relation to their prior standards at GCSE. Results improved similarly at AS level and overall represent satisfactory achievement.

164. Current standards of work are average and represent satisfactory achievement in relation to students' prior average standards at GCSE. Year 13 students show a good grasp of difficult terminology. For example, they explain the terms Bolshevik and Menshevik and identify their relative positions on the political spectrum and then identify similar groups in post First World War Germany. In Year 12, students,

using the textbook, can explain a difficult passage on ‘constitutionalism’ and show a good grasp of basic political terminology. While oral responses are good, students’ written work is of more variable quality but is satisfactory overall in line with results. High attaining students write high standard essays with a good grasp of narrative and analysis using appropriate quotations and mature vocabulary. Essay writing of lower attaining students is less well developed in terms of organisation and analysis. For example, in course work essays heavy annotation from teachers is required. One student with special educational needs is making good progress.

165. Teaching is good. Teachers are well qualified and experienced in teaching A-level. They divide responsibilities for the different papers and pay close attention to the requirements of the examination board in preparing students for their examinations. A variety of teaching methods is employed. Students in a Year 12 class analysed, in some depth, the idea of ‘leadership’. They watched extracts from a recent television series (projected onto a large screen) and contrasted Hitler’s way of working with conventional views of effective leadership. In Year 13, students were given current newspaper articles of the fiftieth anniversary of Stalin’s death and they compared the differing views of writers and their historical accuracy. It was revealing in this class when the students were able to compare the activities of Stalin with their real life experience of Milosevic, whom they had seen in his trial in the Hague. The department encourages students to discuss historical issues and relate them to current circumstances. Teachers set and mark work regularly. Some of the marking is exemplary, being detailed, informative, illuminating and encouraging. This sets a very high standard for all the teachers in the department, and clear targets for students. Files and notes are not checked, however, and this is a weakness.

166. Student learning is satisfactory. The understanding and response of students in class is good. Lower attaining students have difficulties in constructing and maintaining their files and organising their note taking. Their lack of organisation can make revision difficult. The major factor limiting good learning, however, is attendance. Regular attendance is necessary in any A-level course but is vital when so much of the course is dependent upon discussion. Overall attendance levels are poor. In one group, in 70 per cent of the lessons since Christmas one third of the class has been absent.

167. The students interviewed were mature and confident. They agree that they are well supported in their studies and are comfortable about asking for help from their teachers when they need it. They are happy with the course and eight of the eleven students in Year 13 have chosen history as their degree subject.

168. Resources are good. Relevant text books and an on-line book have recently been purchased. Increasing use is being made of ICT as a research and learning tool.

169. The management of the department is good. In difficult circumstances a commitment to standards has been maintained and staff have been willing to shoulder extra teaching responsibilities. The department makes good use of GCSE data and other available data to set target grades for students. They also analyse each year’s results carefully to identify differences in student performance in the different options taken, to try and identify areas for possible improvement. Students’ work is monitored closely and there has been some evaluation of teaching in line with the school’s policies and expectations.

Religious studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers are highly dedicated to helping all their students achieve success in examinations.
- The assessment of students’ progress in written work is very good.
- Students have very good attitudes towards the subject.
- Relationships in the classroom are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The range of approaches to teaching and learning is limited.
- Students' oral skills are underdeveloped.

170. In 2001 the number of students taking examinations in Years 12 and 13 was very small. The four candidates taking the subject at A-level gained grades A to C, which represented good achievement. The six students taking the subject at AS level in Year 12 also achieved well when, with a new syllabus, five of them gained grades A to C. They maintained these standards over the following year, with broadly similar results at A-level. The department's flexible approach encourages students of all levels of attainment who wish to take religious studies in the sixth form to do so, and in 2002 the numbers in Year 12 rose significantly. The results of the twenty-five candidates at AS level reflected the broad spread of attainment so although the proportion of A to C grades was smaller than in the previous year, progress overall was generally satisfactory. There were examples of good and very good achievement, but some results that were lower than had been expected. Almost all students who start the course complete it and so retention rates are good.

171. The standards of work of current students are average. Most students are achieving well in relation to their target grades. Students in Year 13 have a firm grasp of the similarities and differences between liberal and traditional approaches to scripture, and they have a clear understanding of the issues of Black theology. Students in Year 12 know how the Christian Church developed in the second and third centuries and they can give examples of the roles played by women in the life of the Early Church. Students in both years have an accurate recall of what they have learnt over a period of time. In one lesson, for example, students showed, by their references to previous work, that they had a sound knowledge of the different philosophical theories and scientific developments which have brought about changes in concepts of sexual morality. However, standards of speaking are lower than standards of writing. In the lessons seen, students generally were reticent in responding to teachers' questions, and many of them had difficulty in expressing their ideas clearly and audibly during class discussions.

172. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. The main strength of the teaching is the dedication shown by the teachers in helping students to gain confidence and achieve success in examinations. This is clearly evident in the detailed notes provided for students, the step-by-step preparation for formal essay writing, and the very effective way in which students' written work is assessed, with astute and very helpful suggestions for improvement. As a result, students make good progress in developing the quality of their essay writing, for instance in the effective use of introductions and conclusions, and in the selection of relevant quotations to exemplify points made. Students benefit from teachers' good command of the subject and from their generosity in giving their free time to hold revision classes after school and in the holidays.

173. The high quality of the classroom relationships also makes a strong contribution to students' very positive attitudes to their work. Students say that they are happy with their choice of religious studies as a sixth form examination course, although they think there is too much ground to cover. They chose the subject because it gives them the opportunity to explore contemporary issues, such as the sanctity of life, in relation to Christian values.

174. However, there is one area of teaching in need of improvement. The range of teaching and learning styles is not wide enough. Too much time is spent on one activity, such as a question and answer session, and as a result the lessons lack pace and vigour, and students do not have enough opportunities for independent learning.

175. At the time of the last inspection, religious studies formed part of a separate report, so it is not possible to say how well the department has responded to any issues raised. However, in the last few years the improvement has been good. Standards have risen and a new syllabus has been successfully introduced. Last year the department coped well with the challenge of a large group of students in Year 12, when two classes were needed. The two main areas for improvement relate to the limited range of

teaching and learning styles and students' presentational skills. In addition, the department has rightly identified the extension of the use of ICT as an area for development.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good, resulting in good learning.
- Teachers provide good quality information on the subject.
- Positive working relationships between the teacher and students promote learning.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough homework is given to students.
- Not enough use is made of computers and whiteboard technology to explore, develop and present information.

176. Examination results at AS level in 2002 in relation to students' standards on entry to the course are satisfactory. There are no national figures available for 2002 to make a comparison with national averages possible. The higher attaining students performed well over all grades. Students have made good progress from Year 12 to Year 13. The 2003 results are predicted to show some improvement over the previous year.

177. Current standards of work in psychology are average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Students' knowledge of psychology causes the quality of their learning to be good. Students' achievements overall, in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form, are good. Retention rates are good.

178. Standards in Year 12 are average. Students gain an understanding of a new vocabulary and of such terms as 'obedience' and 'conformity'. They understand why Bowlby's studies provoked a public outcry amongst feminists and the ethical issues raised by the published work. Students recognise the pessimistic work of Asch, Crutchfield and Milgram on conformity and its significance. Students successfully discussed difficulties in working with descriptions of normality and abnormality using the work of Rosenhan and Seligman. The teacher uses good research studies to illustrate the lessons. Higher attaining students write well and produce elaborate descriptions of a study. A few students struggle with technical spellings. Average attaining students occasionally run out of ideas but they are encouraged to think of correct explanations of the key approaches to psychology. With regard to neurobiological issues, they know the causes are genetic, allergies or chemical imbalances. They argue about treatments such as chemotherapy, electroconvulsive therapy and psychosurgery. This issue raises the social and moral awareness that psychology brings to students. Most students perform well in class.

179. Standards in Year 13 are average. Students apply a scientific process to learning about human behaviour. For example, they argue about the developmental, gender and socio-cultural factors in health. They make observations and produce facts about psychology. Students construct a theory to account for a set of related facts and they then progress to generating expectations (hypotheses) from the theory. An example was a lesson on biological rhythms, sleep and dreaming. Students divided theories into neurobiological and psychological. All students are equally competent to collect data to test expectations. Students handle contradictory reports as, for example, the activation – synthesis theory and the evidence for and against. The higher attaining students are better at spelling, punctuation and grammar. Most students can write about cognitive psychology and analyse and evaluate a range of psychology theories and studies. The high attaining students communicate their knowledge and understanding of psychology in a clear and effective manner. This was illustrated in their experimental work.

180. The quality of teaching is good. The teacher of psychology shows an appropriate interest in the core areas of cognitive, social developmental, individual differences and physiological psychology. Lessons are planned effectively to develop an understanding of psychology as a scientific study of behaviour and experience. Students are well advised that psychology differs from commonsense insofar as it seeks to collect objective and verifiable facts about behaviour and it constructs empirically based theories. The teacher is good at helping students to understand the logic of important concepts of psychology. There is some use of ICT during lessons though there is room to develop its use further. Students increase their understanding of psychology by discussing their research with their teacher and fellow students. For example, they attempted to explain psychological research into how social identity theory can be used to reduce prejudice. The strength of teaching is in the informed commentary and thorough analysis of relevant psychological studies and methods. Students are taught that all findings in psychology are open to criticism. The teacher develops in them a respect for the individuality and integrity of all human beings.

181. Leadership and management are good. The support and resources that are provided enable students to feel confident, valued and well placed to make the most of their opportunities in the sixth form. Psychology has clear aims and these are relevant to their stated purpose. Students are enabled to gain confidence and helped to achieve their fullest potential regardless of their academic ability. There are contacts with further and higher education which benefit the students.

182. Psychology is a new subject in the sixth form. Improvement over the last twelve months has been made to aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. Students are now provided with a sounder basis of factual knowledge of psychology. Students are well supported to thoroughly learn their material. A significant minority of students do not persevere with their work which reduces the quality of their writing. The quality of written communication is assessed accurately. However, to raise standards more homework needs to be set and completed by students.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

183. English and French were the focus subjects of the inspection. The school offers courses in English, French and Spanish at AS and A level. English and French were the focus subjects. Two lessons of Spanish were also sampled. Teaching was good in one lesson and satisfactory in the other. Students benefit from the teacher's excellent subject knowledge and exposure to fluent and confident Spanish. In the satisfactory lesson, learning was held back because too much time was spent on one activity. In 2001, A-level results in Spanish were average and in 2002 they improved. Students generally achieved the results expected of them based on their prior standards at GCSE. Of the 15 students taking AS in 2001, over one third gained the higher grades A or B and all students passed. In 2002, AS results were not as good and students did not do as well in relation to their prior attainment.

English

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students achieve well.
- Procedures for assessing students' work are very good.
- Students are highly motivated.
- There is a good programme of enrichment activities which broaden students' experience.

Areas for improvement

- Students' control of oral expression is not well developed.

- Some students do not have a sufficiently varied vocabulary.

184. Results of the GCE A-level examinations in 2001 in English literature were just below average. In 2002, there was a very significant improvement; 50 per cent of students obtained A or B grades. Results in the AS examination in 2001 were good; English was the third highest in the school's average points scores, but in 2002 results declined slightly. However, the trend over the past three years is upwards. Most students complete the AS course, but not all choose to continue at A2. Nevertheless, numbers choosing English literature are high.

185. Students' achievement in comparison with their prior standards at GCSE is good. The attainment of most students on entry to the course is average, but all obtained pass grades in the AS examination. Current standards of work are above average; because students are better informed than previously about the course, they are better able to fulfil its demands.

186. Students in Year 13 have secure analytical and evaluative skills. They show high levels of perception and an ability to justify their opinions with reference to the text. Their oral contributions are extended and well organised. In comparing the characters of Iago and Othello, they displayed a clear understanding of the interaction between the two characters and demonstrated a good control of vocabulary, volunteering "Machiavellian" and "omnipresent" in commenting on the influence of Iago on the tragic outcomes of the play. All readily understood the undertones of racial prejudice which had parallels in Mary Lamb's writings about the slave trade in the eighteenth century, and went on to compare moral issues of vested interests with contemporary values. The work of higher attaining students shows mature insight and an ability to relate to the customs and values prevalent in sixteenth century Verona, and in England during the eighteenth century. However, less able students have difficulty in separating their reactions from their experience and views of present-day attitudes. Most students produce well extended, thorough research, and many show good progress over time in improving their sharpness of observation and succinct forms of expression.

187. Students in Year 12 have a good general knowledge of literature and are able to recognise the universality of themes which authors perpetually adopt. For example, they quickly recognised the similarity between themes explored in Sheridan's writing in "The Rivals" and current satirical television programmes. Some more able students have a highly developed ability to present their opinions, explaining implications, and support their opinions by relevant and carefully selected references to the text. However, a number of students have not acquired sufficient variety of vocabulary to enable them to express themselves clearly and succinctly.

188. Students' attitudes are very good. They are highly appreciative of the quality and accessibility of teachers' advice and expertise, and are conscientious about undertaking and completing assignments. Although not all are confident and fluent when speaking in front of others, they present a good range of research, and are willing to express their opinions and to challenge those of others. They make very good use of the school's extensive ICT facilities, and regularly borrow from the department's library of contemporary publications to support their work with a wide range of source material. Their co-operation and concentration are very good, and all find the course satisfying, both personally and in academic terms.

189. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers are well informed and communicate their ideas with commitment and enthusiasm. Their expectations of their students are very high; lessons are systematically planned, with clear objectives. A particular feature is the well-targeted questioning which challenges students' thinking, broadens their understanding of literary concepts, and extends their vocabulary. Activities are well varied, and very good use is made of inter-active white boards and other forms of ICT. Students' capabilities are very well understood, support on an individual basis is unstinting, and a rigorous assessment system ensures that students know exactly how to maintain or improve their attainment. Students' work is thoroughly marked. Essays are annotated with constructive comments and a critique which provides guidelines for further development of ideas. Students are expected to relate content to the examination grade criteria against which all work is marked and to evaluate their efforts in those terms.

190. Provision for students who are gifted and talented is very good. In order to complement current areas of study and to extend students' knowledge of contemporary and established authors, the head of department has established in her room an additional library. Theatre trips to productions not directly associated with the works of the set syllabus are organised, the department has hosted a writer in residence, and there are annual summer schools in essay writing.

191. The head of department provides very good leadership, and management of the department is good. Using the performance management system, the quality of teaching is monitored for consistency, although beyond that there is no formal system of lesson observation to discover and share best practice. Marking is regularly checked for consistent application of the department's agreed code, and meetings to discuss students' progress are held regularly. The department is extensively involved in the school's initiative on different methods of teaching and learning, and has incorporated its findings and methods into styles of teaching in the sixth form.

192. As a result of the maintenance of high standards, the constant drive to improve further, and the increasingly effective use of ICT, improvement is good.

French

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

Strengths

- The most recent results at AS and A2 show good improvement.
- Current standards are above average and students are achieving well.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Assessment is good.

Areas for improvement

- Too many students drop out of the AS course; potential students in Year 11 need better guidance.
- ICT is not used widely enough; electronic links with French speaking countries are not well established.

193. In 2001, numbers taking A-level French were much higher than in previous years. Results were well below average and students did less well in French than in other subjects. This was due in part to discontinuity of staffing. In 2002, there were only two entries for A-level and both students, who had studied French as second language from Year 9, achieved passes at grade A. AS results in 2002 were just above average overall, with four out of the nine students gaining passes at grades A or B. However, close to half the number of students who started the course dropped out during the year.

194. In Year 13, standards are above average. Most students who took AS continue to study at A2 level and students are achieving well. Standards of the most able students are well above average. They speak and write confidently and fluently on a variety of topics because they have a good command of complex structures together with a rich and varied vocabulary. They show good understanding of challenging texts and tapes on moral, social and cultural issues and readily engage in discussion, developing their answers well. Other students also convey a good deal of information and express opinions, but they do not always apply grammar rules accurately or develop responses sufficiently.

195. Standards in Year 12 are already above average and the four students, all of whom studied French as second language to GCSE, are achieving well in each skill. The rapid progress they have made in understanding and using more complex grammar structures, including the subjunctive mood, is reflected in both oral and written work. Despite some errors in their work and pronunciation, which is occasionally rather influenced by their knowledge of Spanish, overall, students communicate their ideas and views with confidence.

196. Students' good attitudes contribute to their good achievement. They show interest, are well motivated and are keen to do well. Students in Year 13 show particular commitment to improving their performance, for example by regularly undertaking extra listening and reading in order to develop comprehension skills still further. Students sometimes use the Internet to research an aspect but overall, use of ICT is too limited. Students are not yet making full use of the Internet or e-mail to communicate with the French students. Provision for work experience in France is good, though only one student in Year 13 has participated in the scheme this year.

197. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and have high expectations in terms of grammatical accuracy and mastery of the language. Students respond well to the challenging tasks set and learning is generally effective, although sometimes they are not given enough opportunity to work things out for themselves. Assessment is good. Good examples of detailed supportive comments to students on their oral performance and on coursework were seen both in a Year 13 lesson and in work analysed. Students also spoke appreciatively of the clear advice they received about how to improve further.

198. The subject is well managed and improvement in the last two years has been good. Teachers now work closely together to plan units of work and to share ideas. However, in order to develop teaching and learning styles further and achieve a more consistent approach, for example in marking practice, monitoring of classroom practice needs to be introduced on a formal basis.