

INSPECTION REPORT

**SAINTS PETER AND PAUL ROMAN CATHOLIC
HIGH SCHOOL**

Widnes

LEA area: Halton

Unique reference number: 111457

Headteacher: Mr M. Glover

Reporting inspector: Mrs G. Salter-Smith

8329

Dates of inspection: 25th – 29th November 2002

Inspection number: 249689

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Highfield Road Widnes
Postcode:	WA8 7DW
Telephone number:	0151 424 2139
Fax number:	0151 495 1889
E-mail address:	admin@saintspeterandpaul.halton.sch.uk
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J. Wilson
Date of previous inspection:	3 rd March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
8329	Mrs G. Salter-Smith	Registered inspector	Educational Inclusion	Information about the school The school's results and pupils' and students' achievements How well are pupils and students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
13762	Mr N. Shelley	Lay inspector		Pupils' and students' attitudes and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
4193	Mr C. Radley	Team inspector	Citizenship	Co-ordinator for the inspection of the sixth form
30941	Mr K. Brammer	Team inspector	English	
32113	Mrs J. Byrom	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-16	
21866	Dr D. Tracey	Team inspector	Science Chemistry P16	
31680	Mr P. Redican	Team inspector	Art and design	
11966	Mr J. Clay	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12671	Mrs M. Thomas	Team inspector	Geography	
5851	Mr M. Robottom	Team inspector	Business Studies – P16	
13623	Mr J. Waddington	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Sociology – P16	
23709	Mrs A. Powell	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	
27665	Mrs A. Lees	Team inspector	Music	
19295	Mr P. Wall	Team inspector	Physical Education Health and social care – P16	
32122	Mrs J. Straw	Team inspector	History	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
15678	Mrs J. Radford	Team inspector	Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
18676	Mr R. Meakin	Team inspector	Mathematics – P16	
2959	Mr B. Leek	Team inspector		

The inspection contractor was: North West Education Services
Cheshire House
164 Main Road
Goostrey
Cheshire
CW4 8JP

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Saints Peter and Paul Catholic High is a mixed voluntary aided comprehensive school for pupils in the 11-18 age range with 1602 pupils on roll of which 161 students are in the sixth form. It serves the whole of Widnes and is currently oversubscribed in Year 7. There are more boys than girls in Year 9 and vice versa in Year 10. Almost all pupils are white British with a very small number from mixed ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the local situation. There are no pupils learning English as an additional language. An above average proportion of pupils is identified as having special educational needs. The number with statements is broadly average and they require help for specific learning difficulties (dyslexia), moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties and visual impairment. Although the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average, the social and economic circumstances of pupils and students are below average overall. There is a greater amount of social and economic deprivation among older pupils. Attainment of pupils when they enter the school is improving, being below average overall but much closer to average for pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 and well below average for those in Years 11, 12 and 13. The school is part of the Excellence in Cities initiative and hosts a City Learning Centre.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with many very good features. It is increasing in popularity after the amalgamation of two schools and a move onto one site. Pupils and students achieve well because teaching and learning are good. Outstanding leadership and very effective management have created a strong Christian ethos which promote very good relationships, positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points. Achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) is very good and excellent in art and design in Years 7 to 11.
- Pupils behave very well around the school; relationships are very good.
- The school's Christian mission underpins the work of school and pervades all its activities.
- Leadership of the headteacher is outstanding and management by senior managers and governors is very effective.
- Teaching is good overall.
- The school provides high quality pastoral care supporting pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, very well.

What could be improved

- Standards in design and technology are below average and pupils do not achieve well enough.
- The behaviour of a small number of younger pupils in some lessons is unacceptable and disturbs learning.
- There is not enough variety, pace and challenge in the teaching and learning in some lessons and pupils do not take an active part in their own learning often enough.
- Identification of the most effective teaching and the sharing and promotion of best practice is not regular or systematic enough across all subjects.
- The range of vocational opportunities provided in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form is limited.

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 in 1997, improvement has been good. Standards and the quality of teaching have improved. The school has moved to one site and improved the accommodation and access to ICT significantly. The issues raised at the previous inspection have been acted upon but pupils do not yet take enough control of their own learning.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

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

In the 2002 national tests taken by pupils at age 14, overall results were in line with the national average and above average when compared with similar schools. Results in English were above average, mathematics results were average and science results were below average. When compared with similar schools, results were well above average in English, above average in mathematics and average in science. Results are improving at a rate similar to most schools and reflect improved standards of work since the last inspection.

In 2002, based on average points scores, GCSE examinations results were in line with the national average and above average when compared with similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher A*-C grades was average when compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds and below the average for all schools. The school's results have improved since the last inspection and are doing so at a rate similar to the national picture. Girls continue to outperform boys but the gap between them is narrowing and is similar to that found nationally. The school met realistic targets set in conjunction with the local education authority based on pupils' prior attainment and including a degree of challenge. The school did not fully meet the more challenging targets set through the Excellence in Cities initiative.

Results reflect current average standards of work in Year 9 and in Year 11. Taking account of pupils' attainment on entry to the school, which is below average overall and lower for older pupils, then pupils of all abilities are achieving well. There are no significant differences between girls' and boys' achievement. Pupils achieve particularly well in art and design and ICT where pupils are very well taught and have access to very good resources. Pupils achieve well in most other subjects except in French in Years 7 to 9, design and technology in Years 10 and 11 and in geography in Years 7 to 11 where they achieve satisfactorily. Pupils' achievement in design and technology in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, as do pupils identified as gifted and talented.

2001 A-level examination results were below average and males achieved more highly than females. 2002 results show some improvement but comparative national figures are not yet available. Current standards of work are average. Results and current standards of work reflect students who achieve satisfactorily considering that many of them started in the sixth form with modest GCSE results.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are very positive and enthusiastic about the school. Their involvement in activities is very good.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Behaviour in almost all lessons is good. A small minority of younger pupils do not behave appropriately in some lessons. Behaviour around the school is very good. The number of exclusions is low.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils develop a very good sense of spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. Relationships amongst pupils and between staff and pupils are particularly strong.

Attendance	Satisfactory. The large majority of pupils have a good record of attendance. Most pupils arrive at school on time. A small minority have a very poor record of attendance. Attendance in the sixth form is good.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Teaching is good across the school and results in pupils learning well. The best teaching is in Years 10 and 11 where there is a higher proportion of very good and excellent teaching. Teaching is consistently good in English, mathematics and science. It is excellent in art and design, very good in ICT and good in most other subjects. Teaching is unsatisfactory in design and technology in Years 7 to 9.

Teachers develop very good relationships with pupils which help build up pupils' confidence in their own abilities. Pupils respond very positively to teachers' high expectations of their progress and behaviour. Teachers' good subject knowledge helps them to plan suitable steps in learning and, in most lessons, they include varied activities which interest pupils and keep up a good pace. Homework tasks are relevant and pupils' work is marked thoroughly so that they know how well they are doing and what to do to improve. Literacy and ICT skills are well taught across subjects and numeracy skills are taught satisfactorily. In some lessons, especially in Years 7 to 9, pupils' behaviour is not managed well enough so that learning is slower. In some lessons pupils do not have enough opportunities to think for themselves or to work with others.

Pupils with special educational needs are well taught, often in small classes and teachers know their needs well. Gifted and talented pupils have been identified and extension tasks and additional activities in most subjects ensure that they make good progress. Overall, teaching meets the varying needs of all pupils.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. A very good range of extra-curricular activities enhances standards and pupils' personal development. Links with partner institutions and the community are very strong. Vocational course in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form are too limited.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils make good progress as a result of good teaching and effective support for individual pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Opportunities for pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The arrangements for pupils' welfare and care are very good. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic and personal development are good.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Good. Parents express very positive views about the school and have a great deal of confidence in it. The partnership between school and parents is good.

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 outstanding leadership has helped to establish and maintain a remarkably strong Christian ethos that underpins the work of the school. He is very well supported by senior managers and pastoral staff. Management of subjects is good overall although the management of design and technology is unsatisfactory.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. A highly committed and well-informed governing body supports and guides the school. Governors fulfil their statutory requirements well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Senior managers have a good knowledge of the work in their areas of responsibility which they monitor regularly. Systems of performance management are closely linked to the school's priorities for improvement. The identification and sharing of effective practice in teaching and learning is not consistent across subjects.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Financial planning is very good and ensures the best use is made of all resources including additional grants and additional funding. 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"> • The leadership and management of the school • The good quality of teaching and teachers' expectations of pupils • Their children like school and make good progress • The range of extra-curricular activities • Pupils' behaviour and how the school helps them to become mature and responsible • The improvements in buildings and facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework and the consistency with which it is set • Information about pupils' progress • The school should work more closely with parents.

Parents' positive views are justified. Homework usefully contributes to classwork and pupils' independence but is not consistently set in a few subjects. Inspectors judge that the school makes good attempts to work closely with parents but does not provide enough opportunities for all parents to express their views of the school. Information about pupils' progress is satisfactory.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Saints Peter and Paul Roman Catholic High School, which serves the whole of Widnes, has a sixth form comprising 92 female and 69 males. Almost all pupils are from white UK backgrounds. The intake of students is largely from an area of low socio-economic background and their attainment on entry to the sixth form, overall, is below that of most sixth forms. There are currently no students with special educational needs in the sixth form. Admission to the sixth form is open to all students. Higher GCSE grades are required for A-level courses. However, less stringent criteria are used for admission to less demanding courses, for example GCSE re-sits, and where courses are considered to suit pupils' needs. There are a small number of students joining the sixth form from other schools. The school provides 24 AS courses, 22 A2 courses and one advanced vocational course.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

It is an effective sixth form which meets the needs of most students. It is well managed and overall the teaching is good. The 2001 exam results were below average. They have improved in 2002. Current standards of work are broadly in line with national averages, although they vary between subjects. In relation to their starting points, students achieve satisfactorily. Students have very positive attitudes towards their work, accept responsibilities within the school and work well in the community. This year some small subject groups are not cost effective which

results in a small financial subsidy from the main school to the sixth form. However, most students complete their courses and attain qualifications. Overall, the sixth form is cost effective.

Strengths

- Results in art and design are well above average.
- Students' have positive attitudes to the school and their work; they establish good relationships and their personal development is very good.
- Opportunities for enriching experiences beyond examination courses and lessons and the students' contribution to the school and the community are very good.
- Careers education and guidance are very effective.
- Facilities for students' social activities, personal and private study are very good.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good and reflect the school's aims and values.

What could be improved

- Results are below the national average.
- Standards are well below average in design and technology.
- The range of vocational courses is limited, which restricts the choice of courses for some students.
- Lower attaining students in some subjects do not get enough support in basic skills and study skills.
- Some teachers do not use a wide enough variety of approaches to ensure that students are actively involved in their learning.

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.

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Satisfactory. Results are below average. Students currently achieve satisfactorily. Teachers' command of the subject and positive relationships lead to purposeful work.
Chemistry	Satisfactory. Some students did not obtain the results expected of them in recent examinations. Currently students achieve well because teaching is good and students have very positive attitudes.
Design and Technology	Unsatisfactory. Standards are well below average and students do not achieve as well as they should. Teaching is unsatisfactory because expectations are not high enough.
Business Studies	Satisfactory. Standards are below average in Year 13 but improving in Year 12. Some students' attitudes are unsatisfactory in Year 13.
Health and Social Care	Very good. Teaching is very good and encourages positive attitudes and very good achievement in relation to modest GCSE grades. The subject is very well led and managed.
Art	Very good. Standards of work are well above average. Teaching and learning are very good, and students' achieve very well as a result.
History	Good. Students achieve well. Students are well taught and challenged by the high expectations of their teachers.
Sociology	Satisfactory. Results are below average. However, students achieve the standards expected of them in response to satisfactory teaching.
English	Good. Students make good progress and achieve well because of their positive attitude to their learning and very good teaching.

In addition to the subjects inspected in depth, lessons were also seen in physics, biology, drama, music technology, creative textiles, media studies, English literature, French, geography, physical education and sports studies, politics, psychology and theology. Teaching and learning were good in most lessons and very good in English literature.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good. Students are provided with very good information about the sixth form and the courses available. They are effectively inducted into the sixth form and good quality advice and guidance are maintained throughout Years 12 and 13. Students are well informed about career options beyond school and are very well advised and prepared regarding higher education. Students' progress is monitored effectively and they receive good advice about how to improve and achieve their targets.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. The sixth form is well led and managed with a strong focus on the school's mission statement, supported by a caring and committed team of tutors. Planning and review are carried out in meticulous detail. A very good system of mentoring has been introduced for students whose attainment and progress have been identified as cause for concern from the thorough analysis and evaluation of their performance. Although students' progress is monitored well, not all subject leaders formally monitor the quality of the teaching. The governors strongly support the work of the sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They regard teaching as excellent. • Their teachers give them a great deal of help and support. • Students appreciate the very good relationships they have with their teachers. • The enrichment opportunities are considered very good. • The social and private study facilities and access to computers are very good. • Students appreciate the way that they are treated as young adults, and with respect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blocks of subject choices could be more flexible.

Students are well justified in their remarks although inspectors judge that the teaching is good rather than excellent. Students are very positive about all their experiences in the sixth form and they are given every opportunity to achieve well academically and personally. All facilities are good. Inspectors are satisfied that the school is flexible in providing choices within the range of courses it offers but the range could be broader.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

Results in tests at the age of 14:

1. Results in the most recent national tests taken by pupils aged 14 are close to the national average and are above average when compared with schools with pupils of similar background. Over the past three years the trend of improvement is similar to schools nationally and since the previous inspection, results have improved significantly. There is no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys.
2. Overall, pupils of differing prior attainment achieved better results than expected based on their prior attainment, representing good achievement. These results match the current average standards of work and good achievement across subjects in Year 9.

The table below sets out the school's results in national tests for pupils aged 14 in 2002

Subject	School result in relation to 2002 national results.	Trend over the last 3 years	Comments
English	Above average	Improving at a faster rate than schools nationally	Girls outperform boys but boys are exceeding the national average for their gender by a greater margin than are girls. Results are well above average compared with similar schools
Mathematics	Average	Rising in line with the national trend	There is no overall difference between results of girls and boys, although higher attaining girls outperformed boys in 2002. Results are above average compared with similar schools.
Science	Below average	Rising steadily.	There is no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys. Results are average compared with similar schools.

Examination results at GCSE level

3. In the most recent GCSE examinations taken in 2002, based on pupils' average point score, results were in line with the average for all maintained schools and above average when compared with similar schools, both schools with pupils of similar prior attainment and schools with pupils of similar backgrounds. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher A*-C grades was average when compared with similar schools and below the average for all schools.
4. These results represent good achievement for pupils who entered the school with well below average attainment and who were below average in mathematics and science, two of their core subjects, at the end of Year 9. The below average results among the higher grades A*-C is a reflection of the small number of higher attaining pupils in the school at that time.
5. The school's results have improved since the last inspection and are doing so at a rate similar to most schools. Girls continue to outperform boys but the gap between them is narrowing and is similar to that found nationally. The school met realistic targets based on pupils' prior attainment set in conjunction with the local education authority. The school did not fully meet the more challenging targets set through the Excellence in Cities initiative.

The table below sets out how the 2002 GCSE examination results compare with national averages.

Subject	School result in 2002 compared with national result	Trend over 3 years	Comment
The following subjects were taken by most students in the year group.			
English	Average	Steady improvement.	A much higher percentage of pupils entered for both English literature and language than in most schools
Mathematics	Broadly average	Improvement in line with the national trend.	Above average when compared with similar schools.
Science	Below average	Steadily improving.	Average when compared with similar schools.
Design and technology	Below average	Consistently below average.	Variations between different areas of the subject. Almost one third of pupils do not take a GCSE in design and technology.
Religious Studies	Well below average	Broadly similar	The subject is taken by all pupils.
The following subjects were optional and taken by varying sized groups of pupils.			
Art and design	Very high	Consistently very high results.	Pupils generally do better in art and design compared with most of their other subjects.
Geography	Average	Much improved from below average.	No significant differences between girls and boys although very few girls take the subject.
History	Below average	Improving steadily	Boys results have improved significantly in 2002. Results reflect good achievement based on prior attainment.
ICT	Above average	Steady improvement	No significant differences between boys and girls.
French	Above average	Improving	A low number of pupils entered.
German	Numbers too small for sensible comparison	Improving	Very low number of pupils entered.
Music	Numbers too small for sensible comparison	Significant improvement on previous years.	Very small numbers. Two out of six pupils gained A*-C grades.
Physical education	Above average	Dipped from exceptional results in 2001 but the trend over four years is upwards.	Girls outperformed boys in 2002 whereas in 2001 the boys did better when a high number gained A* or A grades.
Business studies	Below average	Slight decline.	Results reflect satisfactory achievement and added value.
Catering	Average		
Child development	Below average		
Drama	Above average	Broadly similar	Results reflect good achievement for these pupils.
Media Studies	Below average	Broadly similar	A popular subject among boys. Results reflect good achievement.

Current standards of work and how well pupils achieve

The table below sets out how current standards of work compare with standards nationally and how well pupils' achieve in each subject in Years 7 to 9.

Subject	Current standards of work in Year 9 compared with standards nationally	How well pupils achieve in Years 7 to 9
English	Average	Well
Mathematics	Average	Well
Science	Average	Well
Art and design	Well above average	Outstandingly well
Design and technology	Below average	Unsatisfactory
Geography	Average	Satisfactorily
History	Average	Well
ICT	Above average	Very well
Modern foreign languages	Below average	Satisfactorily
Music	Average	Well
Physical education	Average	Well

The table below sets out how current standards of work compare with standards nationally and how well pupils' achieve in each subject in Years 10 and 11.

Subject	Current standards of work in Year 11 compared with standards nationally	How well pupils achieve in Years 10 and 11
English	Average	Well
Mathematics	Average	Well
Science	Average	Well
Art and design	Very high	Outstandingly well
Design and technology	Below average	Satisfactorily
Geography	Average	Satisfactorily
History	Average	Well
ICT	Above average	Well overall and very well in the GCSE course
Modern foreign languages	Below average	Well
Music	Average	Well
Physical education	Average	Satisfactorily overall and well in the GCSE course
Business studies	Average	Well
Catering	Below average	Well
Child development	Above average	Well
Drama	Above average	Well
Health and social care	Above average	Well
Media Studies	Below average	Well

6. Current standards of work are average overall in Year 9 and in Year 11 and match results in national tests and GCSE examinations. These standards reflect good achievement when pupils' prior attainment is taken into account. Older pupils, particularly those who took the GCSE examinations in 2002, started at the school with well below average attainment. The profile of pupils' attainment on entry is improving and is close to average in Years 7 and 8.

7. Pupils achieve outstandingly well in art and design because the teaching is excellent, inspiring pupils to work hard and use their imaginations and providing excellent individual guidance. Very good achievement

in ICT in Years 7 to 9 is the result of very well planned teaching, where teachers have access to very good facilities and make the most of the school's Intranet to provide very good individual support and guidance. In subjects where pupils achieve well they are benefiting from good teaching. In modern foreign languages there is variation in the achievement between the languages taught; it is satisfactory in French in Years 7 to 9 and good in German and Spanish matching the quality of the teaching. Achievement in design and technology is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 because the teaching does not challenge pupils sufficiently and there is no coherent approach to learning how to design.

8. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys and girls although in some lessons a small number of boys do not achieve as well as they might because they lack motivation, the teaching activities do not engage them in learning adequately and their behaviour is not always well managed. Lower attaining boys have difficulty in their written work in Years 10 and 11 in some subjects, such as media studies.

9. Pupils of differing prior attainment make good progress overall. Teachers know the pupils' prior attainment and set high expectations of individuals based on this information. Occasionally higher attaining pupils are not stretched enough because the teaching approaches restrict the opportunity to work independently or to write at length. Gifted and talented pupils progress well because teachers set them challenging targets and they take part in a good range of additional activities.

10. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall, in common with other groups of pupils. In public examinations pupils with special education needs generally achieve well in comparison with their standards on entry to the school. This was evident in the school's most recent results in 2002 when the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 or above in the Year 9 English tests was higher than the national average. Similarly, results at GCSE showed an above average percentage of pupils gaining five A*-G grades and one A*-G grade.

11. Standards in literacy across subjects are average and are already above average in some curriculum areas because of the successful whole school implementation of the National Literacy Strategy. However, not all pupils are confident speakers because there are missed opportunities for pupils to make spoken contributions in lessons both to the teacher and each other. Standards of numeracy both in mathematics and throughout the curriculum are average. ICT is widely used across the school and pupils are making rapid gains in skills.

Sixth form

Results in examinations

12. Examination results in 2001 were below the national average. Results of male students were broadly average and better than female results which were below average. Results in 2002 have improved but as yet no reliable national comparisons are available.

13. Between 1997 and 2001 results varied in response to the differing prior attainment of the students. The pass rate dipped in 2001 but returned to the 2000 level in 2002. The proportion of students gaining higher A and B grades has declined. This reflects a change in the nature of the pupils and students attending the school through an unsettled period when two schools amalgamated, moved onto one site and underwent major building projects. The number of pupils on roll fell significantly and many families were attracted to other schools in the area. The students who took their A-levels in 2001 were in Year 7 at the time of the amalgamation. The attainment of these students when they entered the school as year 7 pupils was well below average. Since this time the school has gradually re-established itself in the community; it is now popular and is oversubscribed in the current Year 7 and, in consequence, the attainment of students on entry to the school is improving.

14. In recent years the attainment of the student body on starting at the sixth form in Year 12 has been, overall, below average. Although five A*-C passes at GCSE is recommended, exceptions are made to ensure that student's interests, needs and aspirations are well met. A number of students, 18 in 2002, often lower attaining students, follow AS courses for one year and then take other routes, such as

entering the armed forces or going to the local higher education college to enter health care courses. This is acceptable use of the new curriculum arrangements. Consequently the numbers of students in Year 13 is lower than in Year 12 and the Year 13 attainment profile, although still below average, is a little higher. The recent 2001 and 2002 results, therefore, indicate that most students did as well as might be expected of them. Results vary from subject to subject but the school's analysis of added value for 2001 and 2002 results reflects satisfactory achievement overall and there is no significant difference between the achievement of males and females.

15. Overall rates of retention on courses are good. Few students leave the courses they follow. After a dip in 2001 the proportion of students gaining places in higher education is increasing.

16. In 2002 the results have improved, particularly in the proportion of students gaining a pass grade at A-level. The high proportion of students gaining pass grades and relatively lower proportion gaining A or B grades reflect the prior attainment profile of students. In some subjects, however, there are some students, often lower attaining students, who failed to gain the results expected of them despite the efforts of the school to support students in their academic study and personal development. For example, in mathematics and psychology. A similar picture was seen in chemistry, biology and physics but numbers of students are very small. In most of these subjects changes in staffing and management are resulting in improved teaching and students' progress.

The table below sets out how the 2001 A2/AVCE results in subjects compared with national averages.

How A2 / AVCE results compare with national averages in 2001	Subjects
Above average	Art and design, drama, sport and physical education
Average	English literature, psychology
Below average	Business studies, English language, geography, history, religious studies, sociology, health and social care
Well below average	Biology, media studies, mathematics
Very low	General studies

NB. Where less than 5 students entered an examination statistical tests have not been applied and so some subjects are not shown.

Current standards of work and how well students' achieve.

The table below sets out inspectors' judgements on the current standards of work and how well students are achieving in the focus subjects for inspection in the sixth form.

Focus subject	Current standards of work	How well students achieve
Mathematics	Average	Satisfactorily
Chemistry	Average	Well
Design and technology	Well below average	Unsatisfactorily
Business studies	Below average	Satisfactorily
Health & social care	Average	Very well
Art and design	Well above average	Very well
History	Average	Well
Sociology	Below average	Satisfactorily
English	Average	Well

17. Current standards of work are average overall. Taking account of results in examination and the added value these represent, alongside the current standards of work, overall achievement is satisfactory. Current standards are slightly better than exam results suggest because in a number of subjects the quality of teaching is improving with changed staffing and management, for example in the sciences. Good quality of teaching with good support for individual students, alongside close monitoring of students'

progress by form tutors and senior staff are significant factors in helping students to achieve. The work of learning mentors with students identified as in need of support has had a positive impact on students' application to study in the current year. In most subjects students are challenged by their teachers to work independently and apply a good depth of thought to their work. For example, in art and design, very good teaching results in students having the confidence to use a wide range of skills imaginatively in their work. In history, students use a wide range of historical sources and analyse them in considerable depth. Students' satisfactory level of achievement in some subjects is affected by a number of factors. Sometimes students lack motivation and application and students do not complete all the work. Teaching does not always require enough independent thinking or active participation in learning and students rely too heavily on receiving knowledge rather than developing understanding. In some subjects there are a greater number of students with relatively modest prior attainment who need much support in basic skills of communication and numeracy and this sometimes holds back their progress. In design and technology, students do not achieve high enough standards because of a lack of intellectual rigour in the teaching and lack of preparation for the rigours and challenge of design through their GCSE work. Students lack motivation and staff do not insist on high enough of effort and work.

Key Skills in the sixth form

Communication

18. Standards of oral communication vary widely but they are average overall. There are frequent opportunities to discuss, debate and present ideas because classes are usually small, but some students are reticent speakers and others do not give sufficient thought to the preparation of what they want to say. In drama and English many students are articulate and confident, but in others such as design and technology, the quality of discussion is unsatisfactory and in history and sociology students' ability to articulate reasoned arguments ranges from good to unsatisfactory.

19. Reading and writing skills are generally below average but there is no evidence that this is holding back students' progress significantly. Teachers do teach students how to structure essays and are helping them to develop the vocabulary and style necessary in their subjects.

Numeracy

20. In the sixth form there is no formal provision for teaching numeracy skills. Students use numeracy well in ICT, business studies and geography where they use a wide range of statistical techniques competently, and use formulae in spreadsheets confidently and accurately. However, there are some weaknesses in basic skills in mathematics and chemistry. In mathematics some students lack confidence in manipulation of formulae and in chemistry they have some difficulty with calculations.

Information and communication technology

21. With the exception of design and technology where it is used far less than in other schools, ICT is used well by students in most subjects to support their learning. For example, art and design students use ICT skills well in composition where they use digital cameras to record the movement of running or splashing water. Students in chemistry and history, for example, use ICT well for research, presentations and analysis of results.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

22. Pupils' attitudes are very good and their behaviour is good. Their personal development is very good. Attendance is satisfactory. Improvements since the previous inspection include attendance and fewer exclusions. More opportunities are now provided to exercise responsibility, as required by the previous report. Parents are very pleased with pupils' personal standards.

23. Pupils' attitudes to school are very positive. Many say that they really enjoy it. They like almost all of their lessons and particularly appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities in which high numbers of pupils participate. They say that they know how they are getting on and their teachers are friendly and helpful. Overall, pupils are right to be very pleased with almost all of their experiences in school. Almost all try hard and do their best and many take full advantage of what the school has to offer.

24. Pupils generally behave well in lessons. In some lessons pupils' behaviour is extremely good and in a minority, mainly in Years 7 to 9, a few pupils do not exercise appropriate self-control. The majority cooperate with their teachers and participate conscientiously. Behaviour around the school is usually very good. Conduct is orderly and a calm atmosphere prevails. The number of exclusions is well below the average for secondary schools. Many pupils, whose behaviour has been unacceptable, improve because of the intervention of pastoral and mentoring staff and the special support unit. Relationships between pupils are a strong feature of the school. Pupils get on very well and they respond well to the Christian influence that promotes a harmonious school community. They are tolerant and supportive yet adopt a suitably competitive attitude when appropriate. The very large majority of pupils confirm that incidents of bullying are rare and are promptly and effectively dealt with. In a very small number of cases measures taken by the school have not always prevented recurrence.

25. Pupils with special educational needs usually behave well and have good attitudes towards their work. For example, pupils who are withdrawn for extra support in literacy enjoy the challenge of their individual spelling and reading tasks.

26. Pupils make very good progress in becoming mature and responsible. Pupils develop very well their sense of social and moral values and put them into practice in the ways in which they conduct themselves in school. Many describe how spiritually refreshed they have felt when returning from a school retreat. Pupils accept a sense of responsibility for the wider community. They support many charitable causes and a project in Africa. Older pupils organise a massive entertainment event for senior citizens that includes the donation and distribution of numerous food hampers. Pupils' cultural awareness and understanding develop very well, for example through visits to places of interest, international exchanges and a justice and peace group. Pupils take responsibility for themselves through council representation, being a prefect or a mentor or being a buddy to a younger pupil.

27. Attendance is satisfactory overall. It was marginally below the average for secondary schools last year but the large majority of pupils had a good record of attendance. A small but significant minority of pupils had a poor record of attendance that adversely affected the whole. A significant amount of absence was owing to family holidays that were taken during term time. Attendance is improving this year and is currently above the average. There is very little truancy during the day. Most pupils arrive in time for the start of the school day. A minority has a record of recurring lateness. The school's education welfare officer confirms that some parents condone absence.

Sixth form

28. Students' attitudes, values and personal development are very good. They express very positive views about the sixth form. They have a high regard for their teachers and believe that they are taught very well and given a great deal of useful advice, guidance and support. Their attendance is good. Students work very conscientiously and show strong determination to achieve the grades they need for the next stage of their careers. They have a clear sense of direction about their future. They respect their tutors and the guidance they receive and act upon it. Students' attitudes and skills to work with others and independently are good. Relationships between students and tutors and with each other are constructive and positive and there is a well-developed sense of community. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They particularly value the school's retreats. They respect the feelings, values and beliefs of others. Students have a strong sense of responsibility towards the school community and organise many events such as a forum with a Member of Parliament. They participate in assemblies and support younger pupils very well. Students take full advantage of the many enrichment opportunities. They take responsibility for their own community via a sixth form council. They conduct themselves responsibly and attendance is above that of the main school. Exceptions to students' overall very positive attitudes are a small number of students taking business studies and design and technology. They lack motivation and are not making the effort required to achieve that expected of them despite the best efforts of the school.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

29. Since the previous inspection the school has had a clear emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning and this has been effective. There are fewer unsatisfactory lessons and more good and better lessons. Currently the quality of teaching and learning is good across the school and, as a result, pupils of all differing levels of attainment make good progress over time and achieve well in examinations and tests. The good teaching also makes a strong contribution to pupils' positive attitudes, good behaviour and overall maturity. There is however, a greater proportion of good and better lessons in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7, 8 and 9.

30. A number of initiatives introduced across the school has helped to improve the quality of the teaching and learning. A policy for the whole school sets out clear expectations of lesson activities and procedures; the development of the National Strategy to raise standards in Years 7 to 9 has helped develop approaches to teaching literacy, ICT and more recently numeracy across the curriculum; monitoring of teaching and learning by curriculum team leaders and senior managers has helped identify and share best practice and give support where it is needed; an on-going focus on raising boys' standards has led to different approaches; performance management arrangements are carried out effectively and targets are closely linked to the school's priorities; and the work of an advanced skills teacher has helped to share effective practice. Additionally, the school's close analysis of results, assessments and pupils' individual progress has also brought attention to areas of teaching that were worth sharing with others or that needed improvement.

31. The table below identifies the quality of teaching and learning in each subject and differences between key stages in the school.

Subject	The quality of teaching and how well pupils learn in Years 7 to 11
English	Good
Mathematics	Good
Science	Good
Art and design	Excellent
Design and technology	Unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 but satisfactory in Years 10 & 11
Geography	Satisfactory
History	Good
ICT	Very good
Modern foreign languages	Satisfactory in French in Years 7 to 9 Good in German and Spanish in Years 7 to 9 Good in French, German and Spanish in Years 10 & 11
Music	Good
Physical education	Good
Subject	The quality of teaching and how well pupils learn in Years 10 to 11
Business studies	Good
Catering	Good
Child development	Good
Health and social care	Good
Drama	Very good
Media Studies	Good

32. Examples of excellent teaching were observed in art and design, mathematics, ICT and physical education. These lessons are characterised by teachers' very high expectations of pupils' progress, effort and good behaviour. Activities are varied, move on at a good pace and demand that pupils think for themselves. Excellent attention is paid to individuals' rate of learning. Questioning skilfully takes account of individuals' needs and pupils receive very good advice from knowledgeable teachers. ICT resources are used well and relationships are very good.

33. An excellent art and design lesson in Year 11 was very well prepared. The teacher injected a sense of urgency and the lesson got off to a very brisk and focused start. An excellent demonstration of heat transfer method to transfer images from paper to cloth created high levels of interest among pupils. The teacher gave very focused advice geared to each pupils' individual level of interest and attainment. This produced a very positive learning atmosphere where pupils were highly motivated to do their best. Relationships were excellent and pupils became confident as skilful questioning encouraged them to think further and produce imaginative responses as they explored unusual combinations of materials.

34. In an excellent Year 8 ICT lesson where pupils were creating charts from spreadsheet data, the teacher made the aims of the lesson very clear to pupils, making excellent use of ICT, including the inter-active whiteboard. The teacher gave very good support to individuals, designed to promote their ability to work on their own. A good range of extension activities and consolidation activities drawn from the school's Intranet matched the wide range of ability in the class very well. The teacher encouraged pupils to talk through their "formulae" and explain them, making a very good contribution to pupils' speaking and literacy skills. This very well planned lessons involved pupils in the tasks and promoted high levels of concentration and learning.

35. In an excellent Year 11 mathematics lesson on percentages, the teacher was very skilful at anticipating misunderstandings and ensured that everyone kept up through perceptive questioning in a friendly and supportive style. Insistence on correct presentation and setting out reflected high expectations and the whole lesson moved learning on at an excellent pace.

36. In an excellent Year 7 dance lesson, the teacher very skilfully introduced the theme using a poem about bullying to stimulate ideas about feelings and emotions. She used her expertise to ensure that pupils had a secure understanding of how to use actions and movement to express feelings. The pace was sharp and she continually challenged pupils to look for improvement in their work whilst at the same time encouraging and praising effort and progress. The very well established positive relationships helped pupils to grow in confidence as they developed their work.

37. Teaching has many good features. Teachers know their subjects well. In most lessons they recognise the steps pupils need to take in learning and plan accordingly. They pick up on pupils' misconceptions and recognise how pupils are thinking, as was seen in many mathematics lessons. With the exception of a small number of lessons in Years 7 to 9, pupils' behaviour is managed well and teachers develop very good relationships with pupils based on trust, respect and high expectations. They often use humour effectively to encourage pupils and cajole those who are more reluctant learners. Consequently pupils want to do well and they become more confident learners. Teaching is well planned across most subjects with clear lesson aims providing focus on what is to be learnt. Tasks and activities are well matched to individual pupils' needs and consequently pupils of all levels of prior attainment make good progress. Homework tasks make a useful contribution to pupils' learning and work is marked thoroughly in most subjects. Teachers' comments are supportive and helpful in identifying what pupils need to do to improve, creating confidence in pupils to tackle new work. In some subjects, such as French and science, the national level at which pupils are working is not always stated so that pupils do not have a clear idea of what standard they have reached. In geography, the quality of the marking is not consistent and some pupils do not have a clear idea of what to do to improve.

38. Basic skills of literacy and ICT are well taught across subjects. Key words are explained and emphasised and teachers provide good support to aid pupils' writing for different purposes. Where there is good access to ICT it is well used to support pupils' learning. In some subjects, such as English, design and technology and physical education, the use of ICT is not fully developed. Most subjects teach numeracy skills satisfactorily and the policy for its inclusion in teaching across subjects is in the early stages of development. Numeracy skills are well taught in science, ICT and geography.

39. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good overall. Pupils learn well because teachers are aware of their needs and give them individual attention. The quality of the provision is enhanced by the supportive and detailed comments made by subject teachers in the marking of written assignments, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In ICT the interactive whiteboards are a key factor in enabling pupils to access information effectively and in physical education pupils benefit from the wide range of literacy strategies used by teachers. Gifted and talented pupils are identified across the school and a good range of additional activities out of lesson time aids their learning. Most subjects provide extension tasks in lessons and for homework which challenge and stimulate so that overall these pupils make similar progress to other pupils.

40. More lessons were judged satisfactory, rather than good or better, in Years 7, 8 and 9 than in Years 10 and 11. In these lessons, although satisfactory, the work did not make enough demands of pupils and sometimes higher attaining pupils were not stretched. The range of approaches was narrow and did not enable pupils to think for themselves. In some lessons the teacher talked at length and pupils had little opportunity to think for themselves or work with others. Pupils lost interest and learnt less as a result. In a small number of lessons the inappropriate behaviour of a small number of pupils, often boys, was not managed well enough to avoid disturbance to other pupils and the pace of learning slowed. A small number of unsatisfactory lessons was seen in Years 7, 8 and 9 and one poor lesson. These were mainly in design and technology when expectations were low and pupils were not encouraged to make decisions relating to design for themselves. This is because there is no coherent approach to teaching design across the subject.

Sixth form

41. The quality of teaching is good overall and so students learn at a good rate in lessons and in their own time. Almost three quarters of lessons were good or better and over a quarter were very good or excellent. The good quality of the teaching has been maintained since the previous inspection. Teaching has improved significantly in some subjects due to recent changes in staffing, for example in chemistry. Examples of excellent teaching were observed in mathematics and art and design. Unsatisfactory lessons were observed in design and technology and sociology. Students have a high regard for their teachers and consider that they are taught very well and given a great deal of useful advice and support.

42. In an excellent Year 13 mathematics lesson on theory of logarithms, the teacher transmitted enthusiasm and love of the subject to the students. Subject expertise was used effectively in the formation of questions to illuminate understanding and identify common problems. The teacher skilfully involved every student and his whole demeanour was challenging, raising the sights of students. The meaning of words and the derivation of formulae were emphasised very effectively and the approach is scholastic and fully rigorous. The teacher knows the students very well and uses their strengths and weaknesses to good effect, knowing who to prompt and who to give free reign to as they bounce ideas off each other.

43. In an excellent Year 12 art and design lesson on the effects of research on students' own work, relationships are excellent and students and the teacher are very focused on the work in hand. The learning atmosphere is extremely busy and positive. The teacher's approach is quiet and insistent, constantly guiding students, encouraging them to think further and imaginatively. Students rise to the challenge very successfully and creatively. They are stimulated by the tasks set and by the imaginative way the resources are used which are extremely well matched to the focus and demands of the lesson. Students make considerable gains in their skills in manipulating and using materials in imaginative and vigorous ways.

44. The table below identifies the quality of teaching and learning in each focus subject and differences between key stages in the school.

Subject	The quality of teaching and how well students learn in Years 12 and 13
Mathematics	Good

Chemistry	Good
Design and technology	Unsatisfactory
Business studies	Good teaching and a satisfactory rate of learning
Health and social care	Very good
Art and design	Very good
History	Good
Sociology	Satisfactory
English	Very good teaching and a good rate of learning

45. Good overall teaching has many notable features. Relationships are very well-established and, as a result, students grow confident in their own abilities. Teachers very willingly give additional time, offering support and guidance and they are very aware of individual student needs. Students find teachers are approachable and so students gain confidence in asking for advice and in offering their own opinions in lessons. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and this enables them to give clear explanations, break down complex concepts into manageable parts and to give relevant guidance. Teachers quickly recognise when students do not understand and often use questioning skilfully to develop understanding. Planning is thorough and reflects individual student needs and high expectations. In most subjects it is produced in a common format and shared on the school's Intranet so that students know what is expected of them both in class and for personal study. The purpose of lessons is made clear to students so that in most lessons there is a common focus and activity is very focused. Marking is thorough in most subjects and shows students clearly what they must do to improve. In mathematics, marking is variable and sometimes lacks detail and is infrequent.

46. In the best lessons a good range of teaching approaches encourages students' participation in lessons so that they have the chance to share and refine their ideas, work in groups, apply their understanding to new situations, work creatively and imaginatively. These lessons often move on at a good pace and challenge students to take more responsibility for their own learning. The material teachers draw on is often very up-to-date and relevant to students' lives and experiences. For example in health and social care, topical television news clips are used to stimulate a discussion on the idea of different levels of health care and postal code areas. In better lessons teachers pay attention to developing students' key skills. Students are helped to improve their written communication well in health and social care and business education. For example, they are given support in how to construct essays and there is a good emphasis on using technical vocabulary. Numeracy is used well in business education and health and social care. The use of ICT is well developed in most subjects such as business education, art and design, sociology, health and social care. It is in need of further development in mathematics and design and technology especially. However, students' communication skills need are in need of more attention in English, sociology and history; their numeracy skills need attention in mathematics, chemistry and in mathematics and design and technology ICT is not used enough.

47. In some lessons teaching is satisfactory and there are features which can be improved. Usually it is the lack of variety, pace and challenge in the activities which fails to stimulate students. Lengthy introductions and explanations which do not involve students lead to too great a reliance on the teacher and students who do not think for themselves often enough. In unsatisfactory lessons, particularly in design and technology, expectations of students' effort and progress are too low and activities do not make enough demands of students and lack intellectual rigour.

48. Students are generally good learners, spending much of their own time researching, reading and completing homework assignments. Most students apply themselves well to the rigours of study and they sustain interest and concentration well. Many lower attaining students continue their study in the sixth form and they benefit from how well the teachers know them and through the additional personal support and guidance they receive. A small number of students, often lower attaining students, find the rigours of study at this level challenging. Some need more support in developing communication skills and their ability to work independently.

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

49. Overall the school provides a good range of learning opportunities and the appropriate statutory requirements are met. Pupils have equality of access to the opportunities provided. In Years 7 to 9 pupils experience a good breadth and balance of subjects in that all the subjects of the National Curriculum are taught plus religious education and personal, social and health education. From Year 7 onwards, half of the pupils study French and half study German. Spanish is introduced as a second modern language in Year 9. Drama is taught as part of English and ICT is taught as a separate subject. The school endeavours to meet individual pupils' needs. For example, one or two classes in Year 7 have a special focus on key skills for pupils whose literacy or numeracy is not as well developed as others. During Year 7 these pupils will gradually rejoin the rest of the year group.

50. Learning activities are well planned across most subjects and are relevant and accessible to all pupils. However, in design and technology in Years 7 to 9 learning opportunities are unsatisfactory because there is no planned approach to the teaching of design and the work is fragmented and lacks continuity across the different activities within the subject. This has an adverse affect on pupils' progress, achievement and standards.

51. A two-week timetable causes some imbalance of lessons in modern foreign languages. Lower attaining groups in Year 9 have lessons bunched together in one or two days over the two week period, and sometimes classes are shared between two teachers. This causes a lack of continuity in learning. Progress is more difficult when there are long gaps between lessons or pupils lose interest during the second lesson of the day in one language.

52. In Years 10 and 11 the quality and range of the learning opportunities are satisfactory. Pupils follow a core curriculum in English language and literature, mathematics, science, physical education, personal social and health education and religious education. These enable pupils to enter a core of six GCSE examinations. Entries to examinations in the core subjects are higher than in many schools and so pupils are given every opportunity to succeed. Pupils can choose either four more GCSE subjects from 19 which are offered, or GNVQ in health and social care and two further GCSE options. The options include two modern foreign languages and five different technology courses. Numbers taking a modern foreign language course have been very low but are now increasing, particularly since the introduction of Spanish and a change of management in the department. Many more pupils than in most schools, over a third, do not follow a course in design and technology in Years 10 and 11. These arrangements have been made with the consent of parents and with the agreement of the relevant national authority. ICT is not taught as a separate subject to all pupils. Accredited course are offered within the optional choices. Most pupils receive their entitlement to the National Curriculum through the ICT they carry out in the subjects they follow. Their experiences and progress are well audited and pupils overall make good progress and achieve above average standards.

53. The range of GCSE subjects offered generally provides good preparation for the courses in the sixth form. However, the number of vocational courses is limited and does not give enough pupils preparation for study in vocational education. The school is aware of this gap in provision and has plans to review and broaden its provision for 14 to 19 year olds. A small number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 likely to become disaffected are currently following a local scheme based in Liverpool which provides on-going work experience. This is a successful course and the school is looking to expand similar opportunities in conjunction with the work being developed in the Bosco Centre, the learning support centre established through Excellence in cities funding.

54. Overall provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers know their pupils well and the school offers a wide range of curricular opportunities for those requiring extra help. The organisation of classes in Year 7 enables pupils to be taught in small groups so that they can benefit from individual support. Withdrawal sessions give pupils good opportunities to improve their literacy skills through one-to-one tuition. Individual education plans provide clear information for subject teachers on

pupils' strengths and weaknesses, although the measuring of progress is difficult when targets for improvement are not sufficiently precise. Study sessions in Years 10 and 11 enable pupils to improve their writing and organisational skills, and special examination arrangements are negotiated for those who require them. Pupils moving from one stage of education to another are given good support and advice, for instance in settling into a new school in Year 7, and in choosing appropriate courses at age 16 for further education. Pupils who have been identified as gifted and talented are offered extension work in a most subjects. They are appropriately challenged and make good progress. They take part in a good range of additional activities which promote their interest and progress.

55. The National Strategies Literacy and Numeracy are in place and many subjects adapt schemes of work to take account of the recommendations offered. These are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement.

56. A very wide range of extra-curricular activities takes place before, during and after school. Subject departments supplement class work with many relevant field visits that enhance learning. Numerous out of school visits are arranged. Departments such as art, English, drama, media studies, music and physical education offer an exciting and attractive range of activities. Many pupils take part in these activities and their learning is significantly enhanced. The school has gained a Sports Mark Award in recognition of the range of curricular and extracurricular provision for sport.

57. The provision for personal, social and health education is good. The recently redesigned programme of study comprehensively covers all the required areas and there is an appropriate focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects. Adequate curriculum time is allocated. Lessons provide advice and guidance, for example about coping emotionally with life's problems as well as giving opportunities for the development of useful self-management skills. Teaching is good but the attitudes of some pupils towards the subject are not always as positive as they should be because teaching methods are limited in some lessons by a range of resources that is not sufficiently wide and stimulating. Pupils achieve good standards in their knowledge, understanding and skill development.

58. Careers education is satisfactory overall and has some good features. Curriculum time is adequate and teaching was good in the lesson seen. Pupils receive appropriate advice and guidance that enables them to prepare adequately for employment and a careers service adviser is available for further assistance. There is a good range of resources that inform pupils well and enables them to investigate career opportunities. Work experience placements are arranged by an educational business partnership and the school matches as best it can pupils' preferences rather than identifying pupils' needs first and then asking the partnership to meet them. Pupils undertake their work experience during the last two weeks of the summer term and it is not possible to review pupils' experiences with them until the next term and this dilutes its effectiveness. Pupils are not given the experience of having mock interviews with employers although arrangements are in hand for a form of employment interview via a video conferencing link. Pupils who are likely to leave school when they are sixteen visit an employers' fair and gifted and talented pupils participate in a business simulation event at a nearby stadium. A new project is commencing that is designed to raise pupils' aspirations and improve their study skills in order to encourage more to follow a higher education route. Some older pupils say that they would like more preparation for the world of work.

59. Links with partner institutions are very good. Relationships between the school and its main partner primary schools are excellent and the very well established arrangements include joint curricular projects that very effectively promote standards and continuity of education into secondary education. The arrangements for the transfer of pupils in a well-informed, smooth and sensitive manner are very good. The school's connections with establishments of higher education enable students to make well-informed decisions about which universities are most likely to suit their needs. The school has good links with a college of further education but does not yet use the facilities available to provide a wider range of vocationally related courses and experiences for relevant pupils. The school's links with teacher training institutions are very good. The school provides support and experience for teachers in training and the school benefits from the student teachers' contributions.

60. The school's involvement with the community contributes very well to pupils' learning and personal development and has been recognised by a Curriculum Award. Subject departments supplement class work with relevant field visits that enhance learning. Many pupils and students undertake forms of community service. The school's City Learning Centre provides opportunities for members of the community and particularly the unemployed to learn ICT skills and achieve qualifications.

Provision for pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

61. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The school's Christian mission pervades all its activities. As at the time of the last report it successfully promotes a strong and supportive community rooted in faith, where respect for the individual and a sense of personal responsibility are actively encouraged. Art and drama, music and extra curricular activities make a distinctive contribution to the life of the school, and pupils benefit from a wide variety of opportunities which widen their experience.

62. Provision for the development of pupils' spiritual awareness is very good. The spiritual life of the school, with its emphasis on Christian witness and thought for others, is very strong. Its fruits are seen in the quality of relationships, pupils' very positive attitudes towards the school and their courteous behaviour. The quiet room provides a place for private prayer and reflection, as well as for group assemblies and religious education lessons. Pupils also benefit greatly from the pastoral support of the school chaplain. Pupils' spiritual awareness is nurtured by seasonal celebrations during the Church year, such as the Christmas carol service, as well as religious education lessons, retreats organised for different age groups and the work of the school houses in their different areas of Christian mission. Morning assemblies and form tutor periods generally make a good contribution to pupils' appreciation of the spiritual dimension to life, but there is not enough time given to reflection and prayer in some of the form periods.

63. The school's provision for moral education is very good. Pupils respond positively to teachers' expectations of high standards in work and behaviour, and sixth form students provide very good examples of taking responsibility in school activities. There is a clear code of conduct which pupils understand and accept and achievements in all areas of school life are regularly celebrated. Pupils learn about the difference between right and wrong in assemblies, form time and mentoring sessions as well as in the daily routines of school life. Moral issues are explored very effectively in the programme for personal, social and health education. Most subjects of the curriculum reinforce positive moral messages and teachers use opportunities well to make pupils think about moral issues. In geography, for example, pupils learn about the impact of man on the natural environment, and in a history lesson a "virtual" interview with Adolf Hitler led to a profound discussion on the nature of evil.

64. Provision for social development is very good. The mission statement emphasises the importance of preparing young people to take their place in society as confident, caring and responsible adults. Pupils develop self-confidence in expressing themselves through working in a variety of different groupings in lessons, sports and house activities and in dramatic and musical performances. They have a wealth of opportunities to learn how to work together cooperatively through participation in sports teams, school clubs, and house activities, as well as in residential retreats, field studies, cultural trips and journeys abroad. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills through becoming form representatives and taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme which promotes in pupils a sense of collective and personal responsibility. The school's very good community links encourage pupils to take an active role in parish and community life, and to develop an understanding of citizenship. For example, pupils contribute to the regular Deanery Youth Mass and organise Christmas parties for senior citizens. They also actively support local care homes and charitable foundations.

65. The school makes very good provision for pupils' cultural development. Within the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities, pupils are given many opportunities to appreciate their own cultural traditions. School productions and musical activities, as well as visits to concerts and the theatre enable pupils to enjoy and take part in traditional and modern entertainment. In music, pupils perform and listen to a wide range of styles both in and out of lessons. The art and design department provides an excellent programme of visits to local and national galleries and artists in residence are often used to extend the range of activities, such as making large-scale sculptures based on ships. In modern foreign languages pupils have pen friend links with schools in Germany and Spain. Opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity of non-European cultures and traditions have improved since the last report, particularly through the school's reciprocal links with the South African township of Soweto. In recent years there have been exchange visits between staff and senior students and these have had an influence on pupils' learning in the school. For example, in physical education younger pupils have been exploring South African dance themes and in an English lesson they used the Internet to find information about the way of life in the township. Life in Kenya and Japan is studied in geography and in English older pupils study poetry from different cultures. In religious education pupils learn about world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

66. Most subjects of the curriculum offer opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. However, there are missed opportunities in some areas because there is no formally planned provision in the schemes of work.

Sixth form

67. The quality and range of learning opportunities are satisfactory. The school offers a reasonably wide range of courses to ensure a good quality of education for all the students. The statutory requirements for religious education are met.

68. The school offers courses in 24 subjects at AS and Advanced level, and just one Advanced Vocational course in health and social care, although in previous years there were more opportunities to undertake vocational courses. The change has been made after careful consideration of the needs of students in the light of the opportunities available to them at other Post-16 settings in the district. The senior management of the school sincerely believe that vocational courses can be offered at a neighbouring college in an environment better equipped, and staffed with specialists in the fields concerned. Nevertheless, consideration is being given to the introduction of a range of vocational courses for pupils aged from 14 to 19, particularly bearing in mind the wish by many young students to remain within the well-known and secure environment of the school itself. The desire to remain in the school results in some students with very modest results at GCSE following Advanced level courses. The school offers effective support and many succeed, particularly at AS level and then move on to other relevant routes such as the armed forces or nursing. This is effective use of the new curricular arrangements. However, the range of courses offered does not include enough vocational opportunities.

69. Curriculum planning in most subject areas enables students to build on their work at GCSE and to make satisfactory progress in relation to it. In some subjects they make better progress, notably art, physical education and health and social care. Some classes are rather small, for example only two students in a Year 12 French class, and three each in Year 13 French and chemistry classes, which reduces the level of interaction between students that is so important in driving their progress forward. In some subjects students need more help with their communication, numeracy and ICT skills to enable them to make better progress. The support for developing students' basic skills is variable between subjects and the approach is not consistent. Overall, however, the curriculum satisfactorily meets the needs and interests of most students, and enables them to make progress commensurate with their prior attainment.

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70. In Year 12 opportunities are given to students to follow GCSE courses in English, mathematics and science, and all students take general studies, religious education, guidance and curriculum enrichment. Students receive good information and advice about choice of subjects in the sixth form through an

effective induction procedure, which starts when they are in Year 11. As a result only a few students fail to complete their courses.

71. The sixth form provides opportunities for a very good range of enrichment activities. On offer are the Community Sports Leadership Award, choral and instrumental music, an annual drama production, first aid, charity work, work placements, mentoring of younger pupils, running school clubs, and a very wide range of sporting activities. These give students considerable help in their personal development.

72. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be very good in the sixth form, and students are expected to set a good example to younger pupils and to accept some responsibility for them, as exemplified in their work in school assemblies and in lunchtime activities. They also have the opportunity to take part in a residential retreat each year. Students value highly the wide range of enrichment opportunities in which they can participate. Overall students believe that they have been given very good opportunities to achieve their potential academically and personally.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS AND STUDENTS?

73. The arrangements for pupils' welfare and care are very good. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic and personal development are good. The good standards reported at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained and improvements have taken place in assessment and some aspects of health and safety. Parents are very pleased with the quality of care and support provided.

74. Teachers and pastoral staff know the pupils well and go to considerable lengths to try to meet the needs of all of them. Relationships between all adults in the school and pupils are constructive and supportive and pupils feel valued and safe. Adults are very good role models and reflect the school's Christian ethos. Transfer arrangements from primary schools are very effective, making transition smooth, and pastoral staff move on with pupils each year. Child protection procedures are securely in place and the arrangements for health and safety are good. The number of adults qualified to apply first aid are adequate and one is available continuously for that purpose and provides very good medical and emotional support.

75. The procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are good. Attendance is closely monitored and an administrator for each year group liaises daily with parents of pupils who are absent in order to obtain reasons for absence and to engage their support to improve attendance. This process is steadily contributing to improvement. Assistants to the heads of year regularly check attendance in individual lessons and this has reduced truancy during the day. Rates of attendance are well publicised throughout the school, in the form of year group league tables, and incentives are used to good effect. The school has not yet reduced enough the absence caused by family holidays in term time. The school does not consistently challenge pupils who are late to some lessons and registrations. The school's attendance officer effectively supports and encourages those pupils whose attendance record is poor.

76. The procedures for monitoring behaviour and promoting good behaviour are very good. The large majority of teachers effectively manage behaviour during lessons. The school's expectations are clearly displayed and explained and pupils know them well. Rewards and sanctions are very well applied and motivate the pupils. An isolation room is used suitably when pupils cause disruption in lessons. Experienced mentors provide very effective support to a substantial number of pupils, many of whom make good progress with their attitudes towards learning, behaviour, relationships with others and, often, attendance. A special support unit, known as the Bosco centre, provides flexible, including long term, support for pupils who find it difficult to cope with school or classroom situations. It has successfully helped many to return to school, resume studies and re-integrate into the school community. In some lessons teachers do not make use of the school's systems to manage unacceptable behaviour quickly enough and consequently the behaviour of a small number of pupils disrupts learning in a few lessons in Years 7 to 9.

77. Relationships between pupils are very good and because of the social and moral principles promoted, incidents of anti-social conduct are few. They are almost always promptly and effectively dealt with at the time but a few pupils and parents suggest that the measures do not always prevent recurrence. The school successfully minimises the number of permanent and temporary exclusions and so more pupils benefit from the education provided by the school.

78. The procedures to monitor and support pupils' personal development are very good. Form tutors complete checklists to monitor how well pupils complete their journals that in turn reflect how well pupils organise their homework. In personal, social and health education lessons, personal contributions to lessons, effort and skills are assessed and pupils have regular opportunities for self-evaluation. The school's Christian ethos, the programme for personal, social and health education and religious education contribute much to standards of behaviour, pupils' attitudes and personal development. Numerous opportunities are provided for social experiences in school, in the immediate community and overseas. Many experiences supplement cultural awareness and develop pupils' sense of responsibility towards others including those less fortunate than themselves. The school's retreats contribute much to pupils' spiritual growth and appreciation of finer values. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and others through, for example their own representative councils. Older pupils and students provide mentoring support to younger pupils.

79. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress are good. The school maintains very detailed records of pupils' attainment, starting with very helpful information received from primary schools. This wealth of information enables teachers to set appropriate targets and to identify pupils, whose progress is not commensurate with their expectations. Formal schemes for mentoring these pupils have been introduced, including assistance from older pupils. In Years 7 to 9 there is a formal check on progress each year, and in Years 10 and 11 there are four checks of progress against predicted grades for GCSE, which shows a good response to the judgment at the time of the previous inspection that assessment information was not fully used to inform learning. The school has no overall policy for marking. However, policies exist within subject departments to ensure consistency, and in most departments the marking is supportive and helpful so that pupils feel that they know how well they are performing and what is required to make improvements. In a number of subjects, such as geography, modern foreign languages and design and technology not enough emphasis is placed on using assessment to encourage higher standards among pupils and teachers.

80. The school has good systems for identifying and monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs. Pupils' progress in improving standards of work, behaviour and attendance is monitored on a regular basis by teaching and pastoral staff. A strength of the academic support is the care which teachers take in showing pupils how they can improve their work. The quality of the learning support is good. Support staff have a strong commitment to promoting the well-being of their pupils and they are successful in creating relationships based on stability and trust which give their pupils the confidence to succeed. However, there is not enough support available in some classrooms, and as a result pupils' progress in larger teaching groups is sometimes limited. The school is aware of this problem and is taking action to remedy it by appointing further support staff. The school's good liaison with the local specialist services ensures access to a wide range of support and advice for pupils' different needs.

The Bosco Centre

81. The school's learning support unit was set up in September 2001 as part of the Excellence in Cities initiative. Named after Saint John Bosco, who advocated a preventative and positive system of education, it is a centre which caters for pupils whose attitudes are causing particular concern. It is an area where pupils develop good study habits and a sense of self-worth prior to re-integration into main school classes. Provision for pupils is good. The emphasis is on creating a well-ordered and harmonious atmosphere in which pupils learn successfully and make steady progress towards the targets that have been set for them. A major strength in the provision is the close cooperation between the school and parents and carers. The emphasis is on communicating positive news of progress, so that parents are pleased and pupils realise the benefit of making an effort to improve work and behaviour. Another strength is the way

in which the curriculum is tailored to pupils' requirements, for instance by arranging appropriate courses for older pupils in local training centres. Most pupils improve their attitudes to school and are eventually reintegrated within the school community. Management of the centre is good. The manager has high expectations of the pupils in his care and a strong commitment to helping them succeed. Daily routines run efficiently and the good liaison between the centre and the subject departments ensures that pupils know exactly what they have to do. Resources and accommodation are satisfactory. Pupils make good use of ICT facilities, including interactive learning programmes which helps them to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Space is at a premium when several pupils are using the centre at the same time but forthcoming refurbishment will improve the appearance and efficiency of the centre. The Bosco Centre is a good example of the school's commitment to the welfare of all its pupils.

Sixth form

Assessment

82. Assessment procedures are good and students' progress is closely monitored and supported. One teacher from each subject department is a member of a management group, which, amongst other responsibilities, oversees procedures for the assessment and monitoring of students' attainment and progress. The group has available to it very detailed, individual records on students. Students' progress is reviewed three times a year, including their own self review. Very recently a graduate mentor has been appointed to counsel and support students who have been identified as causes for concern. Their parents also are consulted so that additional help may be given at home. Marking is standardised within subject departments, and students know from the plans for units of work how they are to be assessed.

Advice, support and guidance

83. The arrangements for student's welfare and care are good. Educational and personal support and guidance are good. The school provides for students very good social amenities and facilities for private study and access to computers is very good. Very good advice and sensitive guidance are available to students regarding personal matters. All members of the sixth form staff demonstrate considerable interest in students, listen to them, treat them with respect and do their best to support them.

84. Students are very pleased with the level of advice, guidance and support they receive. They describe the information that they received about the sixth form and courses available as very good. They were given appropriate guidance that enabled them to make informed choices about which courses to take up. They say that induction was good and they have been well looked after and treated as adults and with respect. They are very pleased with the facilities for the sixth form community, private study and access to computers. They say that they are very well informed about and prepared for higher education opportunities.

85. Although attendance registers are completed, there is not a signing in and out system for students who arrive and leave at other than normal times and, consequently, the whereabouts of students are not always known. This has implications for safety in the event of an emergency evacuation of the building. The school's first aid services are equally available to students.

86. Students receive very good information and helpful, impartial advice about career routes and courses available prior to joining the sixth form. They receive expert and timely advice about higher education and applications for university placements. Those students who intend going directly into employment or vocational training are able to access the services of a careers adviser. Tutors frequently review the progress students make with their course work and agree actions to be taken in order to improve and to reach their targets. Students confirm that they have ready access to their tutors and information when they need it,

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

87. Parents have a very high regard for the school and express considerable confidence in it. The partnership between school and parents is good. Most findings are similar to the previous report.

88. Parents are right to be very pleased with the quality of education and care that is provided. They believe that their children achieve well academically and personally. They are pleased with teaching and the opportunities that pupils have for enrichment experiences. Some parents are not satisfied with the amount of homework that is set. Most homework is constructive but is not consistently set by a few subject departments. Some parents are not satisfied with the information that they receive about pupils' progress. The annual school reports provide satisfactory information about pupils' progress. They describe achievement understandably but do not consistently set out pupils' strengths and weaknesses in all subjects and the 'ways forward' are not always constructive or specific to the subject. The reports are supplemented by an annual parents' evening that is attended by approximately seven parents out of every ten. Interim progress reports are not produced, except on request, but every month letters are sent to parents commending those pupils who have performed exceptionally well. The school contacts parents promptly about identified underachievement or individual personal concerns. General communications, for example by newsletters and about absence are good. Although some parents suggest that the school could work more closely with them, inspectors judge that the school works well with parents, is approachable and endeavours to involve parents and to work with them. The school goes to considerable lengths to contact parents regarding absence and to seek their support for improved attendance. Parents' overall views are sought informally as they leave the annual parents' meeting. Some parents are disappointed that they are not notified in advance about what is to be taught and that the school prefers not to advise them about teaching group arrangements and changes to these groups. A few parents feel that the school has not adequately responded about incidents of bullying.

89. Parents' attendance is high at meetings to discuss options for Year 9, sixth form entry and courses and higher education. Turn out is also high for school productions and presentation events. Many parents support sporting activities and a few help voluntarily in school. The school does not at present benefit from the support of a parents' association. The school has not been successful at dissuading a significant minority of parents from withdrawing their children from school during term time for the purpose of family holidays. The school does its best to help parents who need personal support and guidance and also provides opportunities for adult education, for example in ICT.

90. The school has a good partnership with the parents of pupils with special educational needs. Most parents contribute towards their children's annual and transitional reviews and they are supportive of their children's efforts in improving academic work and behaviour. Parents are also appreciative of the different ways in which the school helps their children to make progress.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

91. The headteacher's excellent leadership supported by very good senior management has helped to develop this relatively new school and establish it as popular and successful in the community. The last inspection took place shortly after the amalgamation of two schools. Since then the school has moved on to one site and into many new buildings. The standards pupils achieve, the quality of the teaching and the provision for ICT, especially, have all improved. The improvements to the building have been particularly well planned and pupils and students benefit from a new sixth form area, learning resource centre, sports hall and modern classrooms. The establishment of the City Learning Centre as an integral part of the school has brought many outstanding advantages in ICT provision to both the school and the community. The school is held in very high regard by parents and is growing in popularity. This is reflected in the increasing numbers of families choosing to send their children to the school, and Year 7 is currently oversubscribed.

92. A remarkably strong Christian ethos pervades all areas of the school's work. The headteacher, with the support of all staff and governors, has established a very clear mission that is witnessed daily throughout the school's activities. It is the school's mission to, "... *offer a strong and supportive school community rooted in faith and striving to live out Christian ideals. The school aims to develop the gifts of all by providing a challenging educational environment in which young people will be fully prepared to take their place in society as confident, caring and responsible adults....*". The

headteacher plays a significant role in ensuring that the school's mission is upheld in decision making across the school and in all its activities.

93. The school's mission is reflected in the well-established sense of community that is experienced daily by pupils and staff and is based very much on care, trust and respect. Pupils have a well-developed sense of personal responsibility which is seen in their very good behaviour around the school and in the relationships they establish with others. For example, pupils are trusted to use classrooms at lunchtimes without direct supervision. They know exactly what is expected of them and almost all are happy to conform to the school's high expectations. The school strives to ensure the well-being, personal and academic development of all pupils and has a very strong pastoral team of staff who work very effectively to this end.

94. The school is clearly focused on ensuring that pupils and students achieve their best through receiving good quality teaching and experiencing the most suitable learning opportunities. The school development plan outlines relevant priorities and has a clear emphasis on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Senior managers play significant part in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the identified areas for development. Senior staff work very effectively with team leaders for each curriculum area and overall there is a very strong commitment to improve and succeed. The school's priorities are identified as a result of careful monitoring and evaluation of pupils' achievements at whole school level and within subjects. For example, boys' achievement has been a recent focus and many subjects have implemented a variety of different teaching approaches or courses to help improve boys' motivation and learning. This work is continually under review and evaluated against the achievements of boys. The school has taken on the National Strategies for raising standards in Years 7 to 9 and a strong team of managers led by a deputy head ensures that the work is implemented, monitored and evaluated across subjects. Systems of performance management are very effective in that they are closely linked to school and subject priorities. The senior managers all have targets directly related to priorities set out in the school development plan.

95. Governors are a highly committed group bringing a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience to their responsibilities. The recently retired chair of governors has provided outstanding support to the headteacher, and to other governors since the establishment of the school. Governors are very well informed of the school's work and they have a clear understanding of its strengths and priorities for improvement. They have been particularly supportive of successful and innovative ways in which additional funds have been procured and staff deployed, for example, in the roles of the ICT curriculum team leader and the City Learning Centre manager. The governing body fulfil their statutory requirements in full.

96. The school monitors and evaluates its performance well. Senior managers and curriculum team leaders review results of national test and examinations closely. They use this information to establish school and subject priorities for improvement. Senior managers and curriculum team leaders have a good knowledge of the quality of the work in their areas of the school because, in most subjects, regular monitoring of pupils' work and teaching takes place. The observation of teaching and learning and the sharing of best practice is well established in some subjects such as English and science, but in others, such as mathematics, systems are informal and not regular enough to ensure consistent improvement. The management has a good understanding of the areas in need of improvement across the school. For example, strategies to raise standards in specific subjects, such as modern languages, science and design and technology, have been tackled with rigour and sensitivity and are resulting in clear improvements.

97. Management of special educational needs is good. The SENCO manages her responsibilities efficiently, and the literacy tutor and support staff, including the volunteer helpers, work together very effectively as a team. The well-established links between the special needs department and subject departments ensure a whole school approach with pupils' needs identified and progress monitored. Statutory requirements in respect of pupils with statements of special educational need are met and the specific grant is used effectively for its designated purposes. The school has made good progress in implementing the recommendations of the revised Code of Practice. However the department lacks the

necessary ICT facilities to store information centrally and process documentation efficiently. The school is involved in different initiatives to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and their attitudes to learning, however, there is not enough collaboration and sharing of expertise amongst the staff responsible for the different initiatives. The interactive learning programme to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, and to develop their independence in learning is not used regularly enough.

98. The use of new technology particularly for day-to-day administration is very good. Interactive whiteboards are used well and the impact has been to quicken the pace of learning and prompt greater levels of teacher-student interaction. The library has recently acquired a comprehensive software programme for managing book issue arrangements. The school makes extensive use of communication links with schools both locally and overseas and is beginning to exploit the potential of video conferencing with education partners, including primary schools. Some ICT courses and sixth form courses are 'on line' but these are not yet widespread. The school is aware of this and there are plans for more ambitious use of the Intranet.

Financial management

99. Financial management is effective and secure. Financial planning is very good and linked closely to the school development plan. Long-term forecasts are made to enable longer-term plans, for example a rolling programme for site maintenance. The governors, together with the headteacher and finance officer, monitor the budget carefully analysing any differences between actual and expected expenditure. Day to day management is sound and has improved as a result of the recent audit. The school is committed to, and effectively applies the principles of best value by rigorously comparing its performance with that of other schools, by examining alternative ways of providing for the needs of its pupils and by ensuring competitive tendering procedures are followed. A good example is the school's approach to grounds maintenance which is now split between a Borough Council contract for the playing fields and the governors' employment of a school gardener. The effectiveness of this decision is carefully monitored. The school consulted parents and the wider community in its planning of the new Sports Hall, but does not formally consult as rigorously with regard to curriculum decisions. Specific grants are used very well for the purposes for which they are intended. For example, the impact of the work of learning mentors, funded through Excellence in Cities, on pupils' and students' motivation and achievement, especially boys has been marked.

100. Taking into account the level of funding, pupils' achievement, their social background and the school's good environment, the positive ethos of the school and its effectiveness, the school gives good value for money.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources (Main School)

101. Overall, the school has a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced teachers who are well deployed to match the needs of the curriculum. In response to the recommendation in the previous inspection report concerning teacher appraisal, senior management of the school has ensured that the relatively new procedures for the performance management of teachers have been introduced very effectively with a correspondingly good impact on the professional development of teachers. All teaching staff have a good entitlement to appropriate in-service education, although not all take full advantage of it. The school has established a good scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers, which the latter have found very helpful in their introduction to teaching. An apparently low level of special needs and technical support staff is well compensated for by the administrative and clerical support attached to subject departments. Additionally, two new appointments are to be made for special needs assistants. Pupils with special educational needs also benefit from a high level of voluntary help in withdrawal sessions. Strong links are maintained with local universities in the initial training of teachers, which has been recognised by an award presented to the school in recognition of its significant work in this area.

102. At the time of the previous inspection the school was on split sites and undergoing major capital building works; the provision for physical education was unsatisfactory. However, since then the building

programme has been completed, the school is now on one site and a new sports hall was opened at the beginning of the term. The external environment of sports hall is, however, rough, unfinished and untidy. Some classrooms are cramped when occupied by large classes, and overall the quantity of accommodation is tight with a very high occupancy rate. Planning is already at an advanced stage for the provision of an additional classroom for music. Nevertheless the majority of the accommodation is now very good and offers an environment conducive to learning. It is further enhanced by the creation on the site of a City Learning Centre, and an attractive, welcoming resources/library centre.

103. Resources for teaching and learning are good; expenditure on these is just above the average level in comparison with similar schools. Resources for ICT have been improved considerably since the previous inspection, being further enhanced by provision in the City Learning Centre, although there is insufficient access to computers in English and design and technology. In geography pupils sometimes have to share text books, and in art the level of funding does not meet the cost of sufficient basic materials.

104. The library is used well to promote learning across the school. It offers a reasonable range of books and access to computers. It is open to pupils at break and after school until 4:30 pm; during the school day it can be booked for use by whole classes or used by small groups of pupils for research.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

105. The sixth form is well led and managed by a head of sixth form, supported by a caring and committed team of tutors. It is very firmly constituted in the spirit and meaning of the school's mission statement to develop young people in terms of academic success, social skills, spirituality, cultural attainment and caring, supportive attitudes. Curricular planning and review are carried out in meticulous detail, as are reviews of progress and mentoring of students, being based on detailed records of attainment and thorough analyses and evaluation of students' performance. Underachievement is identified quickly among current students and pastoral and senior staff take supportive action. Identification of underachievement in examinations is acted upon and helps inform curricular planning and guidance to individual students on choice of courses. The formal monitoring of teaching and learning is variable across subjects and in some, there is not enough focus on sharing effective practice

106. The governors display significant commitment to the school, and bring a very wide range of expertise to the role, as a result of which they have a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and the areas for development.

107. Financial management and control are very effective, as is the regular monitoring of budget expenditure by the headteacher and the governors. The principles of best value are consistently applied. For example, through tendering for services and resources, and in the considered way that changes in sixth form provision are effected only after a thorough analysis of all the options to ensure the adoption of what is most suitable for the school and students. Specific grants are used wisely for the purposes intended, and the school has achieved notable success in searching out and bidding for additional sources of funding, for example the Excellence Challenge in order to make special provision for gifted and talented students in the sixth form. The main school budget subsidises the sixth form to a small extent, because there are some small sixth form teaching groups in mathematics, chemistry and modern languages. Nevertheless, overall, the sixth form is cost-effective.

Resources

108. The sixth form has sufficient, suitably qualified and experienced teachers, whose knowledge and expertise are generally well matched to the subjects they teach. Recent appointments have led to improvements in teaching and learning in some subjects, notably in sciences. Performance management and the setting of objectives for teachers have been very effectively introduced, and are linked very closely with professional development to benefit individual teachers and the school.

109. The sixth form accommodation is of a very high quality. Teaching areas well suited to their purpose, including laboratories, surround a pleasant environment for social activity. Additionally, students enjoy the use of a dedicated area of the school library for their private study and easy access there to computers. Although in chemistry students have to share text books, and do not have them at home to develop their independent learning skills, overall, they have the benefit of a good level of educational resources.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

110. In order to raise the standards achieved by pupils and students and improve the quality of education provided, the headteacher and the governing body should:

- (1) raise below average standards in design and technology by:
 - ensuring that all areas of the subject contribute to pupils' progressive understanding of design and technology;
 - fostering pupils' abilities to make independent decisions when designing and making;
 - improving teachers' knowledge and understanding of suitable teaching approaches to the design process;

(Paragraphs - 7, 52, 161,162,163,164,165,166)
- (2) reduce the amount of unacceptable behaviour among a small number of pupils in Years 7 to 9 by;
 - ensuring that all teachers, especially those with less experience, make full use of the school's systems for promoting good behaviour and managing unacceptable behaviour;
 - improving the pace, variety and challenge in some of the teaching and learning;

(Paragraphs – 8,24,40,76,137,148,193,197,210)
- (3) improve the variety, pace and challenge in the teaching and learning in Year 7 to 11by:
 - encouraging pupils to take a more active part in their own learning;
 - ensuring that all departments identify the best practice in teaching and share the most effective approaches to teaching regularly;

(Paragraphs – 9,11,17,18,39,40,47,48,57,120,130,139,140,171,172,196,205,210,226, 233,235,239,244,248,276)
- (4) improve the range of vocational opportunities provided in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form.

(Paragraphs – 53,68)

Sixth form

- (1) raise well below average standards in design and technology by:
 - improving teachers' knowledge and understanding of design and the intellectual rigour expected of students taking AS and A-level;

(Paragraphs – 47,236,238,239,240,241)
- (2) broaden the range of approaches to teaching to ensure that students are actively involved in their learning by:
 - ensuring that subjects identify the best practice in teaching and learning and share the most effective approaches;

(Paragraphs – 9,11,17,18,39,40,47,48,57,120,130,139,140,171,172,196,205,210,226, 233,235,239,244,248,276)

- (3) give more support to lower attaining students in some subjects by:
- ensuring a well planned approach to the teaching of basic skills, especially communication, across all subjects;
 - providing additional support for students with weaknesses in basic skills;
 - providing support in how to study.
- (Paragraphs 17,18,20,46,48,69,224,226,241,268,275,276)
- (4) broaden the range of vocational courses offered to ensure greater flexibility of choice of course for some students.
- (Paragraphs – 53,68)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7- 11	120
	Sixth form	57
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		177

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	4	22	57	33	3	1	0
Percentage	3	18	48	28	3	1	0
Sixth form							
Number	2	14	26	12	3	0	0
Percentage	4	25	46	21	5	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for the sixth form as each lesson represents more than 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	1441	161
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	237	8

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	31	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	200	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	8

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.2
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.3
National comparative data	1.2

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year. 2001/02

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	117	144	261

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	67	78	73
	Girls	112	96	91
	Total	179	174	164
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	69 (75)	67 (65)	63 (59)
	National	66 (65)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	42 (38)	40 (34)	22 (21)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	76	87	83
	Girls	105	115	104
	Total	181	202	187
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70.2 (54)	78.0 (66)	72.5 (66)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (19)	47 (28)	24 (24)
	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	105	145	229

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	37	92	100
	Girls	58	121	122
	Total	95	213	222
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	42 (39)	93 (93)	97 (98)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	33.2-capped* 36.9 - uncapped (35.9 uncapped)
	National	35-capped* (39 - uncapped)

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

* In 2002 this is the average point score based on the best eight results for each pupil.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	10	80
	National		Not known

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13) - 2002

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Males	Females	All
School	Number of candidates	30	51	81
	Average point score per candidate	14.8 (13.4)	12.9 (11.6)	13.6 (12.3)
National	Average point score per candidate	* (16.9)	* (18.0)	* (17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Males	Females	All	Males	Females	All
School	Number of candidates	29	37	66	1	14	15
	Average point score per candidate	15.2	14.6	14.8	2	8.57	8.13
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year. (2001)

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

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	N/A
	National		N/A

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	1596	28	5
White – Irish			
White – any other White background			
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4		
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian	1		
Mixed – any other mixed background	1		
Asian or Asian British - Indian			
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani			
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi			
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background			
Black or Black British – Caribbean			
Black or Black British – African			
Black or Black British – any other Black background			
Chinese			
Any other ethnic group			
No ethnic group recorded			

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	99.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.1

Financial year	2001/2002
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Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	481

	£
Total income	4351191
Total expenditure	4478639
Expenditure per pupil	2925
Balance brought forward from previous year	283000
Balance carried forward to next year	155552

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75%
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.8
Key Stage 4	21.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	21
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	27.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Number of questionnaires sent out

1602

Number of questionnaires returned

588

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	55	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	50	3	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	51	5	2	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	54	11	3	2
The teaching is good.	42	53	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	47	14	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	38	3	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	34	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	34	49	13	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	51	42	2	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	46	2	1	3

The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

44	46	4	1	5
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PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- National test results for pupils aged 14 are above average and standards overall are rising.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- The quality of teaching and pupils' learning is good.
- Teachers' marking clearly shows pupils how to improve.
- A wide range of activities beyond lessons greatly enriches pupils' learning.

Areas for improvement

- The range of teaching approaches does not encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning often enough.
- ICT is not used widely enough to develop pupils' critical reading, decision-making and discussion skills.

111. Current standards of work in Years 9 and 11 are at the national average. Good teaching and pupils' positive attitudes and commitment ensure good learning in lessons. Pupils' achievement, in relation to their prior standards, is good.

112. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 have risen since 2000. In 2002 they were above average compared with all schools and well above when compared with schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. Boys are exceeding the national average for their gender by a greater margin than are girls. Pupils do better in English than they do in mathematics and science and a greater proportion achieves the higher levels. Results in tests are better than current standards because a far broader range of work was observed during the inspection than is tested in national tests which concentrate mainly on comprehension and responses to works of Shakespeare. Also, pupils are well prepared for the tests and this helps them to do well.

113. Results in GCSE English language and literature examinations are at the national average and have improved steadily over the past two years. Results are above average when compared with those attained in similar schools. Given the below average standards of these pupils on entry to the school and the fact that a much higher percentage is entered for both subjects than is entered nationally, this represents good progress and achievement.

114. Standards of speaking and listening are average overall, but are generally higher in Years 7 to 9 because many younger pupils are confident and more willing to share their knowledge and opinions than those in Years 10 and 11 who often try to give expected, rather than personal responses. Most pupils listen well in class and readily volunteer to answer questions or read aloud. They support and co-operate

with each other very well and, when given the opportunity, can use paired and group talk effectively to refine and extend their ideas.

115. Reading standards are average but, as a result of the school's successful introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, they are improving, especially those of boys. Many lessons begin with a short period of private reading and some teachers join in, thus becoming effective role models. By the end of Year 9, most pupils can make some inferences, deductions and predictions based on their reading of fiction, poetry, drama, media and non-media texts, and all are given opportunities to read for enjoyment and information. Because nearly all pupils are entered for GCSE literature, most are able to understand a good range of texts: the high attaining pupils in Year 11 are confident, mature and fluent readers.

116. Standards of writing are average, though they are improving across the school because of the department's insistence on technical accuracy, neat presentation and the development and use of a wide vocabulary. Lower attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 write simple but interesting stories, descriptions, poems and responses to their reading, such as writing letters from the trenches. Higher attaining pupils show confidence in using complex sentences, attempting successfully a wider range of writing, including convincing play scripts, poetry comparisons, brochures and newspaper accounts. They also sustain arguments and write persuasively. By the end of Year 11, most pupils show a good awareness of audience in their work, particularly when writing creatively, and the most-able produce carefully-considered and sensitive descriptions and imaginative pieces. However, many have difficulty with discursive and critical writing. Lower and middle attaining pupils often offer description and narrative, as well as unnecessary biographical and historical information, in literature assignments, instead of interpretations based on the analysis of textual evidence.

117. Pupils with special needs make good progress in the mixed ability classes because teachers are well aware of when they require help and offer them individual support during lessons. Additionally, there are booster classes for Year 9 and an after school "surgery" for Year 11 pupils needing help with coursework and examination practice. Those who are designated gifted and talented also make good progress because of the challenging targets which their teachers set for them.

118. All pupils have identified opportunities to use ICT in each year but the quality, range and frequency of activities varies, depending upon which teacher takes a class. This is largely because there is no regular timetabling for English in ICT rooms. Pupils word-process and desktop publish their work, use the Internet for research, sometimes indiscriminately, and some classes use *PowerPoint* for presentations.

119. A wide variety of extra activities enriches pupils' learning opportunities. There are visiting speakers, theatre groups and writers, book fairs, a weekly Writers' Club, and competitions, such as the national *Readathon*, Poetry Day and the Carnegie Medal book review. There have been eleven theatre trips since January 2002, with another planned for next month. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is greatly enhanced by these activities and also through the range of texts and issues studied and discussed in lessons.

120. Good overall teaching and learning are assisted considerably by the very good relationships between teachers and pupils and between pupils themselves. Marking is particularly strong and teachers' comments on work, especially in Years 10 and 11, are very useful in showing pupils how they are doing against examination criteria and how to improve. Clear statements of what pupils will know, understand and be able to do at the end, are shared with pupils and mark the most successful lessons. Most lessons are well planned for all abilities, and teachers have high expectations of pupils' progress and behaviour. There are opportunities for pupils to work together, to negotiate, problem solve, make choices and decisions, explore ideas and texts for themselves and learn from each other. Additionally, teachers often make useful links with the pupils' own experiences, such as Harry Potter stories or the television programme *Great Britons*, to make their learning truly relevant to them. In the few less successful lessons, teachers adopt the role of instructor: there is much teacher talk and little opportunity for pupils to bring in or choose their resources, to work in groups or role play, decide how to approach tasks, form and

develop their own opinions or to make sustained contributions. Instead of becoming confident and critical thinkers, some pupils in such lessons are passive and too reliant on their teachers and their views and ideas, because independence is not encouraged.

121. The leadership and management of this large department, which includes media studies and drama, are very good. There is a strong, stable team of highly committed subject specialists, several of whom have appropriately delegated responsibilities. Communication is good. Teaching and learning are monitored closely. Priorities for development and training are clearly identified and linked to the school's improvement plan. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards have improved. All pupils make good progress and the performance of boys is much improved. The National Literacy Strategy is well embedded in the department's work and this is leading to rising literacy standards across the whole school. Opportunities to use computers are identified, but pupils' access to them is not planned.

Drama

122. The subject is taught within English in Years 7 to 9 and as an option subject in Years 10 and 11. Results in GCSE drama were above average in 2001 and for 2002 are similar. The results match current standards of work in Year 11 and pupils make very good progress.

123. Pupils are introduced to the subject's disciplines and techniques from Year 7 so, when they start their GCSE course, they have a good understanding of basic drama requirements. They learn to improvise and role-play, to create and explore situations and characters. They use techniques of freeze framing and hot seating and are aware of how voice and body language contribute to effective performances. In Year 11, standards are above average and pupils achieve well. These pupils work co-operatively and appreciate and evaluate their own work and that of others using examination board criteria. They respond readily to the teacher's direction, but also make their own decisions, and use the freedom of the drama studio in a serious and creative way. They are used to keeping records of their work and in GCSE they produce good analyses and reports. A strength of the department is its contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, through the study of such subjects as The Derek Bentley Story, emigrants, evacuees and the homeless project.

124. Teaching and learning are very good. Units of work are well planned for all abilities, marking is thorough and useful in helping pupils to improve and there is an excellent tradition of school productions which give all pupils, not just those studying drama, the opportunity to perform or be part of a production team. Additionally, pupils' experience of professional theatre is considerably enhanced by an impressive list of theatre visits over the year.

125. The management of drama is very good and pupils wishing to continue their study of the subject in the sixth form are well prepared.

Media Studies

126. This is a separate and optional GCSE subject in Years 10 and 11, though media is also part of the English examination. Standards are below average but achievement is good, given the standards of pupils on entry to the school. The subject is very popular and there are four classes in each of the two years. Many boys opt for the media studies and, whilst they enjoy the practical side, such as film making and devising web pages, several have difficulty with their writing, both when evaluating media texts and sources and devising their own. The overall quality of written work seen during the inspection was just below average but there were some good pieces in the Year 11 sample.

127. Teaching and learning in the lessons seen and work sampled are good. The teacher has very good subject knowledge and sets challenging and interesting tasks for pupils: however, because they lack confidence and experience, many are too dependent upon him for ideas.

Literacy across the curriculum

128. The provision for literacy across the curriculum is good and standards are already above average in some curriculum areas because of the successful whole school implementation of the National Literacy

Strategy. All subjects have a literacy policy and opportunities to develop pupils' speaking, listening, reading and writing are usually planned in most lessons.

129. The teaching of literacy is good. Because marking and presentation are part of the policy, most teachers ensure that errors are corrected and written work is well presented. They also offer pupils a variety of writing and reading opportunities. In science there is extended writing through coursework and investigations, and in mathematics there is an emphasis on pupils writing down explanations and, as in most subjects, using the correct technical vocabulary. Some impressive work is being done in physical education and dance and, in one Year 7 lesson, a poem, *Dear Friends*, was effectively used as a stimulus for the pupils' own ideas and movements. In music, art, physical education and drama pupils are encouraged to discuss and evaluate their own and others' work; and pupils willingly volunteer to read aloud in all lessons: however, during the inspection, pupils were given few opportunities to use talk to make decisions, develop, share and refine their own ideas or to use it creatively, through presentations, drama or role-play.

130. The management of whole school literacy is good and its implementation has been thorough, but there are variations in practice, both across and within departments because some heads of departments do not carefully monitor it. A summer school, designed to help pupils about to enter Year 7 to improve their literacy skills, has been established, and a literacy group, assisted by parents and friends of the school, helps Year 7 pupils with their reading, though there is no catch-up class, as recommended in the NLS, for the fifteen students who qualify. There is evidence of some good literacy opportunities and teaching in personal, social and health education lessons but the school has yet to consider and plan how ICT and the library can make worthwhile contributions.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- Teaching is good overall and very good or excellent in some lessons in Years 10 and 11.
- Relationships among pupils and between teachers and pupils are very good.
- Teachers use assessment information well to plan for individual needs and to track progress.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, committed and work well as a team.

Areas for improvement

- The observation of teaching and learning does not take place regularly.
- In some lessons the work does not challenge pupils and the pace is too slow.
- The National Numeracy Strategy is not yet embedded across the work of the department.

131. Standards of work in Year 9 and Year 11 are average and pupils' achievements overall in relation to their prior standards are good. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Pupils' attitudes to their work are also good, which together with very good teacher-pupil relationships and good leadership and management cause the quality of their learning in mathematics to be good.

132. Results in the 2002 national tests taken by pupils aged 14 were average compared with all schools and above average compared with similar schools. Results over the past four years show steady improvement. There was no difference overall in the results of boys and girls, although higher attaining girls outperformed boys in 2002.

133. In 2002, GCSE results in mathematics were broadly average when compared with all schools nationally and above average when compared with similar schools. Given that standards on entry to the school were below average, this represents good achievement. The proportion of higher grades obtained was above that expected based on attainment at the end of Year 9. More girls than boys achieved a

GCSE grade in mathematics. Over the past four years, the results have improved in line with the national trend.

134. In the current Year 9, standards in number work, algebra, geometry and statistics are average. Most pupils group data and draw neat and accurate frequency graphs. In algebra, above average pupils understand the rules of indices and use these in manipulating formulae. Middle and lower attaining pupils have covered less algebra, but draw and interpret line graphs. Numerical skills are satisfactory. The majority of pupils add and subtract decimals and apply their knowledge to problems involving money. Pupils understand and find primes, factors and multiples. In geometry some good work has been achieved on transformations, including enlargement and reduction. Higher attaining pupils use constructions accurately to determine the locus of a moving point. Pupils set out their work neatly and accurately. Pupils in Year 9 have made good progress from their below average standards on entry to the school. Standards in Years 7 and 8 are slightly above average and are consistent with their higher attainment on entry.

135. In Year 11, pupils have made good progress since Year 9 and their achievement is good. This year's results are likely to continue the trend of steady improvement. Middle attaining pupils use simple percentages, decimals and fractions; higher attaining pupils apply their knowledge of proportion and percentages to calculations of compound interest, appreciation and depreciation. Lower attaining pupils use simple decimals and fractions to calculate parts of a quantity. They recognise different types of angles and use protractors correctly to draw and measure. Most pupils calculate the area of triangles and use Pythagoras' theorem to calculate the length of sides. Higher attaining pupils apply this knowledge, together with their knowledge of trigonometry to find complex volumes and areas of solids. In statistics most pupils construct frequency tables and graphs for grouped data and calculate simple statistical averages; they draw scatter diagrams and show understanding of correlation. In algebra, the most able pupils solve quadratic equations by a variety of methods. Pupils set out their work well and show their working out; diagrams, graphs and constructions are neat and accurate.

136. There is no significant difference in the standards of work of boys and girls. Progress is good in the majority of lessons because teachers set high standards and match the work to the needs of the pupils. In a few lessons progress is slowed down because teachers do not expect enough of their pupils and the pace is too pedestrian. The progress of higher attaining pupils in Year 11 is very good. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is consistent with that of pupils overall; however, in some lessons the groups are too large to provide the necessary level of support. The department makes good provision for gifted and talented pupils, who are able to study GCSE statistics alongside their mathematics in Years 10 and 11. These pupils make good progress, in line with that of the majority of pupils.

137. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall, and relationships between teachers and pupils often very good. The behaviour of some pupils in Year 9 is sometimes unsatisfactory; this occurs when the teaching does not meet pupils' needs.

138. Although the quality of teaching and learning is good overall, there is more very good and better teaching in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7, 8 and 9. Over one third of lessons observed in Years 10 and 11 were very good or better and one lesson was excellent. Teachers' expectations of pupil achievement are usually high. In the best lessons, there are very good relationships, pupils work hard and they learn well. These lessons are well planned, build on prior learning and maintain a brisk pace. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on angles in a polygon, pupils were led through carefully graded activities. All resources were to hand, and the tasks were carefully sequenced; a very good pace was maintained throughout. The department has started to implement the National Numeracy Strategy and most lessons in Years 7 and 8 start with a short arithmetic task; however, these tasks sometimes lack challenge and opportunities for pupils to explain their reasoning are not always taken. Teachers do not consistently make the purpose of lessons clear to pupils or ensure a structured conclusion to a lesson to reinforce what has been learnt.

139. When teachers' expectations are not high, pupils do not progress as well as they should. For example, in a middle-attaining group in Year 11, pupils used *Pythagoras'* theorem to calculate sides of a right-angled triangle; however, they were not encouraged to use the correct vocabulary and the examples were very simple. There was little progression from work done on this topic lower down the school and pupils worked too slowly. Over time there is a good balance of number, algebra, geometry and statistics. Years 7 and 8 pupils benefit from the Cognitive Acceleration project, developing their thinking skills through participation in lessons designed to promote learning through investigation. Relevant homework is set weekly, in accordance with school policy. The marking of work is good and generally gives clear guidance to help pupils improve. The emphasis on presentation skills and accuracy in graph work, constructions and diagrams, together with clear guidance on how to show working out, contributes to pupils' progress.

140. The leadership and management of mathematics are good. Teachers are enthusiastic, committed and work as a team. Homework and marking are monitored regularly, but lesson observations have not yet taken place on a regular basis. An induction programme and opportunities to share good practice support less experienced colleagues. The Advanced Skills teacher shares his expertise with colleagues through demonstrations and team teaching. Development planning is good, as are assessment procedures. The department uses information about pupils' prior attainment to help plan their teaching and to set individual pupil targets; pupils understand their targets and are aware of how to improve their National Curriculum level or GCSE grade. There is good use of ICT in the teaching of some topics; this is not yet written into all schemes of work. The department has a well-equipped suite of classrooms, which is enhanced by very good wall displays. It is well resourced and now has satisfactory access to computers. Since the last inspection, standards at the end of Year 11 and the achievement of higher attaining pupils have improved. Overall, improvement is good.

Numeracy across the curriculum

141. Standards of numeracy both in mathematics and throughout the curriculum are average. All departments have a very comprehensive numeracy handbook, produced by the mathematics department, which includes a common approach to the teaching and use of units of measurement, graphs, data handling, basic algebra and arithmetic. Some departments use wall display to reinforce numeracy requirements of their subject. For example, distance lines in physical education display world records for long and high jump and the geography department displays temperature conversions. Geography, information and communications technology (ICT) and science provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills; the contribution from other subjects, with the exception of design and technology, is satisfactory. In design and technology the teaching of numeracy is unsatisfactory. There is little emphasis on numeracy and opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of units of measurement are not taken. In science there is good teaching of numeracy, especially number, manipulation of formulae and graphical analysis of experimental data; in geography pupils use co-ordinates, directions and scale to a satisfactory standard. The mathematics department has started to introduce the National Numeracy Strategy in Years 7 and 8, but this is not yet fully embedded in the teaching of mathematics.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good, especially the teaching of basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT.
- Pupils achieve well.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are good.

Areas for improvement

- Results in national tests taken by pupils in year 9 and in GCSE examinations are below average.
- Teachers do not refer to National Curriculum levels often enough when marking pupils' work in Years 7 to 9.

142. Current standards of work in Year 9 and in Year 11 are average, and pupils' achievement in relation to their prior standards is good. Current standards are better than the most recent results because the teaching is good and has improved as the result of changes in the management and staffing of the subject. Pupils' positive attitudes also cause the quality of their learning in science to be good.

143. Results in national tests taken by pupils aged 14 in 2002 were below average. They were average for schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. There is no difference between the performance of boys and girls in these tests. Results over the past four years have improved steadily.

144. GCSE results in 2002 were below average compared with all schools. They were also below average compared with similar schools. Results over the most recent years have been rather static but dipped significantly in 2002 due to problems with continuity of staffing. Again there was little difference in boys and girls performance.

145. Standards are average in Year 9. Achievement is good as a result of good teaching in this age range. Standards in biology, chemistry and physics are in line with what would be expected for their age. Higher-attaining pupils write the word equation for the process of photosynthesis and understand its relevance to plant growth. In chemistry, average-attaining pupils have a good idea of changes that can occur in chemical reactions. They are improving their understanding of word equations. Lower-attaining pupils have some understanding of the reactivity series but struggle to place metals in the correct place in the series when supplied with information about their reactions. Enquiry skills are less well developed. For example, few pupils in an upper-attaining group knew the correct method of using a microscope.

146. Standards in Year 11 are average and again better than the most recent GCSE results. Standards in enquiry science improve to average standards due to the increased emphasis placed on course work. The highest-attaining pupils have a good understanding of atomic structure and bonding. They work out electronic structures and predict what type of bonding will occur in compounds. Average-attaining pupils have a sound understanding of the role of sex cells in reproduction. They explain the mechanisms that result in twins being identical or non-identical. The lowest-attaining pupils' knowledge and understanding of these topics is not as secure but all are on course to attain a grade at GCSE.

147. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them as a result of good teaching combined with smaller group sizes.

148. Pupils' attitudes to science are generally good and sometimes better. Pupils generally sustain concentration well. They collaborate well with each other when doing practical work. They generally enjoy their work in science. However, some pupils in Year 9 can be uncooperative and are less well behaved and this results in their making slower progress.

149. Teaching was good and better in about seven out of ten lessons observed. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject specialisms and their expertise helps pupils' to progress. For example, in one lesson the teacher was able to explain step by step how to write chemical equations. Very clear guidelines ensured that pupils made good progress in their understanding of this process. In Years 10 and 11 all lessons seen were good or better whilst in Years 7, 8 and 9 more lessons were satisfactory. This was because teachers' planning did not always focus clearly on what pupils should learn. For example, in a Year 9 biology lesson on keeping fit and healthy, pupils were told about what they would be doing and little about what knowledge, skills and understanding they would gain. As a result the lesson lacked focus and pupils made slower progress than they might. The quality of marking is often very good with supportive comments. However in Years 7, 8 and 9 not enough use is made of National Curriculum levels to give pupils a clear understanding of the standards they achieve. The department has accurate procedures for measuring and recording pupils' attainment and tracking their progress. Numeracy and literacy are well taught and this helps raise standards. For example, the use of science readers is giving pupils a broader understanding of scientific issues such as genetics. This also gives them a good insight into ethical scientific problems, for example, cloning. ICT is well taught and is used well to support and extend pupils' learning in science.

150. Teachers work well together as a team and have a very strong commitment to pupils' achievement and overall improvement. Previous problems with staffing that led to underachievement in the past are now largely resolved. The technicians work well to ensure that the department functions efficiently on a day-to-day basis. Management of the subject is good. Since the last inspection teaching and management have improved and standards are rising. Overall, improvement is good although test and examination results need to be better.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Results at GCSE are consistently very high.
 - Teaching and learning are excellent, and pupils' achievement is excellent as a result.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to pupils' cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- None.

151. Current standards of work in Year 9 are well above average, and in Year 11 are very high. Pupils' achievement in relation to their standards when they begin in Year 7 is excellent. These standards are achieved because the teaching is excellent. Pupils' attitudes are very good, relationships are very good, and teachers' subject knowledge is excellent. These factors also cause the quality of learning in art and design to be excellent.

152. In 2001, examination results at GCSE were very high. Numbers of boys taking the examination were too small to reliably compare their results with those of the girls. Similar standards were maintained in the 2002 examinations. Examination results in recent years have been consistently very high. Pupils generally do much better in their art and design than in their other subjects.

153. The standards observed in lessons in Year 9 are well above average. Pupils create lively constructions in card, wire and coloured paper which demonstrate high levels of competence in working with line and shape in three dimensions. Their composition work is strong, and they make bright and bold designs based on a study of confectionery. They show a rapidly growing confidence in the use of hot colours and transparent washes. They also make unusual portraits from wire, which effectively capture the variations of expression seen in the human face. They use ICT for research and to manipulate images, but its use is not frequent enough to fully support and extend their work. In Year 11, pupils continue to gain skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject at an excellent rate. The GCSE course is a flagship for achievement in the school. Pupils' research is very strong, and they make lively study sheets, which combine drawings, photographs and students' own words. They also learn to carve plaster blocks in low relief, casting interesting shadows, which change with the light. Their use of pencil is skilful, and architectural drawings show a sensitive use of line to describe the complex forms seen in Gothic architecture. Higher attaining pupils produce exquisite sculptures in fine wire which express the fragility of form seen in seed pods and plant forms. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is excellent, because the quality of teaching is excellent, and there is a vigorous approach to the use of materials, which means that they can make the most of their skills.

154. Relationships in lessons are very good, teachers' expectations are very high, and as a result pupils listen very carefully and try very hard in lessons. For example; in a Year 11 lesson, the teacher showed pupils how to transfer images quickly and effectively onto fabric, which was then dyed in bright colours. This created very high levels of interest, and a very busy and confident learning atmosphere, as pupils then worked vigorously with sacking, dyes and oil pastels. The teacher maintained this atmosphere by giving very focused individual advice, encouraging pupils to think further and discover ideas for themselves. As a result, learning in the lesson was excellent. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They encourage pupils to enhance their work by using materials very carefully. For example, in one lesson pupils were making prints based on the study of architectural forms; the teacher showed them how to use coloured pencil to work over the surface of the print to emphasise the illusion of depth and form. This was very successful, levels of pupils' interest were high and very good learning was the result.

155. Improvement since the previous inspection has been excellent. Results have shown marked improvement, and in recent years have been consistently very high. These standards have been maintained in the work seen in the school. The subject now makes an excellent contribution to pupils'

cultural development. A very wide range of artists is studied, including Michael Brennan Wood, Pablo Picasso, and Henry Moore. Gallery visits are well-planned and initiate very strong research in sketchbooks and work folders. This strongly informs pupils' own work in class. Visiting artists are used regularly, especially with gifted and talented pupils, to promote a wider range of exciting and very stimulating projects; for example, making large sculptures based on boats or animals. In addition, links have been established with a school in South Africa. All these activities create excellent levels of interest and engagement with the world of art. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent, and there has been a firm focus on raising standards to a very high level and maintaining that level. This has been extremely successful.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Teachers have a strong commitment to pupils' achievement.
- Lessons move on at a good pace and pupils are challenged.
- Planning and management of the subject are good.
- A good level of independent learning takes place in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Arrangements for assessing individual pupils are not in place.
- Elements of citizenship are not identified in schemes of work across all subjects.

156. This is a new subject in the curriculum. The planning and coordination for it have been very thorough, following a meticulous audit of where elements of citizenship were previously part of the work of other subjects. From this the requirements of the programmes of study have been carefully plotted and allocated across the whole curriculum. During the week of the inspection there were only three opportunities for observing lessons in citizenship.

157. Standards of work seen during the inspection were average in Years 7 and 11 and above average in Year 10, and pupils' achievement was very good in all three. This is the result of very good teaching and the very good attitudes and focus of the pupils.

158. In Year 7, pupils understand why rules are necessary in school and society as a whole, and, in discussion, analyse sets of rules, saying why they are important and what might be the outcomes if they did not exist. There was, too, an interesting discussion on rules that apply in their homes. In Years 10 and 11 pupils discuss, with a high level of maturity, prejudice and discrimination in multi- ethnic society and link aspects of contracts of employment to responsibilities to others, as exemplified in the issues raised in the national strike of fire-fighters. A very good example of citizenship in action was at a forum, organised by sixth form students, for pupils from Year 9 with the local Member of Parliament. The pupils raised questions with him on a wide range of topical issues. Growing in confidence as the session continued, they followed up issues with supplementary questions, made pertinent comments and challenged the answers and views he expressed.

159. In all three lessons observed relationships were very good. The teaching was characterised by pace and challenge, variety of activities, and very good planning and organisation.

160. The school's approach to the introduction of citizenship across almost all the subjects of the curriculum makes coordination much more difficult. For example, no firm arrangements have yet been devised to enable individual pupils to be assessed for attainment and progress. Similarly, not all subject areas have yet clearly identified the elements of citizenship in their schemes of work.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The range of courses offered for GCSE is good.
- Pupils work hard and try to succeed.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are below average and pupils underachieve in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9.
- There is a lack of consistency across areas of the subject.

161. Current standards of work in Year 9 and Year 11 are below average. Students' achievement by Year 9 in relation to their standards when they began in Year 7 is unsatisfactory but by Year 11 is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 because overall, teachers do not develop pupils' ability to make independent decisions when designing and making although pupils' attitudes to the subject are good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 10 to 11 because teachers focus pupils' learning on the requirements of the GCSE examinations.

162. Overall, GCSE examination results in 2002 were below average. These results are similar to those in 2001 and 2000. There were differences between the results in different areas of the subject in each year and boys' results were higher than girls' results in 2001 but overall, these differences are not significant. Almost one third of pupils do not take design and technology and many take short courses in which results are lower than in the full courses. Both these factors have a significant impact on the overall results.

163. Standards of work in Year 9 are below average. There is no common approach to planning the development of pupils' understanding of design and technology across the different areas of the subject. Consequently, there are significant variations in the standards of work in each area of the subject and pupils have very variable experiences of design processes in particular. Overall, pupils' ability to make their own decisions in relation to both designing and making is weak because in many lessons they are given instructions for each stage and not required to contribute to the thinking processes involved. For example, in Year 9, pupils were using a common screwed construction for a shelf and just changing the shape of the backplate. On the whole, textiles and some food lessons are an exception with, for example, pupils in Year 8 designing the fabric for an oven glove from visual sources and pupils in Year 9 designing containers for a specific purpose. The areas of knowledge required by the National Curriculum are covered but pupils are not able to apply them because they are taught in isolation from designing. Similarly, pupils can carry out specific graphics skills through exercises but mostly do not use them when designing. However, pupils are starting to use computer graphics to design in several areas, for example, a textiles project in Year 7 based on stained glass windows. Standards of pupils' skills in making are variable. It is mostly accurate in textiles and food but marking out is often inaccurate in wood. Because of this lack of consistency pupils, including those with special educational needs, do not achieve as well as they should.

164. Although standards of work are below average in Year 11, pupils achieve as well as expected in relation to their starting points in Year 10. There is a good range of courses available for pupils at GCSE. Whilst there continue to be weaknesses in thinking and decision-making skills and consequently few higher attaining pupils achieve the highest GCSE grades, they follow a design procedure which ensures that they have acceptable folders and products. The standards of presentation have improved since the previous inspection, but the use of ICT for presenting their work is limited by lack of access to computers in most areas of the department. Pupils taking the Systems and Control course have sound knowledge, good making skills and show more ability to work independently than in most other areas. Pupils have not

completed as much of their design folders as would be expected by this stage of the courses. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in line with that of other pupils because teachers are aware of their needs and give them individual help.

165. Overall, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Almost half the lessons in these years were judged to be unsatisfactory or poor because they did not involve the pupils sufficiently and had low expectations of their ability to make decisions about designing and making. There were some good lessons in textiles that stimulated pupils' interest and confidence in designing. Teaching and learning in Years 10 to 11 are satisfactory and no lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory because a systematic approach to meeting specific examination requirements counterbalanced the lack of emphasis on decision-making. Overall, even in the lessons judged to be unsatisfactory, teachers prepare their lessons and mark pupils' work thoroughly, have good relationships with the pupils and give them thorough individual help. Consequently pupils mostly have positive attitudes in their lessons, work hard and respond well to questions. There are insufficient facilities for designing in the resistant material areas and displays of pupils' work are not used well enough to set appropriate standards.

166. The management of design and technology is unsatisfactory because there is a lack of coherence between different areas of the subject. Although there are appropriate procedures for all key areas such as assessment and monitoring and the schools' priorities for the development of the subject are appropriate, these are not consistently implemented because all areas of the subject are not working towards a common end. A significant factor is the substantial teaching and organisational commitment of the curriculum team leader outside the department without an effective supporting management structure within the department. Although there have been some improvements since the previous inspection, overall, improvement has been unsatisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- GCSE results have improved.
- A well-planned programme of field studies contributes well to pupils' learning.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good; pupils are well supported in their learning.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the quality of pupils' written work.
- Teachers' marking and assessments do not give pupils a clear enough idea of what to do to improve.
- Make better use of pupils' ICT skills in their learning.

167. Current standards of work in Year 9 and Year 11 are broadly average. Pupils' achievement overall, in relation to standards when they joined the school in Year 7, is satisfactory. These standards are achieved because the teaching is satisfactory. Pupils' positive attitudes and good behaviour also contribute to their satisfactory rate of learning in geography.

168. Results in the GCSE examination in 2001 were below the national average. Results are much improved in 2002 and are now average and match the standards seen in lessons. There is no significant difference between the results of boys and girls, although very few girls opt for the subject in Years 10 and 11.

169. Pupils in Year 9 use a satisfactory range of resources, including the Internet, to find information. They acquire and use an appropriate subject vocabulary, aided by displays of key words and the use of glossaries. Higher attaining pupils demonstrate sound understanding of ideas, for example, the impact of the development of the oil industry on the environment in Alaska, including the moral dilemmas that arise

as economic demands conflict with conservation issues. Average pupils identify causes, effects and human responses to hazards such as flooding. Lower attaining pupils construct climate graphs accurately and use them to make simple comparisons between places. Many pupils, however, have difficulty in writing explanations of what they have learned with a degree of detail and accuracy. Although there are opportunities for extended pieces of writing, much written work relies on short responses based on worksheets, which demand little application of geographical skills, and this limits attainment, especially of higher attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they are taught in smaller groups and the work is well matched to their needs. There is a varied programme of activities to challenge gifted and talented pupils. Well planned field work for Year 9 pupils contributes to pupils' enquiry skills.

170. Pupils on the GCSE course achieve satisfactorily. They use a good range of techniques to collect and present data collected in the field, which contributes well to their coursework. A good programme of fieldwork involving river studies has helped develop pupils' understanding and geographical skills. Lower attaining pupils have difficulty in recalling and applying what they have learned, so that they make slower, though satisfactory progress over time, and almost all achieve a grade.

171. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, with undoubted strengths. Discipline is firm, but with a light touch so that pupils know what is expected of them and lesson time is well used for learning. The teachers' enthusiasm for the subject and effective use of praise elicit good responses from pupils, giving them confidence to tackle new work. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and are generous with the help offered after school to support pupils in their revision and with coursework. Lesson planning is generally satisfactory, but planning to meet the range of pupils' needs is weaker, so that more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. The best lessons are well devised to promote literacy skills, but generally this needs a sharper focus on how to improve the quality of pupils' written work. There are inconsistencies in the marking of pupils' work. Some teachers provide useful targets for improvement; others, although encouraging good efforts, do not provide pupils with clear guidance about how to improve.

172. Leadership and management in geography are good. The effective monitoring of teaching and the curriculum has identified clear priorities for development; resources are used well to support these goals. For example, a wider range of textbooks in Years 7 to 9 is beginning to reduce the overuse of worksheets in some areas of the subject. Participation in the Key Stage 3 National Strategy to improve teaching and learning in the foundation subjects is beginning to contribute to raising standards and to broaden the range of teaching and learning styles. Progress since the previous inspection report is satisfactory. GCSE results are now better and the quality of teaching has improved. Opportunities for pupils to use computers are identified but plans to ensure that pupils uses ICT skills to help in their learning in geography are not yet fully implemented. Weaknesses in assessment have not been adequately tackled. The department does not yet use a wide enough range of approaches to assessment to enable it to make judgements about levels of the National Curriculum fully secure or to enable teachers to set useful targets to help pupils to improve their work.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Good teaching sets high expectations of pupils.
- ICT and a good range of resources are used well, especially for historical research.
- Results at GCSE are improving steadily.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Information about what is to be learned in lessons is not always shared with the class.

- Classroom display is not used to full effect.

173. Standards of work in Year 9 and in Year 11 are average and pupils' achievement in relation to their standards when they began in Year 7 is good. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good and has improved significantly under recent changes in the management of the subject. Pupils' very positive attitudes and the good range of resources available to the department also contribute to the good quality of learning in history.

174. GCSE results have improved steadily over the last three years but remain below average. In 2002 pupils performed better than expected based on their prior standards and boys' results were significantly better than previous years. Girls gain higher results than boys in line with the national picture. Current standards of work are higher than the results suggest because the quality of the teaching is improving in response to very good management which has a clear focus on improving teaching and learning.

175. In Years 7 to 9 pupils develop good foundations for the study of history. They explain the differences between primary and secondary sources and they have a good understanding of chronology. Some pupils write about events with great empathy, for example, they write letters as if from the trenches of World War I. However, other pupils tend to take evidence at face value and produce brief answers lacking in depth. Pupils use modern technology well as a method of research. During the inspection Year 7 classes researched aspects of the Roman Empire using the Internet; Year 8 pupils researched events around the defeat of the Spanish Armada and, in Year 9, they conducted an interactive virtual reality interview with Adolf Hitler.

176. In Years 10 and 11 pupils develop a good understanding of the history of medicine. Their sense of history develops because the course helps them to appreciate aspects of medicine across a period of 2000 years. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the past deepens and they begin to appreciate the main features of different ages in time and different societies. In their work on Germany between 1918 and 1945, they begin to see how historical events have been interpreted differently and they develop an ability to remember and prioritise historical information. The work of higher attaining pupils shows extensive reading and their books are full of charts, analyses and illustrations, as well as extended writing. Lower attaining pupils use bullet points so that their answers are brief and evidence is not well developed or extended.

177. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. They work with enthusiasm on a well-chosen variety of interesting tasks. Those who are identified as gifted and talented are encouraged to go further in their research and also make good progress. Boys and girls make similar progress and achieve well in relation to their prior standards.

178. Pupils' good behaviour and attitude contribute to their learning. Many pupils are enthusiastic and enjoy the subject and their books show care and effort throughout. A small minority of pupils, particularly in Years 9 and 11, have low attendance records and as a result do not achieve well in examinations. The work of some lower attaining pupils is incomplete.

179. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Lessons observed were never less than satisfactory and one in four was very good. Teachers know their pupils well, have high expectations of them and match activities to pupils' needs closely. For example, gifted and talented pupils are often given extension work. Teachers prepare interesting and dynamic lessons using a good range of learning activities which motivate pupils and often inspire them. Teachers ensure that pupils make progress with literacy skills by ensuring a good emphasis on key words and specialist vocabulary and through extended writing exercises. For example, terms in a phrase such as "yesterday's propagandist is today's spin-doctor" are explained well. There are many opportunities for the discussion of moral questions such as the nature of evil and the development of social skills, when pupils work together on different projects. Pupils gain a good understanding and appreciation of different cultures through their study of history. Teachers mark work thoroughly and offer positive comments with advice on how pupils might improve their grades. Where teaching could be improved some teachers do not explain to pupils what they can

expect to learn so that the purpose of the lesson is not always clear. Pupils' numeracy skills are not especially well developed through history, though some pupils can use statistical data well.

180. The department is very well led and managed. All the teachers have shared aims and all work together to create an enjoyable and effective work ethos. The work of the department is monitored rigorously, both through close analysis of pupils' achievements and through observation of teaching. Consequently there is a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the subject. New schemes of work have been developed and enhanced during the last two years. The choice of courses which the students follow, the resources which are provided to help their learning, the valuable range of educational visits throughout the year and the enthusiasm they bring to their work all make this a successful department. The accommodation is satisfactory though class display is not used consistently well to promote learning. Since the last inspection the good quality of teaching has been maintained and standards are improving. Overall improvement has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **very good**, both in taught courses and in the provision for all pupils across subjects.

Strengths

- Leadership and management are excellent and contribute well to rising standards amongst pupils within each age group.
- Monitoring and assessment of pupils' progress are exemplary.
- Standards are above average
- Teaching on the taught courses is very good.
- Facilities for the teaching of ICT as a separate subject are excellent.

Areas for Improvement

- The proportion of pupils taking ICT as an accredited subject is relatively low ..

181. Across the school all pupils receive their statutory entitlement to be taught National Curriculum ICT. In Years 7 to 9 ICT is taught as a separate subject and it is taught and used through subjects across the curriculum. In Years 10 and 11 around one quarter of pupils have chosen to take ICT as a separate GCSE. For those pupils who do not take ICT as a separate subject they receive their entitlement to ICT through the teaching and use of ICT in all other subjects of the curriculum.

182. Current standards of work for all pupils in Years 9 and 11 are above the national average. These standards represent very good achievement for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and good achievement for pupils in Years 10 and 11. This is due to a combination of very good teaching and learning together with excellent leadership and management.

183. GCSE results are improving and in 2002 were above the national average. This represents good achievement in relation to pupils' prior attainment. Girls outperformed boys in 2002 but in the previous year there was no significant difference. Overall, the numbers of pupils taking external accreditation are relatively low.

184. In Year 9, current standards of pupils' work are above average and match teachers' assessments. A particular strength is pupils' understanding of aspects of spreadsheet work. There is an appropriate emphasis on numeracy skills. Pupils use a wide range of software and produce animated presentations, for example in project work promoting leisure and tourism. Key board skills are very good and higher attaining pupils correct and re-draft work without direction. Pupils understand business, planning and modelling applications of ICT very well, although their awareness of graphic applications is more varied because of lack of emphasis on this in the teaching. Progress and achievement are very good

in Years 7 to 9 because of the clear emphasis on teaching skills and the access to and willingness of pupils to use ICT outside of formal lesson time. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress because they are well known by their teachers and they receive good individual attention.

185. Standards of work in Year 11 are above average. In the ICT GCSE course pupils' knowledge and understanding, for example, of the use and application of spreadsheets and relational data bases, are good. Pupils taking the GCSE course achieve very well in relation to their prior standards. Pupils following the GCSE course speak very positively of their learning experiences and the modern facilities available to them. Pupils not following the GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 continue to develop good ICT skills. They use advanced software, for example Excel, and become increasingly confident in the design of spreadsheets. Pupils apply their ability to analyse spreadsheet data well in mathematics coursework. Standards of word processing are good as was seen among pupils following the health and social care course. Pupils following GCSE music courses use software to help sequence their work very effectively. Pupils with special educational needs and those of high attainment make good progress both in taught ICT courses and in ICT across subjects. Progress and achievement in Years 10 and 11 are good overall, rather than very good as a result of a relatively narrow focus on ICT skills across subjects in Years 10 and 11.

186. Teaching and learning are very good in the taught courses for ICT. Lessons are very well prepared. Teachers make high demands of pupils' effort and progress. Time is well managed so that learning moves on at a rapid pace. Pupils are very clear as to what they need to do to improve as a result of very sophisticated 'on-line' assessment arrangements which give continuous feedback on individual educational performance. Teachers use the Intranet very effectively to encourage independent learning. The schemes of work give consistent emphasis to the development of literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, pupils are confident both in cell calculation work and in extended writing on designing information technology applications to deal with business issues. Support for individual pupils is very effective, principally through teaching staff. As a result, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, learn at least at a good rate. Consistently good classroom management ensures that pupils remain focused and produce plenty of work and strive hard to complete tasks within the allocated time. Not enough emphasis is given within teaching to developing pupils' understanding of the social and economic effects of new technology.

187. Pupils' learning is enhanced through a very good range of extra opportunities which take place beyond lesson time. In part, this is due to the successful establishment of a 'City Learning Centre'. This offers a very broad range of communication facilities, including video conferencing. There is excellent access to ICT via the library, a 'cyber café' as well as after school clubs, including a 'Creative Writers' club.

188. Leadership and management are excellent. There is an excellent vision for the future development of the subject as a communication medium. Assessment and the use of pupil performance data are excellent for pupils within ICT taught courses. Arrangements are in place to monitor ICT where it is taught across subjects. These have not yet been carried out regularly and rigorously enough to ensure opportunities for extending higher order ICT skills in all subject areas. High quality and number of staff, both in teaching and technical support, help promote high standards. Extensive staff development has had a positive effect on pupils' learning. Resources are very good, serving to motivate pupils and support their learning within and outside lessons. The quality of wall display is very good, informing pupils' learning and helping to improve their technical vocabulary. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards have improved significantly. The school has invested heavily in new technology.

ICT taught across the subjects of the curriculum

189. The provision and co-ordination of teaching ICT skills across the curriculum are good. The ratio of modern computers to the number of pupils within the college meets national recommendations. The City Learning Centre Initiative provides significant additional facilities giving pupils, pupils and the local community access to additional computers. However, for the school to meet the national recommended ratio of 1 computer for every 4 pupils in 2004, additional investment by the school will be necessary.

There is a management post with responsibility for monitoring the way in which ICT supports learning across subjects of the curriculum. Although this monitoring function is in its infancy, a good start has been made on ensuring curriculum entitlement for pupils' continuing ICT skill development in Years 10 and 11 through other subjects of the curriculum. This is particularly evident in subjects such as French where schemes of work fully include ICT skills. There has been considerable investment in staff development for ICT.

190. Computing facilities are well used, including those subject areas which possess their own ICT equipment, for example modern foreign languages. Modelling and sensing work is undertaken in science and the use and application of ICT is well developed in mathematics, particularly in graph work. The use of ICT in English is relatively less well developed other than for basic word processing. Most subjects are making good progress in developing pupils' higher order ICT skills. History, music, modern foreign languages, business studies and health and social care all ensure that pupils make good use of ICT. In art and design, design and technology, geography and physical education, although some ICT is used it is not yet used often enough.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

In German:

- Teaching is good.
- Pupils achieve well and reach above average standards.

In French:

- Standards are rising and pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11.
- *In modern languages as a whole:*
- Leadership is very good.

Areas for improvement

In French:

- In Years 7 to 9, standards in speaking are not high enough.
- Some boys in Year 9 do not achieve high enough standards.

In modern languages as a whole:

- Systems for checking on the quality of teaching and learning are not yet regular and rigorous enough.
- Systems of assessment are not yet helping to raise standards well enough.
- Timetable arrangements lead to bunching of lessons over a two week period and classes that are split between more than one teacher.

191. Following the recent introduction of diversified provision in modern languages, half year groups in Years 7 and 8 now study either French or German. Currently, all pupils in Year 9 study French and Spanish is introduced as a second language for some average and higher attaining pupils.

French

192. Standards of work in Year 9 are below average and, in relation to their starting point, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. These standards are achieved because the teaching is satisfactory and pupils' attitudes are good. Standards of work in Year 11 are below average but, in relation to their standards when they entered Year 10, pupils' achievement is good. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good and pupils' attitudes to learning are good.

193. In Year 9, comprehension skills develop quite well and all pupils can pick out some detail from what they read and hear. Speaking skills are less well developed, largely because pupils do not have

enough opportunities to practise, for example in pairs. They lack confidence, responses tend to be brief and pronunciation is often anglicised. By contrast, writing is relatively strong because pupils practise regularly. They learn basic grammar, including the past tense, which enables most pupils to write sentences by adapting models. However, pupils do very little extended writing and higher attaining pupils in particular need opportunities to produce work more independently. There is some underachievement, particularly among boys of average ability, related to effort and concentration. Pupils with special educational needs progress at a similar rate to others in the class because teachers provide good individual support.

194. In 2001, fewer than half of Year 11 took either a full or short GCSE course. In the full course, the proportion achieving grades A*-C was average and all pupils achieved a grade. Girls, who made up most of the entry, did less well in French than in their other subjects and significantly less well than girls nationally. In 2002, results in the full course improved significantly to above average, though the number of entries was very much lower than in the previous two years. There have been very few passes at grades A* or A over the past three years. Results in the short course have been very low. This course is no longer offered.

195. In Year 11, numbers taking French have increased considerably and pupils now all follow a full GCSE course. Standards are clearly improving and pupils are achieving more highly than in previous years. Reading and listening with understanding skills develop quite well and pupils continue to make relatively good progress in writing. Many higher attaining pupils use a wide range of structures and refer to past and future events with some success. However, overall, pupils do not pay enough attention to accuracy, for example, in spelling and verb forms. Although speaking remains weak, pupils are gaining in confidence now that they get more regular opportunities to practise speaking in class and they benefit from conversation practice with the French assistant.

196. The quality of teaching and learning although satisfactory overall in French, is consistently good in Years 10 and 11 and more variable in Years 7 to 9. Teachers are fluent but there is some inconsistent practice. Most teachers employ good strategies to manage pupils well, lessons are well planned and relationships are good. However, there are occasions, in Year 9 especially, when undemanding activities drag on for too long or teachers do too much of the work, so pupils become restless and switch off. By contrast, in Years 10 and 11, pupils are learning at a faster rate as gaps in their knowledge from earlier years are filled and they are presented with more stimulating and more challenging work. ICT is used effectively, including the use of the interactive whiteboard to support and enhance pupils' learning. Marking is variable. Despite some good examples of supportive written comments, the practice is not widespread and basic errors are not always picked up. There is too little reference to National Curriculum levels or GCSE criteria, which would inform pupils more clearly about their progress and what they need to do to improve.

197. Attitudes towards French are good overall but variable. Attitudes are consistently good in Years 10 and 11 in response to good teaching. Behaviour overall is good, though a small minority of pupils, mainly boys in Year 9, show some immaturity and waste time, which disrupts the learning of others in the class.

German

198. Standards of work in Year 8 are above average for their age and this represents good achievement in relation to pupils' starting point in Year 7. Pupils make rapid progress in listening, speaking, reading and writing because teaching is good, pupils' attitudes are very good and subject management is very effective. Pupils build up their knowledge of vocabulary and structures and learn to use the past tense early so that they can talk and write confidently about, for example, holiday activities with a good level of accuracy.

199. In 2001, GCSE results were above average and marked a significant improvement on results in 2000 when they were well below average. All pupils in 2001 achieved grades in the range A*-E, though only one achieved a grade A. Numbers in 2002 fell sharply to six in total and so comparisons to national

averages are not valid. While all pupils achieved a pass in the range A*-F, there were no passes at A* or A.

200. Standards in the Year 11 class, which comprises higher attaining pupils who began German as a second language in Year 9, are well above average and are higher than GCSE results in recent years. Pupils are achieving well. Comprehension skills are well developed and pupils can extract details and points of view from tapes and texts. In speaking, most answer familiar questions confidently with good pronunciation, though opportunities are missed to develop answers more fully. They write accounts and descriptions on a range of topics and can refer successfully to past and future events, though spelling errors occur too frequently.

201. The quality of teaching and learning in German is good overall and is sometimes very good. Planning is very good. Teachers plan lessons carefully to give good opportunities for pupils to develop each skill, they make good use of resources to stimulate interest and they prepare activities that involve pupils fully. They manage pupils well and relationships are good. Marking is good.

202. Both boys and girls enjoy their lessons and come ready to work. They take pride in the presentation of their written work and complete their homework. Behaviour is very good. A good number of Y11 pupils show interest in continuing with German in the sixth form.

Spanish

203. Since they began Spanish as a second language in September, higher attaining pupils in Year 9 are achieving well and generally making good progress in each skill. They talk about themselves and most write a paragraph to describe a famous person, although scrutiny of pupils' work shows some variation in the rate of progress in parallel groups. In Year 10, a high proportion of pupils has continued with Spanish, although very few now study two languages. Skills in listening and reading with understanding are developing well and pupils are building up their knowledge of vocabulary and structures, including an early introduction to the past tense, which is enabling them to speak and write at increasing length. Overall, pupils have good attitudes, they enjoy their lessons and are keen to do well.

204. Teaching and learning are good overall. As in German, planning is good. Some very good lessons were seen during the inspection. A good example was a Year 10 lesson about houses and amenities. After a brief oral review of key vocabulary and very clear teacher instructions, each pupil worked independently and within a strict time limit to write a detailed description of a holiday property. Pupils then worked in two groups, taking turns to present their descriptions to other pupils, with each one noting down in Spanish the advantages and disadvantages of each property being described. In this lesson, pupils grew in confidence, they made considerable gains in the development of the different skills and achievement was high. However, in other lessons, when tasks are insufficiently demanding, pupils do not progress fast enough. Teachers speak Spanish fluently but opportunities for pupils to practice its use are sometimes inconsistent. As in French, marking needs some attention.

Modern languages

205. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory overall. This is an improving department. Staffing difficulties and shortages that had beset the department have been resolved with recent appointments and teachers are now working closely as a team under the very good leadership of a new head of department. Many changes have already been successfully introduced and close checking on the quality of teaching and learning has led to some improvement in teaching style and quality but has not yet extended to French in Years 7, 8 and 9. Across all languages, policies are not yet applied consistently and assessment, although satisfactory, is not used fully to drive up standards. Some timetabling arrangements have had a negative impact on pupils' learning due to lessons that are bunched together over a two-week period and classes that are shared between more than one teacher. The department has links with schools in Germany and Spain but new technology is not used as well as it could be to develop these links further.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Standards are rising.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Pupils and teachers enjoy very good relationships.
- Technology resources are very good.

Areas for Improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to think for themselves.
- In group rehearsals, pupils sometimes work for too long without a specific focus and clear ground rules.
- There is no means of tracking pupils' progress towards achieving their targets.

206. Standards of work in Year 9 and in Year 11 are average, and students' achievement overall in relation to their standards when they began in Years 7 and 10 is good. These standards are achieved because teaching is good. Students' positive attitudes and good resources also cause the quality of their learning in music to be good.

207. In GCSE examination results in 2002, all six pupils achieved a grade and two of them achieved a grade between A* and C. Results were significantly better than the previous two years. There were too few pupils taking the examination to make reliable comparisons with national averages and between boys and girls.

208. Standards in Year 9 are average overall. This judgement matches the teachers' assessments in 2002. In Year 9, pupils compose effective pieces of atmospheric music for a psychological thriller. They use appropriate words and some musical terms, to evaluate how the music is created specifically for the opening of *Psycho*. In a sample of taped work, pupils compose effective melodies. Pupils' listening skills are developing well because they practise this in most lessons. They play confidently on the keyboard and xylophone and, when playing together in groups, they listen carefully to create a good ensemble. Lower attaining pupils in music do not play together well and are often unaware that they lose the beat. Many higher attaining pupils learn to play instruments to a good and very good standard. In school over one hundred pupils are learning to play an instrument. Taking part in the many extra-curricular groups and workshops provided by the school further challenges all these pupils.

209. In Year 11, pupils compose music well in a variety of styles which include Baroque Canzonas, rock song and gently strummed guitar pieces. Many pupils use the very good facilities for music technology for this aspect of their work. Standards of performance vary greatly at this stage. Listening skills are not as well developed overall as their other skills because, unlike in Years 7 to 9, they are not rehearsed regularly enough. However, when done, listening is taught very effectively and with good interaction between pupils and the teacher, so that pupils are focused well on particular features of the music.

210. Teachers are well in command of their subject. They use good methods and sometimes very imaginative ways to help their pupils to learn, such as using upturned dustbins as drums for call and response work in Year 7. The activities are varied and include some listening, performing and composing in most lessons, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9. Pupils learn quickly when they hear the teacher play or accompany their work. Teachers manage pupils very well, humouring and cajoling more difficult pupils very effectively especially in Year 9. Pupils work hard in most lessons and usually concentrate well, especially when the work is well focused. In one lesson, however, pupils lost concentration easily because tasks were not sufficiently well defined, and paired and group work went on too long without making the ground rules clear. The projects devised for pupils to do in Years 7 to 9 are good, but pupils

need more regular opportunities to practise and develop musical skills. There is a tendency for pupils to be quite passive in lessons because teachers provide too few opportunities for pupils to think for themselves.

211. Teachers give good advice and guidance to individuals and groups in lessons when they are performing and composing. This helps pupils to move forward with their work and is particularly notable with pupils with special educational needs who achieve as well as others in the school. Teachers assess pupils' work accurately. However, pupils are not always clear, when questioned, what their grades or National Curriculum levels are even though these are discussed with the class. Also there is no effective strategy for tracking pupils' progress as yet. Teachers use the information gained from assessment to help plan to raise standards and improve teaching and learning and this is being well managed. Since the previous inspection standards and the quality of teaching have improved. Overall, improvement is good as a result of good leadership and management and a commitment to high standards by the teachers.

212. Pupils enjoy music and many feel a great sense of achievement at playing and composing music both in class and in all the other activities. Both boys and girls are now opting in good numbers to do GCSE music. They behave well and maturely and work very productively. They enjoy very good relationships with their teachers and with each other. Pupils are very willing to help each other. In all these ways music provides very good opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is consistently good or better.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 7, 8 and 9 and in the GCSE examination course.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for Improvement

- Use information gathered from assessment processes to measure the overall effectiveness of the department and the impact of the teaching on pupils' learning.
- Improve the quality of outdoor surfaces and consequently the range of activities for girls.

213. Standards of work in Year 9 and in Year 11 are broadly average. Average standards in Year 9 represent good achievement for pupils who start from a below average starting point. In Year 11 average standards are sustained and pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 overall is satisfactory, though in examination groups pupils achieve well. These standards are reached because good teaching and a positive approach from almost all pupils ensures that learning is good.

214. By the age of 14 pupils' standards of physical fitness are at the expected levels, and for some, particularly boys, fitness is good. Pupils know how to warm up and most understand the purpose of preparation for physical activity. Some are sufficiently confident to lead a class in this activity and this represents good achievement. When pupils start at the school their experiences in physical education have been variable and their levels of personal fitness are below average. In a Year 7 netball group, pupils' coordination and ball skills are lower than expected for their age. As a result of good teaching, standards rise quickly and are sometimes above average. For example, in a Year 8 dance class most girls sustain the rhythm patterns of an African Dance theme, quickly learn new ones and add them into sequences with good control. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and many gain in self-confidence that, in turn, enables them to tackle more challenging tasks.

215. By the age of 16, overall standards are average levels though boys outperform girls. In badminton lessons most boys play the game to a good standard and play tactically to outmanoeuvre opponents. In the girls' lesson most were struggling to sustain rallies to a standard sufficient to enable them to practise a variety of shots within the game situation. In a Year 11 dance lesson girls sustained rhythm well in sequences and added to their existing dances creatively. Overall, levels of physical fitness are average though again, boys tend to be better than girls. Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall because a significant proportion of girls, who do not take GCSE but follow the National Curriculum course, have lost some motivation and do not participate in lessons regularly enough. Consequently they do not make the same progress as other pupils who benefit from good teaching and regular participation in lessons. Participation in lessons is improving with recent changes in staffing and improved teaching. Pupils following the GCSE course achieve well.

216. In the 2001 examinations, boys' results were well above average and girls' were above average. Overall, physical education was the highest achieving subject in the school. A large number of physically gifted and talented pupils achieved well above the national averages for A* and A grades. The most recent results in 2002 show a fall from this level but the numbers achieving higher grades, A*-C, remains around the national average. In 2002 girls outperformed boys significantly.

217. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with occasional very good or excellent lessons. Teachers know the subject well and they plan and devise activities designed to challenge individuals. Good explanations and demonstrations give clear direction and specific help to individuals which helps them to make progress. Consequently pupils have a clear understanding of what is needed to improve and they respond in a most positive manner to this approach. Teachers encourage pupils to evaluate each other ensuring that they understand and can give relevant advice to help individuals to improve. For example, in a Year 7 boys' gymnastics lesson, partners observed performers and then informed them of what to do in order to improve body tension in sequence work. This effective teaching led to clear improvement in understanding alongside better performance. Teachers set out very clearly what pupils will learn in each lesson. At different points, teachers review what has been learnt with pupils to help keep them well focused and motivated. In an outstanding dance lesson, the range of learning intentions set out at the start was extensive and included composition, personal and social development and attention to the National Literacy Strategy. The work produced was of a very good standard and this was achieved through excellent teaching that challenged very committed learners to improve their own personal standards. Teachers encourage older pupils to take responsibility for learning in parts of lessons. For example, pupils planned and managed warm-up activities effectively in a badminton lesson.

218. The department is well managed. The team works well and shares a clear vision of how the subject can develop. However, the netball courts are uneven and badly worn; in wet weather they are hazardous. Similarly, hockey surfaces have been seriously neglected. This disadvantages girls especially in examination classes by limiting the range of sports in which they can be assessed. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement. Standards of attainment have been raised. Teaching is now consistently good and the work of the physical education department is well managed. Much hard work has been devoted to improving the assessment procedures and there is a sharper understanding of how assessment can be used to make further improvements.

KEY STAGE 4 - OTHER SUBJECTS TAUGHT

219. Subjects additional to the National Curriculum are business studies, media studies, child development, health and social care and catering. Lessons were observed in all five subjects in which the teaching was good; pupils' attainment was above average in child development and health and social care, average in business education and below average in catering and media studies, with good progress by pupils in all of them.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002, for which national comparisons are not yet available.

GCE AS level courses 2002

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	10	10	*	0	*	0.2	*
Chemistry	5	60	*	20	*	1.6	*
Biology	13	53	*	23	*	1.3	*
Physics	6	100	*	0	*	1.8	*
Design and technology	5	60	*	0	*	1.0	*
Business Studies	10	50	*	10	*	0.9	*
Computer Studies	23	78	*	0	*	1.4	*
Sport and physical education	13	92	*	15	*	2.3	*
Health and Social Care – single	6	66	*	33	*	1.5	*
Health and Social Care – double	5	100	*	20	*	2.2	*
Art	14	100	*	50	*	3.5	*
Drama	11	100	*	18	*	3.1	*
Media Studies	15	93	*	7	*	1.5	*
Music Technology	5	100	*	0	*	1.8	*
Geography	6	100	*	0	*	2.2	*
History	16	69	*	25	*	1.9	*
Politics	12	83	*	17	*	2.1	*
Religious Studies	11	91	*	9	*	2.4	*
Sociology	30	80	*	10	*	1.6	*
Psychology	24	46	*	13	*	1.3	*
English Language	17	82	*	18	*	1.8	*
English Literature	9	100	*	33	*	3.2	*
French	4	100	*	50	*	3.0	*
General Studies	11	100	*	27	*	3.2	*
Critical Thinking	11	100	*	27	*	2.6	*

GCE A level and AVCE courses 2002

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	10	80	*	20	*	4.0	*
Chemistry	4	75	*	0	*	3.0	*
Biology	2	100	*	0	*	3.0	*
Physics	6	67	*	17	*	2.7	*
Design and technology	10	100	*	0	*	3.4	*
Business Studies	8	100	*	0	*	4.75	*
Computer Studies	15	100	*	40	*	6.13	*
Sport and physical education	8	100	*	25	*	6.0	*
Travel and Tourism	5	80	*	0	*	4.0	*
Health and Social Care – single	2	100	*	N/A	*	2.0	*
Health and Social Care – double	8	100	*	N/A	*	8.5	*
Art	22	100	*	50	*	7.1	*
Drama	5	100	*	20	*	6.0	*
Media Studies	13	100	*	23	*	5.5	*
Geography	6	100	*	0	*	5.0	*
History	13	100	*	23	*	5.3	*
Religious Studies	6	86	*	17	*	4.3	*
Sociology	17	88	*	18	*	4.5	*
Politics	5	100	*	20	*	5.6	*
Psychology	9	67	*	0	*	1.6	*
English Language	13	92	*	15	*	4.6	*
English Literature	11	100	*	36	*	5.6	*
General Studies	2	100	*	50	*	6.0	*

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

220. The focus was on mathematics and chemistry, but one physics and one biology lesson were observed. In both lessons the teaching was good with teachers displaying good subject knowledge and giving students clear guidance on answering examination questions. Students were keen to learn and this, coupled with good teaching, enabled them to learn well.

Mathematics

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

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Strengths

- All teachers have a thorough command of the subject.
- There is some excellent and very good teaching.
- Relationships between students and teachers are positive.

Areas for improvement

- Checking for consistency in the quality of teaching to ensure that good practice is shared is not yet regular or rigorous enough.
- Underachievement among students is not yet identified quickly enough.
- Promote learning and retention by adopting a more rigorous approach to the structuring and presentation of notes and solutions.
- Make more frequent and planned use of ICT to enrich and support learning.

221. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average and students' achievement overall, in relation to their standards when they began their AS and A2 courses, is satisfactory. These standards are achieved because teaching is good. The combination of students' positive attitudes and the good relationships between students and their mathematics teachers results in learning taking place in a purposeful and studious atmosphere.

222. Results in A-level (A2) differ significantly from year to year and, on the whole, reflect the variation in the prior attainment of the students. The 2001 AS and A-level results were well below the national average and students generally did less well in mathematics than in their other subjects. In 2000 the results were above the national average and students performed significantly better in mathematics than in their other subjects. Although many students achieve well and produce results higher than predicted, there is a corresponding number that underachieve and consequently do not obtain a pass grade. After the dip in results in 2001, they improved in 2002. There is little difference between the performances of male and female students and results always include students attaining the highest grades. Overall, the results together with standards of work seen represent satisfactory achievement.

223. Standards of work seen in Year 12 are average. Most of the students who experienced difficulty with AS mathematics, about half in total, decided not to pursue the course in Year 13. The standard of work of those remaining in Year 13 is at the national average. Current standards are higher than the most recent results in examinations would suggest and represent good achievement for many students in response to good teaching. However, the significant number of students who did not achieve the grades expected of them in recent examinations means that, overall, achievement is satisfactory.

224. There is systematic progression in both depth and difficulty in the taught course. The most able students demonstrate that they are learning with understanding and they are articulate in applying their prior learning to the development of new knowledge and skills. Weaker students display a lack of proficiency with algebraic manipulation and consequently, even though they understand the new work, make elementary errors. Their written work lacks structure and rigour and, in a few cases, progress is

inhibited by instances of incomplete work. In discussion, most students consider that the volume of work in mathematics is significantly greater than in other subjects and those who need to make the greatest efforts sometimes feel overwhelmed. The quality of students' notes, though often very good, varies and there is a lack of structured explanations to support revision. For example, few students annotate their notes to suit their individual learning needs. The clarity of diagrams, particularly in mechanics, is good and promotes understanding. The use of ICT was not evident in lessons or in students' prior work.

225. In addition to AS and A-level (A2) courses the department offers further mathematics and a "retake" GCSE course. Standards in the GCSE lessons are sufficient to enable students to obtain a grade C. A very good lesson was seen during the inspection in which the teacher's use of a range of strategies, including the use of graphical calculators, enabled students to make good progress. Their confidence and understanding were enhanced but about half of the students who started the course do not attend all the lessons and so their progress and achievement is affected.

226. Teaching and learning are good, overall. Teaching ranges from satisfactory to excellent. Two particular strengths characterise all lessons, the subject command of the teachers and the good relationships that have been established between teachers and students. The best lessons are characterised by the teacher's infectious enthusiasm for the subject and the clear planning which identifies the skills, knowledge and understanding to be developed. Thorough knowledge of individual student strengths and weaknesses is utilised to maximise the impact of skilful questions that illuminate understanding and isolate misconceptions. In an excellent lesson investigating the theory of logarithms the teacher involved every student, using questions that were tailored to each individuals' needs. The result was a challenging, exciting pace that raised the sights of each student. In less successful lessons there is too much teacher talk and insufficient involvement of the students during explanations. Consequently there is an absence of sparkle and learning is passive. Marking and assessment of students' work varies in both frequency and detail. In most instances, there is detailed analysis and correction of inaccuracies, with supporting comments and guidance on what action is required to bring about improvements. Students are particularly appreciative of this aspect of their studies, as they are of teachers' availability to give extra help when required.

227. There is a good match of teachers to the requirements of the various modules in the AS and A-level mathematics courses. They share a commitment to do the best for the students and strive to improve results. The subject is well managed, particularly in terms of developing and improving schemes of work. Monitoring arrangements are largely informal and are not yet used sufficiently as a tool for sharing and capitalising on the good practice that clearly exists.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Teaching is consistently good.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- Teachers work as a team.
- Very good relationships impact positively on learning.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results are below average.
- Not enough students complete the course.
- Resources to support independent learning are limited.

228. Over the past three years student numbers completing the course have been small. It is not possible, therefore, to compare their performance against national figures. However, in this period, some students did not obtain the results that might have been reasonably expected from their prior attainment.

229. Current standards of work are average in both Years 12 and 13. These standards are achieved as a result of good teaching coupled with very positive students' attitudes. Taking the recent examination results and the current standards of work into account achievement in chemistry is satisfactory overall. Improved teaching as a result of staff changes is helping current students to make good progress.

230. Standards of work in Year 12 are average. Although students are encountering new complex theories and concepts, they have made a good start to the study of the subject. For example, they have studied in detail the concept of electronegativity and can from their understanding predict whether compounds are likely to be covalent or ionic in character.

231. The standards of work in Year 13 are also average. These standards are due to good teaching allied with the individual attention students' get due to the small number in the group. For example, in one lesson observed, students received clear individual advice on how to produce an ICT presentation on different aspects of polymer chemistry. As a result, they made good progress in their knowledge and understanding of this topic.

232. The quality of teaching and learning is good and have improved recently as the result of changes in staffing and management in the subject. This is confirmed by scrutiny of the students' files. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject and this makes it easier for students to make good progress. For example, when carrying out a titration experiment students were given very good advice on technical aspects of the task. This ensured that their results were more accurate and that their progress was better.

233. A strength of the teaching is the very good relationships that exist between students and teachers. This enables students to build up their confidence in the subject and make good progress. In one lesson, students were confident enough to write difficult equilibrium equations for the dissociation of a weak acid even if they did make minor errors. The main weakness of teaching is that at times it is too teacher centred and as a result some students do not participate enough. In Year 12 not all students had their own textbooks and this restricted their independent learning in the subject.

234. Across the age range students display a mature attitude to their work. This is seen in their written work that is of a good standard and sometimes higher. Students have very positive views of chemistry and value the extra help they receive when they find parts of the course difficult.

235. Schemes of work are well written and match examination specifications well. Although there is good teamwork in chemistry there is no formal monitoring of teaching and learning within the subject that would serve to raise standards. Assessment of students' work is good and contributes to the standards achieved. Since the previous inspection improvement has been satisfactory. Student numbers are beginning to improve. The department should strive to ensure that this trend is maintained in the future.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology. No other subjects in this curriculum area are offered in the school.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Teachers have good relationships with students and provide thorough individual help.
- Good use is made of external sources in the teaching.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are well below average.
- Students underachieve in relation to their GCSE grades.
- Teaching is unsatisfactory.
- Students do not work hard enough.

236. The GCE A level results in design and technology in 2002 were well below average, but showed a slight improvement on the two previous years. AS level results were also well below average and not as good as in 2001. In 2002 there were separate Product Design groups in textiles, which comprised only girls, and resistant materials which comprised only boys. There was no significant difference between the results of these groups.

237. The standards of work of current students in Year 13 are well below average and they are not achieving as well as predicted by their GCSE results. Neither their design folders nor their product studies are not as far advanced as they need to be to achieve satisfactory standards by the end of the course, although they have started making their products. The quality of research is low and designing mostly comprises minor adaptations of existing products. Students' design development contains a limited range of rather stilted sketches, although one project shows a more fluent approach. Overall there is little evidence of intellectual rigour of analysis and synthesis in the way that decisions are being made. Standards of making are mostly low, in one case using inappropriate methods of construction and in another using scrap wood to pack out a strut which had been cut short rather than re-making it to a high standard.

238. The standards of work of current students in Year 12 are also well below average and there is little evidence that they understand the standards of designing required at this level. Most work has not really moved on from the very routine approach to designing which students were used to in GCSE. Their work is getting behind and they show a lack of commitment. For example, in one lesson no pupil had brought the homework or completed the analysis that was due. They also display limited discussion and writing skills.

239. Overall, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory. Whilst the teachers have good relationships with the students and give them thorough individual help, their expectation of the students is low and most lessons lack pace and rigour. There is a lack of variety in the methods used to stimulate the students' commitment to creating better products, although they do make good use of outside sources such as visits to the Design Museum. Students are not guided sufficiently towards design projects that will provide sufficient rigour and as a result their learning is unsatisfactory. Teachers prepare their teaching materials for technical aspects of the course well, such as those required for pupils to understand electrically powered vehicles.

240. Although students chose design and technology because they liked it at GCSE and continued to enjoy it, their lack of effort and quality of their work suggests that the decision was based on a lack of understanding of the rigour of the subject. Nevertheless most students complete their courses.

241. The division of teaching time and areas of the syllabus between the two teachers leads to some fragmentation and wasted time and limited overall monitoring of students' progress and standards. Current pupils work in only resistant materials, which tends to limit their perspective, the textiles element having been discontinued in favour of an art and design course. The facilities for designing and for using ICT are limited and militate against students making these an integral part of their work. There has been no significant improvement in standards since the previous inspection.

BUSINESS

The focus was on business studies. No other subjects are offered by the school.

Business studies

Overall, the quality of provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good; teachers are well qualified, experienced and have good subject knowledge.
- Resources for teaching and learning are good.
- Standards of literacy, numeracy and ICT are good.
- Students' progress is effectively monitored.

Areas for improvement

- Recent results are below average.
- Standards of students' work are below average in Year 13.
- The motivation and attitudes to work of some students in Year 13 are unsatisfactory and leads to unsatisfactory achievement for these students.
- Students in Year 13 do not have the confidence to work independently often enough.
- Links with outside businesses are not fully developed.

242. Results at A Level in 2001 were below the national average, but showed some improvement in 2002 to just below the national average. Results in the new AS examinations in Year 12 were just below average in 2001 and in 2002. About half of all students left after Year 12 in both years to pursue other subjects, but those entering Year 13 completed the qualification.

243. Standards of work in the current Year 13 are below average. Students' achievement is unsatisfactory because their attitudes have led to slow progress in the completion of assignments. They make insufficient effort out of class and are unable to work in class without constant assistance from the teacher. When questioned, the students have little motivation and appear to regard business studies as a second choice or background subject, although all are seeking to enter higher education to take other subjects. Some of these students have not responded to considerable level of support offered by the school and the school is now taking firm action.

244. Nevertheless, students have acquired useful skills as a result of good, challenging teaching. They reveal good understanding of business terminology and use computer skills in producing graphs and charts. They constructed flow charts from a case study on critical path analysis. Lower attaining students completed this complex task with the help of intensive tutorial guidance from the teacher. They lack the ability to work independently and are still too reliant on the teacher. Their skills in numeracy and ICT, however, are well developed, and compiling a glossary of terms considerably helps their understanding of the technical language.

245. Standards of work in the current Year 12 are just above average and the students are achieving well. Higher attaining students, who gained very high grades in the GCSE, are making very good progress because of their high standards of numeracy. Middle to lower attaining students are making good progress because teachers explain the difficult aspects of accounting very well. Students follow complex calculations and understand technical language well. They use calculators and computers well in working out profit and loss accounts. They reveal good verbal skills and are keen to respond to questions. They enjoy their work and take pride in getting their calculations right. They are already developing their skills of working independently and should be encouraged to take more initiative in thinking out the results of accounting problems.

246. The quality of teaching is good. However, the quality of learning in Year 13 does not always match the teacher's expectations because of poor motivation and attitude. Teachers are very well qualified and experienced and have interpreted the new specifications well. They would benefit, however, from more access to training, as the specifications change. Teachers use good up to date resources, including ICT. Good business links have been built up, which are used to help students with their projects that are based on a week's placement in a local business. This forms part of the A2 examination. Teachers could develop these links further to enhance the students' business experience, by more visits, drawing upon funding from current initiatives. Teachers mark work well to encourage and motivate students, and use assessment information to set targets.

247. Students express variable attitudes to the subject, although most are positive about the school and the sixth form. In Year 13, several find the subject hard, although all consider they have acquired useful skills and knowledge from it. Their poor motivation is a considerable factor in their lack of progress and none of them is considering taking the subject after A2. Attitudes are more positive in Year 12, where there are several students seeking careers in finance and business. The rest have a positive attitude, that the subject will be useful to them alongside other studies or as a general preparation for life. A few students are taking the AS as a freestanding qualification to back up their main subjects, a valid purpose of the new scheme. The students believe that the subject helps to develop their personal skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. The subject makes a contribution to their personal and moral development when they make presentations using computer projection, and when discussing ethical issues such as global capitalism.

248. The subject is managed effectively and the curriculum and resources are well organised. Teaching and learning are monitored, within the framework of the school's performance management system. Since the previous inspection good progress has been made in raising standards of literacy, numeracy and ICT, but not enough has been done to encourage students to work more independently and to raise their achievement in examinations.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

249. There was no focus subject in this area. Students' results in Advanced level are similar to the national average and they perform well in ICT in relation to their other subjects. One ICT lesson was sampled in which the teaching observed was very good and had a positive effect on student motivation. Students made good progress in analysing a case study dealing with computerised stock control and the need to test systems thoroughly before adopting new working practices.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

250. There was no focus subject in this area. Sport and physical education is taught at AS and A2 level. Results in the 2001 Sport and Physical education A2 examination were above the national average and in 2002 results have improved further. These results represent very good achievement when students' prior standards at GCSE are taken into account. One lesson in AS was sampled in which the teaching observed was good, being knowledgeable and skilled, with learning well focused. The standard of attainment in the lesson was satisfactory. Students had positive attitudes and were eager to do well.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

This was the focus subject. No other subjects are offered in this curriculum area.

Health and social care

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

Strengths

- Teaching overall is very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject.
- Students achieve well from a modest GCSE base.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- The subject provides important curriculum opportunities of a vocational nature.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not get specific targets to help them to improve frequently enough.

251. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is generally below average and students in the AVCE course begin their course from a most modest level of attainment based on GCSE average points scores. Results in the 2001 examination were just below the national average and all students achieved pass grades or above. This represents good achievement and clear added value over the two-year course. Results for 2002 have improved, the added value in relation to prior attainment at GCSE for individual students is very good, and overall these results reflect good achievement.

252. Currently standards in Year 13 are average and students make very good progress and are achieving very well. In assignments already assessed a majority have already reached 'E' grade standards and are moving upwards towards 'C' grade. They work maturely and with commitment in lessons and, for example, in one lesson all students showed clearly how their well-developed ICT skills support their learning in carrying out short-term research on the Internet. In folders most work is accurate, detailed and well presented. Year 12 students have made a good beginning to their course. Many have already developed strongly held views on, for example, ethical issues in health care and can argue strongly in favour or against such factors as the so-called 'post-code lottery' situation relating to medical care standards and provision. In extended work on "communications", a key feature of the course, there is clear evidence of a sound grasp of the facts, a growing maturity of understanding and good word-processing skills in their presentation. Almost all students complete the course. Retention of students on the course has been good.

253. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and results in students achieving very well in relation to their prior standards. The teachers of health and social care have very good subject knowledge. The planning and preparation of lessons is very well organised and ensures that the individual needs of students can be addressed. There is in the main good variety in the style of teaching provided with good opportunities for students to be involved in and take responsibility for their own learning and progress. Teachers draw expertly on telling examples and experiences from life to illustrate key principles. This ensures that the topics are fresh and up-to-date, for example, a video tape recording from the previous day's 'News at Six' regarding the medical ethics issue surrounding 'organ donation' and 'tissue transplants'. This sharing of examples, often from personal experience has great impact on the students' personal and social development. It enables them to add to their interest in and commitment to their chosen study area by developing skills in problem solving and decision-making. The resources for learning are very good and similarly up to date. These range from extracts from television documentaries and the popular press, to the internet and to very well produced booklets and work sheets to support the students in acquiring knowledge, for example, on "complementary therapies".

254. The assessment of students' work is regular and thorough. Informative marking of students' work gives them a clear indication of what to do in order to improve. National statistical data is used well to predict students' final level of attainment. However, assessment information is not used well enough to track the progress of students and inform them of more immediate targets to improve their work. Work in health and social care is very well organised and there is a strong commitment to improvement. Under this leadership the subject area makes a valuable contribution to the curricular opportunities of students by offering accreditation in a vocational area. This enables continuous study from age 14 to 19, with certification at foundation, intermediate and advanced level, meeting the needs of students looking for stability and security in the same school. Strong links have been established with the local caring and early years services. They regularly provide work placements in the community for students. The last inspection did not focus on health and social care but the subject is now well established in the sixth form provision.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

255. The focus was on art. Two lessons were observed in drama, in one of which the teaching was very good enabling students to think carefully about interpretation. Two lessons were sampled in media studies, in which the teaching was good and the students achieved well and recent examination results are much improved. One lesson was sampled in music technology, a recently introduced course, in which

standards and teaching were satisfactory, and in the examinations in 2002 all students achieved a grade. One lesson was observed in creative textiles, also a recently introduced course, in which teaching and learning and good and attainment satisfactory.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are well above average in Year 13.
- Teaching and learning are very good, and students' achievement is very good as a result.
- Students' experimental work is vigorous and exciting.

Areas for improvement

Too much of the work is on too small a scale, and this reduces its impact.

256. In the A-level examination in 2001, results were well above average, an improvement on the previous year, though they fell slightly in 2002. Results vary from year to year, and reflect the variations in students' attainment when they start the course. All students completed their courses in recent years, and retention has been very good. In the AS examination in 2001, results were above average, and were maintained at a similar level in 2002. Students generally do better in their art and design than in most of their other subjects.

257. Standards of work of current Year 13 students are well above average. They are achieving very well in relation to their GCSE results. In the lessons seen, they were doing very well as a result of the very good teaching and the very good relationships between teachers and students. In addition, teachers encouraged students to experiment freely with a very wide range of materials, and this produced very good levels of activity and use of the materials. This approach produces very imaginative experimental work, which is vigorous and exciting. Students' work in textiles and mixed media shows a similar approach, and it is richly decorated with exquisite needlework, and a carefully considered use of colour. Painting is approached vigorously; by scraping through darker surfaces, colours are revealed and luminous effects are achieved. However, too much of this work is on too small a scale, and this reduces its impact.

258. In Year 12, standards of work are above average, and students are achieving very well. They use thick impasto to build up pictures in plaster and paint which are exciting and unusual. These show very good gains in their skills in composition. ICT is used well, to help develop students' compositional skills, and to record the rapid movement seen, for example, in running and splashing water. Students are very successfully responding to the increased demands made in lessons, as they move on from their GCSE courses.

259. Teaching is very good overall, and students learn very well as a result. High expectations, very good relationships, and vigorous use of materials are the main strengths of the teaching. In a Year 13 lesson the teacher went from student to student briskly, moving their work on, encouraging them to think further, and develop more imaginative responses to combining materials such as fabric, wire and glue. This created very high levels of interest and engagement, and a very good pace. As a result, learning in the lesson was very good.

260. Students learn very well. They show very positive attitudes to their work in the subject, and concentrate very well, especially when teachers are giving very good, well-focussed individual advice. This means that students benefit fully from the very good teaching. They rise to the challenge of the work set, and develop individual responses, which build on their individual strengths.

261. Monitoring of work in the subject is very good, and the strong team spirit has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and produce higher levels of student achievement. Improvement since

the previous inspection has therefore been good. However, not enough learning resources are provided, especially basic materials such as paint, fabric and canvas. This restricts the opportunities for students to work on a larger scale more regularly.

HUMANITIES

262. Within the Humanities area, a broad curriculum is offered. The subjects focused on during the inspection were history and sociology. Lessons were observed in geography, politics, psychology, and theology. Results within these areas demonstrate a range. In theology the performance of students in 2001 was around the national average and results were similar in 2002; in politics standards were average in 2001 but declined significantly in 2002; in geography standards attained in both options were below the national average in both years; and in psychology the Advanced level standards were average in 2001 but dropped to well below average in 2002. Overall, given that attainment on entry to the sixth form is below the national average, these results represent satisfactory achievement. Almost all students complete their respective AS and A level courses and retention rates are good.

263. In the two geography lessons sampled, teaching and learning were good. Students worked with a degree of independence and initiative to argue for and against the expansion of an airport. Teachers are keen and know their students well. An additional strength is that students' learning is enriched by well-planned residential fieldwork.

264. Within politics, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students were observed extending and deepening their knowledge of the role of pressure groups in the United States democratic process. There was a limited range of class-based activities with an over-emphasis on note-taking, but progress was satisfactory due to the interest and enthusiasm of students.

265. The lesson observed in psychology showed students extending their knowledge and understanding of bystander behaviour within the social psychology component of their A-level course. This represented challenging material, but was well presented by a relaxed but well informed teaching style. Students are making at least satisfactory progress in deepening their evaluative skills and the quality of work being produced is improving against previous years. Teaching was good.

266. Theology students engaged well with a lesson tackling situational ethics. This was due in large measure to the very good relationships between teacher and students. A significant strength was the extent and knowledge of the teacher and the attitudes of students who had read widely on a range of ethical perspectives. An additional strength was the good quality of case study material used in class tasks. Teaching in the lesson observed was good.

History

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

Strengths

- Students have good opportunities to research independently.
- Students' progress is rigorously monitored.
- Teaching is good; advanced historical skills are taught well.

Areas for improvement

- Students' oral skills in history are not as well developed as other aspects of their work.
- Examination results are below average.

267. GCE A level examination results over the last three years have varied greatly. In 2000 the results were very good and above the national average. In 2001 and 2002 they fell below the national average. In 2002, all students passed but they did not gain as many high grades as had been predicted and expected.

Several papers were remarked and although the marks of many students went up, no grades were changed. There was no significant difference in the results achieved by male and female students. A similar picture emerged in the AS results. In 2001 all the students who took the AS examination passed, many achieving high grades. In 2002, however, not all the students passed and there were fewer high grades. Overall, these results reflect good achievement in relation to students' prior standards at GCSE.

268. Standards of work of the current students are average. In Year 13 students are achieving well in relation to their previous performance. Some are entering the sixth form with below average attainment and yet are achieving well. Their files contain a good range of concise notes, analyses and essays, some at a high standard, others at a lower standard but within the pass range. One lesson seen was devoted to a survey of matters in Ireland during the nineteenth century. The whole group worked together drawing on previous knowledge and covering a wide range of issues as a basis for further work on Gladstone. An essay on the 1867 Reform Act indicated a deep knowledge of the period and a high level of historical research. Students take notes throughout their lessons and create a concentrated learning atmosphere. In other lessons, however, some students were reluctant to offer their views and although they kept up with notes, contributed little to the class discussion.

269. Year 12 students work at a good pace. They have achieved a significant amount in one term and are coping well with the move from GCSE to A level work in their written work. In their examination of the personality of Wilhelm II students showed good understanding of the views of different historians and an appreciation of consulting the most up to date research available. However, some of their presentations in class lack confidence and their communication skills are not well developed.

270. Students learn well. The higher attaining students are analytical and well organised. They are able to look at questions from different historical perspectives, social, economic and political, and make comparisons with other aspects of the syllabus they are following. Lower attaining students produce answers lacking in detail and structure, and occasionally incomplete. Many students use ICT resources very effectively as well as historical journals, textbooks, newspaper articles and records of parliamentary debates. They are aware of how well or otherwise they are doing and what must be done to improve. They are encouraged to be responsible for their own learning and to meet deadlines.

271. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching is always satisfactory and often good or very good. Students are made fully aware of what is required of them to achieve well and given encouragement and support in a good range of stimulating tasks. They are encouraged to think laterally and to avoid a purely narrative approach. Independent learning is fostered throughout. Students are assisted by a wide range of good resources and visits to the public records office in London. Their independent work is regularly checked and reviewed. The assessment of their work is very thorough with positive comments and advice on how to improve. Most of the students who take the course complete it.

272. The department is very well led and managed. Rigorous monitoring of performance goes on throughout the year and students are well aware of their own strengths and areas to improve. Confident subject knowledge and a commitment to sharing good practice are evident among the members of the department. The department has improved satisfactorily since the last inspection.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Students are well motivated and respond positively to good teaching.
- The department is beginning to strengthen teaching and learning by the use of new technology.

Areas for Improvement

- Results in both the AS and A level are below average.
- Admission and induction arrangements do not always ensure that courses match learners' aspirations and potential.

273. Results in the 2001 GCE A level examinations were below the national average both in terms of the proportions of candidates attaining A and B grades and the overall pass rate of A-E grades. Results in 2002 are likely to be broadly similar though national averages were not available at the time of the inspection. Based on their attainment on entry to Year 13, which is below the national average, these results reflect satisfactory achievement.

274. The performance of students in the AS level in 2001 was below the national average in terms of both grades and the overall pass rate. However, most students achieved their target grade. In terms of their attainment on entry to the sixth form this represents good achievement. The profile of results for 2002 is similar. The high proportion of students achieving lower grades, including unclassified grades, means that the course is not well matched to the present aptitudes and abilities of some students. However, retention of students on both options is good.

275. Standards seen during the inspection period are below the national average. This represents satisfactory achievement based on attainment on entry to the sixth form and to Year 13. In the lessons observed, students' oral and debating skills in both options are under-developed and this leads to more limited learning in dealing with topics such as the role and function of religious sects. In written work, AS students of middle and higher attainment make satisfactory progress in terms of developing their knowledge of the role of sociology. Those of higher attainment have more sophisticated note-taking skills and pursue work in greater depth, for example on Marxist theory. By the middle of Year 13, students' technical vocabulary in describing and analysing functionalism and crime and deviance is much more secure.

276. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The best lessons are characterised by careful planning which is closely linked to external accreditation requirements and where the purposes of lessons, as well as the tasks to be completed, are made explicit. Teachers do not use of supportive writing frameworks often enough to assist the development of evaluation skills among lower attaining students. Although there is an awareness of the need to develop students as independent learners, this needs to be sustained. Some lessons lack pace because tasks are not timed, the range of activities is narrow and group work is limited. Unsatisfactory teaching lacked appropriate planning and timing of practical activities.

277. The curriculum activities are suitably enriched through dedicated subject days with outside speakers on course themes together with advice from external accrediting agencies. However, little focus is given to the applied and vocational aspects of the discipline or careers guidance through work experience or work shadowing.

278. Attitudes to learning are good. Students overall are keen to succeed, though some see the subject in a secondary role to other course preferences. Students comment positively on the support and guidance received within their respective courses but some feel that the school could prepare them more for the challenges of study prior to entry into the sixth form.

279. The quality of leadership is good and gives a clear direction for the subject. There are well-articulated schemes of work in place for each option. There is good monitoring of new staff. Use of the school's Intranet is beginning to help deepen students' learning. This is improving access to the subject and is beginning to have a positive effect on independent learning. A range of performance data is collected and reporting to parents is good. Resources are good and support learning well. Each student has a dedicated textbook and there is ready access to appropriate journal articles. These resources

broaden students' appreciation of the fact that the study of sociology is the sum of its debates on issues such as the relationship between the media and deviant behaviour during adolescence.

280. The subject was not reported on at the time of the last inspection.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

281. The focus subject was English language. Lessons were observed in English literature and French. Two English literature lessons were observed in which the teaching was very good as was students' progress. Standards were average. Two lessons were sampled in French in which the teaching and the progress were good.

English Language

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

Strengths

- Students make good progress in Year 13
- Teaching is very good
- Teachers' planning is very good
- Students have positive attitudes towards the subject

Areas for improvement

- Results at both AS and A2
- Students' knowledge, understanding and use of grammatical terms
- Students critical writing

282. Results have dropped below the national average in both AS and A2 examinations for the past two years: however, given the levels of attainment of these students on entry to the sixth form, this represents expected achievement. There is no significant difference between results of males and females.

283. The standards of work seen during the inspection are below average in Year 12 and about average in Year 13. Overall, achievement is good. It is better in Year 12 than in Year 13. One in four AS students find the course particularly difficult, and very different from the work done in GCSE classes, because they have to learn a new critical vocabulary and new ways of studying and analysing texts and language very quickly. In Year 13, the higher attaining students are able to communicate clearly, using appropriate linguistic terminology and undertake a systematic study of spoken and written English: however, the lower attaining students are held back in Year 12 because they start with a poor working knowledge of English grammar. Although all students can investigate and comment orally upon texts, several have problems synthesising their critical commentary, apposite quotations and references to secondary sources when writing. Additionally, they sometimes fail to see the significance and intention of material because they are busily dissecting it and identifying writing techniques, instead of first looking carefully at the writer's audience and purpose as a whole. Even though many find the course very challenging, they work hard and, by Year 13, all contribute confidently to lessons, support each other well and research competently.

284. Language is a popular subject and the single Year 12 group is very large compared with other sixth form groups in the school: this limits the amount of support available in lessons for individual students at the time when they need it most. There is not a problem in the two much smaller Year 13 groups. Teaching and learning are very good in both years and relationships in class are excellent. The specialist teachers have very good subject knowledge, their lesson planning is thorough and they are very sensitive to their students' needs. They make clear to students the purpose of lessons and on what criteria they will be assessed so that they can judge progress in their own learning. There is a good range of teaching strategies, including many opportunities to use paired and group discussions to shape and refine ideas: for example, in evaluating and applying linguistic and social theories, such as those of Sapir Whorf and Lakoff, when investigating gender representations in texts. Marking is thorough and very helpful in showing students what they need to do to improve; and teachers provide a number of simple but effective learning aids, such as mnemonics and frameworks, for lower attaining students and those who need to develop a more structured approach.

285. The monitoring of teaching and students' work is very good. Inspection evidence shows that there is a resurgence in the subject and that standards are beginning to rise once more because of the very good planning and teaching in the department.

OTHER SUBJECTS SAMPLED

286. Two lessons were sampled in general studies. In both the teaching and progress were good and standards average. In general studies' external examinations the standards achieved are below average.