

INSPECTION REPORT

ST BEDE'S SCHOOL

Redhill

LEA area: Surrey

Unique reference number: 125278

Headteacher: Mr C Curtis

Reporting inspector: Mr M Pavey
17650

Dates of inspection: 25 -28 November 2002

Inspection number: 249703

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11-18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr D M Rowles

Date of previous inspection: March 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Bede's School is an 11-18, mixed comprehensive school in Redhill, Surrey. It is a voluntary aided school, the only such school established as a formal partnership between all the main Christian churches. There are 1682 pupils on the roll, including 334 in the sixth form. Though the great majority of pupils are white, there are 20 pupils from Asian backgrounds, 31 from African or Caribbean backgrounds and five from Chinese backgrounds. These pupils speak English as an additional language. Although the percentage of those with English as an additional language is a bit higher than in most schools, no student is at an early stage in acquiring English.

There are 150 pupils in Years 7-11 with special educational needs (SEN), of whom 15 have statements. Most pupils' special needs are for learning or behavioural difficulties, though a small number have physical difficulties or autism. In the sixth form, 18 pupils are registered as having SEN, though none have statements. The overall number with SEN or statements is lower than average.

Overall, the ability of pupils on entry to the school is higher than average, though the whole range of ability is present. The area served by the school is favoured in social and economic terms. The school is popular, and more pupils wish to join than can be found places.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Bede's is a very effective school which achieves very high standards at all levels. Teaching is good overall, and much teaching is very good. Pupils make rapid, confident progress, helped by the very good relationships which exist throughout the school. Leadership of the headteacher and senior team is excellent and gives a very carefully planned, professional structure to all the activities of the school. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and support for each other are very good. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The leadership of the headteacher and senior team is excellent. This provides a very secure foundation for all the school does, enabling teachers to teach with confidence and pupils to learn with pace and enjoyment. Together, the leadership team creates a very positive ethos in which learning can flourish.
- The leadership and management of the heads of department and years are almost always good, sometimes very good. Teachers work very well together and have the improvement of their pupils' performance and the school at heart.
- Teaching is good for pupils in Years 7-11, and very good in the sixth form. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Pupils respond very positively, learning well, and are greatly helped by the very good relationships between each other and with teachers.
- Academic results are very high at all levels. They are well above the national average.
- Pupils' behaviour is very good. They are keen to learn, to help each other and to make good progress.
- The sixth form is a strength of the school, in its quality of teaching, results, curriculum and leadership; and also in the very good relationships among students and between teachers and students.
- Pupils are very well looked after. Heads of Year and tutors know their pupils very well, and take a positive interest in their welfare.

What could be improved

Within the context of an already very successful school, implementation of the following four aspects will further develop its performance:

- The school has already established good reporting systems throughout the school. There are good target-setting procedures in the sixth form, but further development is needed in the main school, so that all pupils are aware of what standards they should reach, and how to do so.
- Further improvement in some aspects of communication with parents is needed. The school is already considering how this can be achieved in the context of target setting for individual pupils and in sharing this information with parents.
- The new courses in citizenship have started well, and their combination with the established courses in personal, social and health education (PSHE) is potentially very effective. More curriculum time is now needed to ensure that the many aspects covered are taught in sufficient detail.
- For many years, the school has been trying to attract funding to improve its outdated, small and poorly designed indoor sports accommodation. The lack of adequate indoor space for physical education (PE) is restricting the curriculum for Years 7-11 and this factor has partly caused the absence of non-specialist sixth form PE and games. This was an issue for action in the last inspection report.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1997. Since then, it has made good progress in meeting the issues for improvement given in the last report. It has successfully reviewed its curriculum, greatly strengthened its monitoring of plans, and now very efficiently calculates the financial costs of its priorities. The overall improvement in the work of departments and years has been good.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their standard is overall above the national average. They make good progress in their first three years, achieving well above average results in all three core subjects, English, mathematics and science. Compared with the results achieved by socially similar schools, on the basis of a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, results are well above average also.

During the GCSE course, pupils make further good progress, achieving results well above average in 2001. In 2000, GCSE results were very high, in the top five per cent of results nationally. Results in every subject except science (single award) were well above the national average, for both girls and boys, though girls achieved more highly than boys. Results in sixth form AS and A2 examinations are well above average also. In no subject are A level results below average, and in almost all they are well above. Sixth form students make further good progress over the course, exceeding the grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE performance.

Results have remained well above average at all levels in recent years, while GCSE and A level results rose to new records in 2002. The school has set itself demanding targets at all levels, and reached or exceeded them in 2001 and 2002.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are very keen to learn and to help each other.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good overall and excellent in the sixth form. Pupils' high standards of behaviour make lessons positive and enjoyable.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils get on very well together. Their relationships with each other and their teachers are very good.
Attendance	Satisfactory in Years 7-11 and good in the sixth form.

Strong values of decency and trust unite pupils and teachers. These result in very good attitudes, behaviour and relationships. In turn, these allow good - often very good - teaching and learning to take place. Strongly shared attitudes and values are the basis of the school's high achievement.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good for pupils in Years 7-11 and very good in the sixth form. Teaching is good, sometimes very good, in all subjects. As a result, pupils learn well, making good progress in all subjects. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects are particular strengths. Because teachers generally have very clear subject knowledge, pupils are very good at gaining the skills, knowledge and understanding of the subjects they need to make rapid progress. Teachers' management of pupils is also very good, so that pupils get on with their tasks very well and work quickly and productively. They respond well to the very high expectations which teachers generally have of them. When teachers do not show these qualities, as was seen in a few lessons with younger pupils, pupils can become restless and demanding because they are keen to get on and feel frustrated. Overall, though, teaching and learning are at least good in all respects.

Teaching is good in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, teach with good pace and help pupils to make good progress. The skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught.

The school meets the needs of all pupils well. Though some individual parents report difficulties in getting special help for their children, the school generally provides well for those with SEN. Its courses and level of tuition also generally meet the needs of talented pupils, who take good advantage of the very full range of activities available for all pupils.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The school has a wide curriculum which gives pupils a well balanced education with plenty of choice.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils with statements of SEN are well supported, while class teachers are generally well aware of the individual needs of their pupils and provide appropriately for them.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Though there are some pupils so identified, no pupil is held back by any difficulty in using English. The school is able to provide support if this is needed.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school makes generous and successful provision for spiritual development. Through its very good ethos and range of activities, it makes very good provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development also.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. Procedures for child protection and pupils' welfare are very effective, at all levels.

Though the partnership between school and parents is not usually reported in a short inspection, this has been a focus of the present inspection, in view of the unease expressed by some parents. Generally, the partnership is very strong. School and parents are united by strong ties of faith and common purpose. However, some parents feel that aspects of communication need improving, particularly in arrangements for parents' evenings. The school is hoping to increase communication with all parents as part of its current initiative in target setting, and such a move should increase the amount of contact organised centrally by the school.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements, although the provision of information and communication technology (ICT) is only just sufficient for those pupils not following the GCSE course in ICT in these years. The sixth form curriculum is a strong feature of the school. It offers a very wide range of subjects, creating a vast range of possible combinations. However, the school is not at present able to offer any sport or recreation within school time, for all sixth formers, because it is very short of indoor sports accommodation. The school successfully encourages sixth formers to join the wide range of local sports clubs.

The school gives pupils very good care and support. Heads of years and tutors know their pupils very well and takes a very close interest in their well-being. The school's procedures for encouraging good behaviour are very good, as are procedures for assessing students' progress in the sixth form.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher gives particularly well informed and clear leadership to a talented leadership team of five teachers and the bursar. Each member of the team is very well informed. Heads of department and years generally give good leadership, often very good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors are very well led. They are clearly informed about the work of the school and monitor its standards very closely.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school monitors the progress of its development plan closely. Evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching is very good.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Departments are well provided with resources, while grants for specific purposes are well allocated and used.

The quality of leadership given by the headteacher and senior staff is the most significant factor in the school's success. Together with heads of department and years, they have established a principled, open and collaborative style of leadership. Relationships at all levels are friendly and respectful, and this communicates itself very successfully to the pupils. The school gives very good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils make good progress and behaviour is good. • Teaching is good and pupils are expected to work hard and achieve their best. • The school is very well led and managed. • Pupils like school, which strongly helps them to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents feel that the school does not work closely with them and does not keep them well informed about how their children are getting on. • Some parents consider sports facilities inadequate.

Parents completed and returned 755 questionnaires, a high proportion. A large number of written comments, 114, was also made, some of which were detailed and extensive. There were 81 parents at the pre-inspection meeting. Of the written comments, many were very positive and appreciative of the way that pupils have developed at the school. For example, one parent said her child 'had opened like a flower' in the supporting atmosphere of the school. There was a large measure of agreement in the critical opinions expressed (in the meeting, questionnaires and written comments), about what parents would like to see improved. Inspectors agree that improvement is needed in some aspects of communication. A range of other views was expressed by individual parents. Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents, which are strongly confirmed by the evidence of the inspection.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 334 students in the sixth form, 153 boys and 181 girls. Of these, 18 have special educational needs (SEN); although none have statements, two students require considerable support. The sixth form has a very wide curriculum, including 28 AS and A2 subjects, some GCSE subjects, and one intermediate and one advanced vocational subject. There is a full programme of education in key skills. There is a very useful link with a local college of further education, where some St Bede's students attend AS and A2 courses; in exchange, some 12 college students come for AS and A2 courses at St Bede's.

The great majority of the school's Year 11 students join St Bede's sixth form, and in addition some 18 per year join from other schools. The school welcomes all who can benefit from the education it provides and has widened its entry requirements in recent years. Partly because of this, the sixth form has grown strongly and now has some 130 more students than at the last inspection.

Because GCSE results are well above average, the ability levels of students joining the sixth form are well above average also. However, a wide range of ability is present, as students can join with five GCSE passes at grade C. In 2001, 68 per cent of students went into higher education and a further 23 per cent into further education. The great majority of students therefore make direct use of the qualifications they gain in the sixth form.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very successful and popular sixth form. A-level results are well above the national average, and no subject achieved lower than average results in 2001. Very high results are not confined to a few subjects; in 2001, no fewer than 14 subjects had results well above average. Results have been very high over recent years, but reached a new record in 2002. Teaching is very good, so that students learn very well and make good progress. The leadership of the sixth form is excellent; the leadership and management of the heads of department is generally good and sometimes very good. The sixth form has improved considerably since the last inspection, particularly in its curriculum, which is now very good. It gives very good value for money, spending the grant it receives accurately and effectively, without either supporting or receiving support from funds for the main school.

Strengths

- Very high standards are achieved in AS and A2 examinations in the great majority of subjects.
- The leadership given by the head of sixth is excellent, and that of most heads of department is good, often very good. Planning for the introduction of the new AS and A2 examination courses has been excellent.
- Teaching is very good. It is at least good in all subjects, very good in the majority, and excellent in photography.
- Students respond very well to good teaching. This, with their very good relationships with teachers and each other, is the key to their rapid progress and high achievement.
- The curriculum is wide, and well designed within subjects. The key skills programme is a particularly valuable part of the sixth form curriculum, and makes a very good contribution to students' development of their own skills of individual study.
- The quality of teaching, learning and results in photography is excellent. Photography is an outstanding subject.

What could be improved

- The school has made a good start to its teaching of citizenship, now combined with personal, social and health education (PSHE). More curriculum time and further planning are needed to realise the full potential of this new course.
- Though the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the business courses is very good, most subjects need to provide more opportunities for its use.
- The school is already making satisfactory use of value-added data to provide guidance to departments and students about the AS and A2 grades they should reach. It needs to continue and develop this process, improving the clarity of targets for individual achievement in students' work.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. A2 level results are above the national average. Teaching is good and students learn well. The department is very well led.
Biology	Very good. Results are high, and both teaching and leadership are very good.
Design and technology	Very good. Results are high and leadership good. Teaching was at least good in all lessons seen, so that students made good progress over the course.
Business studies	Very good. Standards are very high in the academic courses, with very good results. Teaching and departmental management are very good.
Information and communication technology	Very good. Standards are well above average, teaching is very good and students' response, in the AS, A2 and key skills courses, is first rate.

Physical education	Good. Standards are above average, teaching is good and students' response is very good. Accommodation is poor and is limiting the range of activities possible.
Health and social care	Good. Students make good progress over the course to reach average standards. Teaching is good and students work very well.
Art (photography)	Excellent. Teaching is extremely good and students' response first rate. This is an outstanding and very popular subject, achieving excellent results in the AS examinations.
Music	Very good. Standards achieved are excellent. Teaching, and students' response and progress, are very good.
Drama	Very good. Standards are very high and teaching is good. Students respond very well. The curriculum is imaginative and challenging.
Geography	Very good. Standards are above average. The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
History	Very good. Students have very good attitudes to work and standards are high. Teaching is very good and students are given valuable course guides and assessment information.
Psychology	Very good. Standards are well above average. Teaching is good. Students take a keen interest and learn very well.
English	Good. Standards are high, teaching and learning are good, and syllabuses are well designed, with challenging activities.
French and German	Good. Examination results are well above average and standards seen are broadly average. Teaching is good and students learn very well.

Other courses sampled were chemistry, physics, government and politics, sociology, art and PSHE. In all these lessons, teaching was at least good and standards in line with those expected nationally, or higher. Because of this, and the very good relationships between students and teachers, students learned rapidly and well. Teaching and learning were outstanding in the one Year 13 art lesson seen; because students had been so well prepared, the teacher was able to give the class complete autonomy, and students worked on their individual tasks with complete concentration.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are very well guided and supported. In lessons, teachers generally assess their work well. Information on careers is well provided, and support given by tutors is very good. The new citizenship course is satisfactory (it was not possible to see any lessons during the inspection), but requires more lesson time.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The leadership of the head of sixth is excellent. All aspects of leadership are meticulously performed. For example, the new curriculum for AS and A2 subjects has been very well planned and carried out. Heads of department generally give good leadership, often very good. The very good teaching and increasingly high results reflect teachers' success in assuring and improving standards. Information to parents of sixth formers is good. There is a very good range of activities available, though there is no sports and recreation programme for everyone. The encouragement given to sixth formers to support younger pupils is a very strong feature of the sixth form. Students have good opportunity to join in all the courses and activities available. For example, the curriculum within design and technology, and mathematics, is wide and varied, and students can find a course or level suitable for their particular abilities.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<p><i>In students' questionnaire responses, most felt that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They enjoyed being in the sixth form, where the choice of courses allows students to follow a suitable programme. • They were well taught and challenged. Teachers are accessible to help them if they have difficulties. • Information on courses was clear and the school helped students to settle well into their new courses. • The school listens well to students' views. 	<p><i>In students' questionnaire responses:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half thought the school did not give them good careers advice. • A quarter thought they were not treated as a responsible young adult in the school. • A quarter felt that their work was not well enough assessed. They were not well informed on their progress.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of students. Inspectors regard teaching in the sixth form as very good. They regard relationships as very good, sometimes excellent. Inspectors judge careers advice as good, and note that Year 12 students will not yet have started their careers programmes. The university entrance procedure is well planned and effective.

Inspectors find that, compared with almost every school they have visited, teachers here treat their students more fully as responsible partners. This view is confirmed by conversations with sixth formers, in the school council and subject areas, who feel they have every chance to work closely with the school and teachers. Inspectors consider that work is generally well marked, but agree with students that more precise help on how to improve their work would further improve students' already good performance.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership

and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement "outstanding" in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to "very weak".

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The leadership of the headteacher and senior team is excellent. This provides a very secure foundation for all the school does, enabling teachers to teach with confidence and pupils to learn with pace and enjoyment. Together, the leadership team creates a very positive ethos in which learning can flourish.

1. The leadership of the headteacher and senior team, known as the leadership team, has built very well on the clear and inspired leadership reported in 1997. The present headteacher and his team have developed this achievement further, making a highly successful school which is also a warmly supporting community. They work very well together and value each other's integrity and professionalism. Teachers and pupils absorb this essential respect, which comes to be natural to them, and this is the basis of the very good, sometimes excellent, relationships which produce the rapport and the results of the school. Governors give very good leadership. They have very good relationships with the leadership team and are very well informed of the school's performance and priorities.
2. This quality of leadership is based on the mission and aims of the school. St Bede's is the only secondary school in the country which is founded to educate, in its area, the children of those in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and, more recently, the Free Churches. The school therefore has a very strong spiritual aim, seen for example in the extensive pastoral work of its three chaplains; it also has a central impulse towards unity, which it realises by the equal value it places on everyone in the school community. To succeed at all, the school must be a united community, and its leadership is aware of the pastoral significance of what it is doing. With this essential impulse, it succeeds admirably in realising its two specific aims, to enable its students to fulfil their own potential and reach the highest achievements of which they are capable; and to create with its students a civilised community based on respect.
3. The leadership team makes possible all the other qualities which are recorded in this report. Its single largest achievement is to create the excellent ethos which is seen in the very good relationships which exist between students and with teachers. This leads to a very good atmosphere for learning and the strong partnership between teachers and pupils in the classroom. Complementing this, the schools' provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
4. The leadership of the senior staff fosters very good teamwork across the school. Heads of department and years are very well informed about the school's main aims for development and share a common purpose with the leadership group. For example, in a meeting of heads of year, all staff present knew exactly what the leadership group was proposing for the development of target setting and were equally as keen as the senior staff to bring about the improvements proposed. The leadership group shares its vision widely, helped by the very good links which each member of the group has with departments and years. There are regular meetings of the line manager and head of department or year, and minutes of these disclose detailed monitoring and discussion of results, curriculum and development planning.
5. Development planning is very good. No item is included in the plan until it is ready for development, so in no way is the strategic action plan a list of aspirations. The current plan rightly concentrates on realising the national initiatives for the 14-19 curriculum and the developments in Key Stage 3. Among other initiatives, it brings into action a long

period of detailed consultation on the development of leadership and further extends essential planning for the development of the school's buildings. It contains an important item on the further development of policies for the inclusion of all pupils in the educational process. The plan is closely evaluated at all levels of the school. The leadership group knows exactly which group in this complex school will be debating a particular issue, whether in the development plan or a more regular concern, and in which term this will happen. The school has an excellent meetings matrix, from which the extensive network of consultation and debate can readily be seen. Governors, who give very good and well informed leadership, are closely involved in this pattern of meetings, either in their full meetings or in the work of their three main committees.

6. As seen in its development planning, the school's aims are well reflected in its very good emphasis on the inclusion of all pupils. In recent years, it has greatly developed the learning support department, which gives effective support to a range of pupils in each year, and has recast its behaviour policy to reflect the care it wishes to give to those who find it difficult to settle in school and need further support. An excellent range of visiting professional help is available, and carefully used. In such ways, the school succeeds in including pupils in school, and the number of permanent exclusions is very low.
7. The school's development and regular work is very well supported by the detailed financial planning, analysis and control provided by the bursar, who is a member of the leadership group. Every initiative is costed, and decisions are taken in the full knowledge of their financial implications. For example, the bursar has been very closely involved in the development of the new sixth form curriculum, so that the overall curriculum offered by the school can be afforded and funded from the resources available for the sixth form. This has been done, and for a curriculum as extensive as that of this sixth form, is a considerable achievement.
8. A final example of the excellent common approach of the headteacher and leadership group is seen in the care with which staff development is managed. A very good performance management system is uniting staff behind common purposes as it helps to develop their individual talents. The welfare of teachers is a high priority of the leadership group, which has created an item on workload in the current strategic plan. The school runs a very full and helpful programme of induction for new staff, and gives high priority to the professional development of teachers.

The leadership and management of the heads of department and years are almost always good, sometimes very good. Teachers work very well together and have the improvement of their pupils' performance and the school at heart.

9. The same high quality of teamwork seen in the leadership group is seen in the work of departments and years. The leadership and management of these areas is overall very good. Heads of department know their subjects and staff very well, and are generally very well briefed on such central issues as development planning, the use of attainment data and the development of their subjects in the light of national initiatives. Heads of year have a very firm grasp of how well their tutors and pupils are performing. They and their tutor team form a unit which moves with their pupils through the years, so their knowledge of their pupils and homes is extremely good. Documentation administered by heads of year is very full and helpful, for example in the detailed records of attendance and detentions which are carefully recorded by each tutor.
10. The most significant aspect of the work of departments and years is the very good personal and professional support which teachers give each other. The care shown by the leadership group for the staff is reflected within departments and years. The example comes from the top, and so teachers care for pupils as individuals and as people.

Teaching is good for pupils in Years 7-11, and very good in the sixth form. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Pupils respond very positively, learn well and are greatly helped by the very good relationships between each other and with teachers.

11. The leadership group intends to give all personal and professional support to teachers, so that they are able to teach effectively. This excellent policy is making the process of education a positive and enjoyable one. Relationships in the classroom are almost always very good, sometimes excellent. Teachers have a real regard for their pupils, who return their concern with a real desire to learn and make progress. Overall, teaching and learning are good for pupils aged 11-16 and very good in the sixth form.
12. Teachers' very good subject knowledge is the basis of good teaching and learning at all levels. This generates very high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and pupils rise to the challenge. For example, in a Year 9 learning support lesson, the assistant was very knowledgeable about the conditions which her pupils were experiencing and had a wide range of approaches to help them learn. As a result, these pupils, whose grasp of literacy was elementary, made good progress in writing their geography homework and left prepared to understand their next lesson. In a Year 11 music lesson, the teacher had an excellent grasp of the qualities needed for good performance, and drew out of pupils a strenuous effort to discuss and perform a chordal accompaniment.
13. All aspects of teaching and learning are at least good, but teachers' other very good characteristic is their management of pupils. This allows them to set a good pace and to make good use of time. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, the teacher had a clear and demanding plan, which was shared in detail with the class. There was time to set the scene, discuss an important chapter in *Of Mice and Men*, regroup as a class to share ideas and listen as the group scribes reported their group's conclusions. As a result, pupils learnt very well, working together productively and helping each other to reach a new understanding of the text. With clear management such as this, there was no possibility of pupils drifting away from the task, and there was still time to set a useful homework.
14. The most consistently good teaching is seen in sixth form lessons, where students' very good earlier training makes them particularly quick to take advantage of their lessons. They know they will be well taught and will benefit from the process. For example, in a good Year 12 lesson on health and social care, pupils were very keen to take advantage of the teacher's very good planning and knowledge to contribute their experiences of keeping clients' confidentiality in recent visits to care settings.
15. This keenness to learn has in fact been characteristic of pupils since their first years, and occasionally leads to a few problems in managing a good lesson with younger pupils. Sometimes, as happened in a Year 8 science lesson on the conservation of heat, pupils are so keen to get something done, and think they know so much about it, that it proves difficult to get them to go through the process thoroughly. On the other hand, such enthusiasm can be an excellent quality if well used, as in another Year 8 lesson, on food technology, where flans and trifles were manufactured at speed, with enjoyment and success. Teaching these enthusiastic younger pupils is not easy, and teachers generally achieve this difficult task very well. Less experienced teachers are sometimes in need of more specific help in this area of classroom management.

Academic results are very high at all levels. They are well above the national average.

16. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their standard is overall above the national

average. They make good progress in their first three years, achieving well above average results in all three core subjects, English, mathematics and science. Compared with the results achieved by socially similar schools, on the basis of a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, results are well above average also. In lessons seen, standards were high, sometimes very high, and progress good. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson, pupils showed good knowledge of the suffragette movement and made good progress in their understanding of history timelines.

17. During the GCSE course, pupils make further good progress, achieving results well above average in 2002. In 2000, GCSE results were very high, in the top five per cent of results nationally. Results in every subject except science (single award) were well above the national average, for both girls and boys. Although girls achieved more highly than boys, often far more highly, boys' achievement is well above average in most subjects, and it is the remarkably good performance of girls at this stage, rather than any inadequate performance of boys, which causes this divergence. For example, girls perform far more highly than boys in English, but when results for both sexes are compared with national averages, the gap is not greater than nationally when allowance is made for the well above average results which both boys and girls achieve. In lessons seen at this stage, pupils continue to make good progress, helped by their very good attitudes, relationships and desire to learn. For example, in a Year 11 biology lesson on the nervous system, pupils made very good progress in their experiments on reflexes and sensitivity because they were very keen to listen and get everything right, thanks to the extremely good organisation and class management of the teacher. Good progress was also seen in a Year 11 French lesson on coursework writing. Pupils reached high standards in the lesson because the teacher had prepared them so well, but found it more difficult to maintain this standard when they did not have this level of support.
18. Results in sixth form AS and A2 examinations are well above average also. In no subject are A2 level results below average, and in almost all they are well above. Sixth form students make further good progress over the course, exceeding the grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE performance. The end result of very good teaching and attitudes in the sixth form is a very high proportion of students entering further or higher education, including a large number gaining places at demanding universities.
19. Results have remained well above average at all levels in recent years, rising to new records in GCSE and A level in 2002. This is the outcome of first rate leadership which supports teachers and helps them to teach effectively, and also of the very good relationships and behaviour found in the great majority of lessons.

Pupils' behaviour is very good. They are keen to learn, to help each other and to make good progress.

20. In almost every lesson, behaviour is good, often very good. Because they are very well treated, pupils and students are enthusiastic to do well, and like being at school. For example, in a Year 7 drama lesson, pupils were able to learn so much about simple drama skills and techniques because their attitudes and behaviour were so positive. They listened well and took part in each activity with concentration and enjoyment. In a Year 10 art lesson, attitudes and behaviour were good, reflecting the teacher's positive, well organised approach. Pupils lost no time in getting down to work with their viewfinders, listening carefully even when helping each other, and achieved good results in a remarkably short time. Reasonably enough, pupils' very good behaviour is a response to good teaching and clear leadership. When this is not present, as for example in a Year 11 physics revision lesson, pupils are quick to show their lack of enthusiasm and interest. Behaviour in sixth form lessons is almost always good, often very good. For example, in a Year 12 ICT key skills lesson, students were engrossed in

their work, asking well informed questions and showing real enthusiasm for the course.

21. Around the school, behaviour is good. Pupils are usually considerate to each other and adults in the crowded corridors, often opening doors for teachers and visitors. Behaviour in assemblies is very good. Pupils listen intently and respectfully to the address, and enter and leave very quietly. The key to good behaviour is the respect the school has for pupils and the respect they learn to show for each other and their teachers.

The sixth form is a strength of the school, in its quality of teaching, results, curriculum and leadership; and also in the excellent relationships among students and between teachers and students.

22. This is a very successful sixth form. Teaching and learning are very good, and results are well above average. Students get on extremely well with their teachers and each other. Leadership is excellent and all aspects of sixth form management, for example the regular work of tutors, are well carried out. The curriculum is well designed and extensive, and there is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. An outstanding feature of the sixth form is the help which its students give to younger pupils, particularly through the paired reading scheme and the 'helpliners' scheme, in which students are attached to tutor groups and act as co-tutor over the term. Details of the very good provision made for sixth form students can be found in the sixth form sections of this report.

Pupils are very well looked after. Heads of year and tutors know their pupils very well, and take a positive interest in their welfare.

23. The school places great emphasis on the value of the individual. A direct consequence of the excellent leadership of the senior team is the very good relationships which support learning at all levels. These relationships are carefully fostered in the school's year and tutorial system. Heads of year and tutors have a very detailed and careful programme of regular activities in tutorial time, so ensuring that pupils get good support. For example, careful records are kept for each student, and parents are contacted if need arises. Tutors are generally good at knowing when it is necessary to contact parents; they are also aware of the need to preserve the essential trust between tutor and student. There is a particularly strong team spirit within the heads of year group, who work closely together, value each other's professionalism, and create a good working atmosphere in their year teams. Heads of year are highly regarded by the leadership group and work very closely with their line managers in planning further improvements in the care and support of pupils.

24. The school's procedures for child protection are very good. Teachers are well informed on these issues, and the school is greatly helped in such areas by the services of trained counsellors from The Valley Trust, available twice a week for discussion with pupils. The school's chaplaincy team is also available, and maintains close contact with pupils and tutors. The range of professionals available to help pupils is a strength of the school's welfare provision. There is regular medical and psychological support, and the school nurse is available to see pupils at short notice. The education welfare officer visits weekly and keeps closely in touch with heads of year and key stages. There is a very good range of support for special needs. Particularly valuable is the weekly visit by the deputy headteacher of a local special school, the help and advice she gives to teachers through observing their teaching of pupils with special educational needs, and the presence of some pupils from her school in classes at St Bede's.

25. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and improving good behaviour. It

has recently revised all its behaviour procedures in the light of a small number of pupils with more severe behavioural problems. The result has been the maintenance of very good standards of behaviour in increasingly challenging conditions. There are good procedures for coping with bullying and other forms of harassment. Pupils and students interviewed confirmed that bullying was not a problem; incidents which arise are well handled. Procedures for securing good attendance are satisfactory. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic performance are good, and are discussed below.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The school has already established good reporting systems throughout the school. There are good target setting procedures in the sixth form, but further development is needed in the main school, so that all pupils are aware of what standards they should reach, and how to do so.

26. Until recently, the school has not wished to place too great a reliance on the data it has collected for the attainment of pupils on entering the school, and has not therefore set precise targets for the achievement of pupils, in other than core subjects, by the end of Key Stage 3 in Year 9. It has set accurate overall targets for attainment in these core subjects, and these have been reached and exceeded. Similarly, it has set and reached its overall targets for GCSE performance. Data for achievement at the ends of both key stages, in Years 9 and 11, is now readily available in each subject, and the school is considering how best to set pupils individual targets for each subject, monitor their progress towards them and keep parents informed of progress. It has revised and improved its reporting systems, so that reports now give accurate information on how pupils are performing in each aspect of their subjects. Though these reports lack the element of personal reporting, they do convey a great deal of clearly assessed information, and make a good basis for the further reporting of progress towards agreed targets. The target setting and reporting system is well established in the sixth form, though the clarity of some targets, and the means of achieving them, needs further improvement.
27. The school has made a good start to giving its departments overall targets for GCSE and A2 level performance. Heads of department need further training in the use of these targets to measure the progress of a class and of individual pupils, and how best to assess and set work which is clearly designed to meet the needs of individual pupils. In the same way, departments need to become more familiar with the use of value-added data in their setting and assessment of targets for individual, class and subject performance.

Further improvement in some aspects of communication with parents is needed. The school is already considering how this can be achieved in the context of target setting for individual pupils and in sharing this information with parents.

28. The pattern for consultation with parents is satisfactory in Years 7-11 and good in the sixth form. Interim and full reports are carefully prepared and give useful information on pupils' attainment and application in all subjects. The interim report is generated from the marks which subject teachers have awarded and the full report is largely made by selecting from a databank of statements. Some parents are not happy at the mechanistic nature of these reports, though they do contain statements of achievement, and the full report assesses progress in each aspect of the National Curriculum within subjects very clearly.
29. Despite considerable consultation of parents over what aspects of communication they would like to see improved, a large minority of parents remains unhappy about the amount of time available for them at the annual parents' evening for Years 7-11. Six five minute appointments are possible for each family, and some parents report that they do not manage to get appointments with particular teachers, who reserve time for the parents of pupils they most need to see. Though not generous, the amount of time available is satisfactory. Parents report that teachers willingly find time outside the parents' meeting, if approached. The daily home-school diary is a useful, but sometimes under-used means of communication. Generally, it is well enough used by pupils and tutors to make a fair record of homework, but its use for dialogue between home and school is not extensive. The standard of publications issued by the school is high. There is an extensive, well presented annual report, informative and attractive prospectuses and course information documents, and a clear monthly journal for parents and friends.
30. For the future, the school is considering a further meeting with parents, to discuss the setting of targets for the improvement of pupils' work. At present, target setting is at the pilot stage in Years 7-11, but is developing strongly in the sixth form. In response to the anxieties of parents expressed at the pre-inspection meeting and in questionnaires, it is also considering the development of a statement of its systems and arrangements for communication with parents, in addition to the existing home-school contract.

The new courses in citizenship have started well, and their combination with the established courses in personal, social and health education (PSHE) is potentially very effective. More curriculum time is now needed to ensure that the many aspects covered are taught in sufficient detail.

31. The school has launched its new course in citizenship, at all stages, which it has combined with its existing programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). There is a lesson once a fortnight, taught by form tutors, who also find time to pursue topics during registration time. Particular topics in the PSHE element of the course are taught in science and religious education, so that there is just sufficient time to cover the most significant aspects of the new course. However, such important aspects as careers education and talks by visiting specialists have to be accommodated in this time, which is likely to be insufficient to cover all the topics of the new course in enough depth and detail. At present, there are only some six lessons per term for this new course. It will not be easy to find the extra time needed, for example to make citizenship/PSHE a weekly lesson, particularly in the sixth form, where the school is currently teaching all three key skills in addition to its AS and A2 programmes. However, the school needs to keep this issue under review when it considers the allocation of time and resources for next school year.

For many years, the school has been trying to attract funding to improve its outdated, small and poorly designed indoor sports accommodation. The lack of adequate indoor space for physical education (PE) is restricting the curriculum for Years 7-11 and this factor has partly caused the absence of non-specialist sixth form PE and games. This was an issue for action in the last inspection report.

32. Indoors sports and PE accommodation is small and poorly equipped. Staff, parents, governors and the local education authority agree that it is in urgent need of improvement. At present, this lack is restricting the curriculum which can be offered, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Though there is no legal requirement to provide a PE programme in the sixth form, and such a session was withdrawn because of pressure of time and space, it would be difficult to run such a programme at present because of lack of space, particularly during wet weather.
33. The lack of PE accommodation also has consequences for the school's financial and timetable planning. Expensive hire and transport costs are incurred in taking pupils to a local leisure centre, while the need to plan such PE sessions to fit in with the centre's arrangements mean an unwelcome restriction to the timetable.
34. To the great potential relief of the school, its bid for new sports accommodation has now won support from the local education authority in the list of projects submitted for approval. Meanwhile, indoor PE accommodation remains poor.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

35. The school should now:
 - (1) Develop the practice of setting targets for pupils' academic performance in Years 7-11, based on the analysis of attainment data, so that:
 - pupils are given clear targets to aim for;
 - overall targets are set for classes and subjects;
 - tutors and parents are aware of how well individual pupils are progressing towards their targets.(Paragraphs 26, 27)
 - (2) Further improve communication with parents, particularly in the context of:
 - target setting for individual pupils and in sharing this information with parents, and
 - further informing parents about the frequency and means of communication, so that parents are aware of all the means of communication open to them.(Paragraphs 28-30)
 - (3) Find more time for the fuller development of the new citizenship and PSHE courses, at all levels.
(Paragraph 31)
 - (4) Continue to work for improved indoor PE accommodation.
(Paragraphs 32-34)

Sixth form

- (1) As in item (3) above, find more time for the fuller development of the new citizenship and PSHE courses.
(Paragraphs 31, 55)
- (2) Improve the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the majority of sixth form subjects.
(Paragraph 40)
- (3) As in item (1) above, further develop
 - the use of value-added data to provide guidance to departments and students about the AS and A2 grades they should reach, and
 - improve the clarity of targets for individual achievement in students' work.(Paragraphs 26, 27, 62, 63)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	56
	Sixth form	75
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		72

Summary of teaching observed in this inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7-11							
Number	0	24	21	10	1	0	0
Percentage	0	43	37	18	2	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	9	27	29	8	1	0	0
Percentage	12	36	39	11	1	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 as each lesson represents more than one 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	1348	334
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	31	6

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	15	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	73	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	52

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	17

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	144	126	270

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	125	124	122
	Girls	120	113	118
	Total	245	237	240
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	91 (91)	88 (87)	89 (84)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	70 (59)	73 (67)	53 (51)
	National	33 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	108	126	122
	Girls	119	118	109
	Total	227	244	231
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	84 (95)	90 (92)	86 (79)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (56)	76 (71)	59 (54)
	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	117	122	239

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	84	113	113
	Girls	99	117	119
	Total	183	230	232
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	77 (75)	96 (97)	97 (97)
	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	54.2
	National	39.8

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	63	92	155

Average A/AS points score per candidate	Male	Female	All
	School	18.9	20.4
National	16.9	17.7	17.4

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	16	75
	National		n/a

Note:

The unvalidated data for the school's results in the 2002 national tests taken in Year 9 and for GCSE in Year 11, received from Ofsted in January 2003, have been included. However, the school is raising some queries about these data, particularly the percentage of pupils passing one or more GCSEs at grades A*-G.

Data on GCE AS and A2 examinations in 2002 was not available at the date of publication of this report, and 2001 data has therefore been included.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1370	23	
0		
44	3	
0	2	
0		
0	2	
0	1	
13		
7		
0		
0		
6	1	
12	1	
13		
5		
13		
199		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	93.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.9

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	30
Total aggregate hours worked per week	677

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.7
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.4
Key Stage 4	22.6

Financial information

Financial year	2001-02
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	£
Total income	4347836
Total expenditure	4303805
Expenditure per pupil	2624
Balance brought forward from previous year	55049
Balance carried forward to next year	99080

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	33.64
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	37.94
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.24
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1682

Number of questionnaires returned

755

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	46	47	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	44	49	3	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	60	4	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	58	13	3	2
The teaching is good.	36	57	3	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	50	20	4	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	44	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	32	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	24	50	17	3	6
The school is well led and managed.	47	44	3	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	45	5	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	45	12	2	11

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

36. In the A2 examinations in 2001 at the end of the sixth form course, results were well above the national average in the total points scored. Results improved further in 2002. Though girls' GCSE results have been considerably higher than boys', results at AS and A2 level are almost identical in terms of overall points scored, with boys and girls going on to equally challenging courses on leaving school. In the 2001 A2 examinations, achievement in no subject was below the national average. All were above, with the exception of sociology and religious studies, and no fewer than 14 subjects achieved results well above the national average.
37. Students enter the sixth form with very high achievement, on the basis of their very high GCSE results. Over the course, they make good progress. Although the use of value-added data is not yet widespread within departments, there is detailed information available which shows that, in the majority of subjects, students' A2 results are higher than would be expected, despite their high GCSE starting points. This is confirmed by the evidence of good progress in lessons and written work seen, whether students have an average or higher level of ability in relation to that expected for the course. For example, in a Year 12 AS English language and literature lesson, students of average ability were making good progress in their study of linguistic devices and how to use them, because teaching was well organised, on the basis of secure knowledge. More highly achieving students also achieve well. For example, in a Year 13 business studies lesson on marketing, students' progress was very good because of very effective teaching, some very good packs of information and students' very good enthusiasm for the subject and desire to do well.
38. Over recent years, the school has maintained and improved on its high A level results, and similar high achievement is now being made in the AS level modules and examinations. Partly because students in this large sixth form can take AS and A2 level courses at the same time, for example an AS course in English and an A2 in history, the school achieves a high rate of retention on its courses. Achievement of high A2 results leads to a substantial and increasing proportion of students entering higher education each year. In 2002, 68 per cent entered higher education and a further 23 per cent went into further education. High levels of retention during the course and over 90 per cent continuing their education beyond school indicates a very effective use of the education provided and points to a very good use of the school's resources at this level. The school sets itself challenging targets for A2 examination performance. In recent years, it has reached and exceeded these targets.
39. The school provides a full programme of education in key skills. Students achieve well in all its three aspects. They make good progress in communication skills, most gaining Level 2 and a significant number going on to gain Level 3. They are given good opportunities to develop their communication and literacy skills in subjects across the curriculum, and make very good progress in their already strong skills of oral communication, talking fluently and engagingly in class and in conversation around the school. The level of discussion is high, and teachers are always glad to spend time discussing issues with students, in an informed, adult atmosphere. Standards of written communication are also high. Most students are able to write clearly, often persuasively.

40. Students achieve well in the key skill of the application of number. All who took the Level 2 tests have passed, and the school is now teaching a Level 3 course. As a result of the Level 2 lessons, students have a much greater realisation of the value of money and how to measure potential earnings against predicted expenditure. In the key skill of ICT, students make good progress to achieve the Level 2 qualification, and some are now extending their study to Level 3. On joining the course, students have initially been disadvantaged by their relative lack of experience of ICT in the GCSE years, so that fewer than expected students begin the course with secure Level 2 skills. The course serves an important function, because it provides a unifying experience for students who may well not get enough experience of ICT in their regular lessons. Across the curriculum, standards acquired through the use of ICT vary according to the use and level of application which departments make of it. For example, standards are high in business studies, but are not well developed in science.
41. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained and further improved its good sixth form results, in an extended range of courses, and has achieved this whilst widening the range of GCSE grades qualifying for access to its sixth form courses.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

42. Sixth form students have highly positive attitudes to the school and to their studies there. Many lessons seen during the course of the inspection were characterised by an exemplary working atmosphere. Students are very highly motivated: they are prepared to make considerable creative and intellectual efforts in order to do well. Such efforts were evident during lessons in such diverse subjects as psychology, geography, mathematics and photography. Students wanted to increase their understanding and mastery of the subject in order to improve the quality of their work. Students also consider it incumbent upon them to contribute to the life of the school and the wider community. They are proud of the fact that what they do 'makes a difference' and that they can be of help to others. Considerable numbers of students help younger pupils, with paired reading or as 'helpliners'. Their contributions to the life of the wider community are concentrated in Rag Week. Students say that they value the skills they acquire in organising the events which comprise it as much as the money they make for charitable causes. The fact remains, however, that they are highly successful because some £12,000 is raised through their efforts. Such commitment indicates a strong response to the provision which the school makes for students' personal development and the values it seeks to inculcate. In addition, students are good communicators, yet sensitive to the reactions of others. And because of this sensitivity, students are ready to give help, whether to fellow students in lessons, sharing ideas or comparing performance, to other pupils within the school or to the wider community.
43. The strength of relations between students and teachers is a consistent feature in lessons. Students themselves acknowledge this and value it highly. This mutual respect is an important component of students' successful learning. Independent learning skills are good, overall. Students are keenly aware of the different learning skills they need for sixth form study and work hard to develop them. By the time they reach Year 13, they have honed the skills they need for independent work to a high level. Very high standards of behaviour form part of students' very positive attitudes to work. Students have the friendly good manners which allow equable discussion. Their attendance is good.
44. The previous inspection report considered that attitudes in the school were good, but did not refer specifically to the sixth form.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

45. Teaching is a strength of the sixth form. It is very good overall, being at least good in all subjects, very good in the majority, and excellent in photography. Most teaching seen was good or very good, in equal proportions, a small proportion was excellent, and a similarly small proportion was satisfactory. In only one lesson seen was teaching unsatisfactory, and that was due to insufficient challenge in the material presented. Teaching is at least good in all subjects, and very good in a majority of the 15 subjects seen in detail. Responding strongly to very good teaching, students learn very well, making rapid and assured gains in all aspects of their subjects.
46. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are very good. Because teachers have so strong a grasp of their subjects, they have very high expectations of what their students can do, and plan their lessons very effectively. Responding positively to these qualities, students absorb knowledge and skills very well, working rapidly and very productively. Photography is the strongest example of these very effective qualities. In a Year 13 photographic project work session, the teacher had great respect from his students for his easy mastery of the subject, which he taught with great enthusiasm. He expected everyone to produce the best work they could, and as each student was very keen to take advantage of the lesson and make real progress, everyone made extremely rapid gains in knowledge.
47. Teachers' management of students is also very good. For example, in a Year 12 ICT lesson on macros and templates, the teacher had organised students to work in pairs, to a clearly defined brief. This arrangement left him free to give detailed, encouraging advice to the six pairs of students, and also allowed each student to work co-operatively with another. So students learnt very well, making a good effort and concentrating very well on understanding the task in hand.
48. Teachers' assessment of students' work is good. Though not every piece of written work receives a recorded comment, teachers are good at talking with students and giving them a helpful assessment of their achievement. Teachers make good use of homework, particularly in setting students helpful and challenging longer-term assignments. Their assessment does not often extend to giving students specific targets, written or oral, for the improvement of their work, and this is a key area for further development across the whole school.
49. A particular strength of students' learning is their independence of action, based on a well informed knowledge of how and what to learn. A leading example of this was seen in a Year 13 art lesson, in which the teacher had given the class a great deal of preparatory advice, seen in the many preliminary sketches they had made. The teacher was now able to let students get on with their individual work, which was being strengthened by the responsibility each had to create a satisfying version of the work which had been planned.
50. Teaching of key skills is good, both in the key skills lessons and in other subjects. For example, the teaching of the application of number has enabled students to make rapid, useful progress in such areas as the economics of mobile phone use, and students are glad of the extra information they have gained on this course. An area for further improvement is the use of ICT in a majority of subjects which are not at present making enough use of it in their regular teaching. In this respect, teachers are not giving students enough access to resources which will enable them to improve their capacity for effective independent study. However, in all other respects, for example their enthusiasm, subject knowledge, very good relationships with students and their high expectations, teachers are giving students every encouragement to develop good habits of independent work.

51. Teaching meets the needs of all students well. Those students who have SEN learn well and their needs are well looked after. Boys and girls learn equally well and, overall, achieve almost precisely the same high level of results. Though there is no overt policy to advance the achievement of gifted and talented students, the high proportion of top grades achieved and the success in getting places at demanding universities confirms that these students are given a good level of challenge and interest.
52. Since the last inspection, teaching has at least maintained its previous high standards and students continue to learn very well.

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

53. The sixth form curriculum is very good. It has a very wide choice of subjects, currently providing no fewer than 4500 combinations of individual subject choice, so meeting the wide range of individual need very well. There are 28 AS and A2 subjects available, and some (including English, mathematics, art, and design and technology) have a number of specialist courses leading to AS and A2 qualifications in their own right. The curriculum is further enriched by a vocational A level GNVQ course in health and social care, and by business studies at intermediate GNVQ, AS and A2 levels. The curriculum has one unsatisfactory feature, the lack of any sports and recreation for those not taking AS and A2 level PE. There is, however, a wide range of extra-curricular activities available.
54. The sixth form curriculum is very responsive to local circumstances. A very helpful link with a local college of further education enables St Bede's students to study AS level film studies, and AS and A2 media studies there. In exchange, college students are welcome to join some sixth form subjects at the school. This link helps make the school's sixth form an open, inclusive place to study. The school decided some three years ago to widen its sixth form entry to anyone who could benefit from its courses. Though it was thought that a wider set of entry criteria would lower A level standards, these have overtaken the previous best level of earlier years, confirming that the school is able to offer success to a wider range of students. Some 18 students join the sixth form from outside the school each year. Also significant for the inclusion of students of all abilities is the pre-A level vocational course in business, taught over one year with mature English and mathematics GCSE courses. Several students have benefited from this course and have then joined two-year AS and A2 courses. Though the school has offered further vocational courses, it finds the demand relatively limited, and concentrates on particular areas such as the one-year course and the two-year health and social care course.
55. The curriculum is further enriched by a full course in all three of the key skills of application of number, literacy and ICT. The school has made a very positive start by providing courses in all three areas, and is one of the very few schools in the area to have done so. The school has also developed a promising course in citizenship, now combined with PSHE. Good progress has been made in setting up this course, but more time is needed, for example a weekly rather than fortnightly lesson, to get the best benefit from the extensive material which should be taught and followed up in such a course.
56. Careers education is good. There is a carefully planned series of lessons, interviews and visits in the second half of Year 12, followed by a very careful assessment of students' prospects for higher education, based on the reports issued at the end of Year 12. The local careers service conducts individual interviews. As a result, a high proportion of students succeed in gaining places in higher or further education. Through the individual interviews, students are guided about options other than higher or further

education, although the school's main thrust in careers guidance is towards continuing in education.

57. The leadership given by the head and deputy head of sixth in planning and providing the curriculum is excellent. Working very closely with heads of department and sixth form tutors, they have very successfully planned the new AS and A2 curriculum so that it provides very good continuity from GCSE, through AS to A2 level. For example, it is possible to study AS and A2 subjects at the same time, and to progress from the pre-A level course to a very wide range of one and two year courses. The result is an impressively flexible curriculum, which offers everyone wide choice within a one, two or sometimes three year course. The success of these arrangements is seen in the high level of results achieved across all subjects and the great range of further and higher education institutions which students enter every year.
58. In planning the sixth form curriculum, the school has regrettably had to exclude the provision of a PE, sports and recreation session for all students. Although it provides a rich variety of extra-curricular activity for anyone interested, and a very good curriculum in other respects, it is unfortunate that the school is not able to find the time for such a sports session.
59. With the exception of the lack of sports in the curriculum for all students, the school provides very well for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Spiritual education is very good. Assemblies, though they do not meet legal requirements, are spiritual acts, led by teachers to whom faith is important and followed by students who are keen to involve themselves in the spiritual values the school so clearly stands for. Moral development is very good also. The school enriches students' lives through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, which include helping to look after younger pupils, in such activities as paired reading or the 'helpliners' scheme, in which a sixth former is attached to a lower school tutorial group. The curriculum offers many opportunities to explore the moral dimension, for example in the values and beliefs encountered in English, history, psychology and sociology. Social development is very well provided for by the great range of activities offered and the very good use of groups and pairs in sixth form lessons. Sixth formers take a leading part in the very good cultural activities programme. Ambitious dramatic and musical productions are often held, and generally involve a large number of sixth formers, who often play leading parts in staging these events. For example, both a major play and concert were presented at the end of the inspection week, and many sixth formers were closely involved in their preparation.
60. Since the last inspection, the school's sixth form curriculum has greatly expanded and improved.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

61. Assessment is good overall and has a positive effect on students' progress and achievements. When students join the sixth form, their GCSE grades are used to set minimum target grades for AS and A2 performance. Departments review these grades regularly. Particular reviews take place at the times of the first Year 12 grade report, when teachers add a target comment to the grades; after the first AS module examination results, in March of Year 12; at the end of Year 12; for the Year 13 grade report; and after the mock A2 level examinations. This represents a full and rigorous system for assessment and reporting.
62. The assessment system is generally well used by teachers to keep students informed of

their progress, and the quality of assessment is generally good. However, there are some variations between subjects. For example, the use of assessment data is very good in business studies, where its use to set targets is raising standards. In PE, the marking of students' work is not informative enough, so that students do not learn how to improve their work as a result.

63. The great strength of assessment in the sixth form is the overall system, often combined with very good marking by teachers of students' work. There are two main areas for improvement. First, targets for the improvement of individual work are not always specific enough, and clearly enough based on practical tasks which students can readily achieve. However, a good start has been made in this area, and the sixth form is some way ahead of other years in this respect. Second, teachers are not yet making best use of the value-added data which is now available in departments, to check targets against potential performance. There is a danger, noted particularly in psychology, that students tend to settle too easily for predicted grades. Though the regular reviews of grades is well designed to guard against this, the use of value added data provides a useful check to see whether some predicted grades might not be too easily achievable.
64. Since the last inspection report, the development of assessment systems and the use of data have markedly improved. The key issue is further to improve the good practice which increasingly exists.

Advice, support and guidance

65. The quality of the advice support and guidance given to students is very good. Students are well prepared before they enter the sixth form. A wide range of open evenings and discussions for Year 11 pupils covers not just the St Bede's sixth form, but other options available locally. The induction procedure on joining the sixth form is an important part of the preparation process. Students interviewed considered it useful because it helped them to adjust to the different styles of learning they would encounter. Very few pupils leave after starting courses. The high rate of retention supports students' views that they are helped to make the right choices and well prepared to make the most of their studies in the sixth form.
66. Students also receive good guidance, both personal and academic, during the two years most spend in the sixth form. This is provided through a carefully structured programme of reviews. Most students intend to go on to university, so there is an emphasis on briefing them about choosing courses and facets of university life, and giving them effective support with UCAS applications in Y13. Advice on other courses and careers is provided for students though, despite notification, they are not always fully aware of how much is available. Careful monitoring of behaviour and attendance forms part of the support that tutors give students. The support which subject teachers give to students is particularly strong. Students interviewed considered the quality of this to be one of the best things about the sixth form. A further reason why the advice, support and guidance that students receive is effective is that it is reviewed and evaluated thoroughly every year and student opinion is part of the evaluation process.
67. The previous inspection report considered that standards of care in the school were of high quality but did not refer specifically to sixth form support. The results currently achieved by students show that standards continue to be very high.

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

68. The school has a good partnership with parents. With students, the partnership is very

good, and this is reflected in the very good relationships between teachers and students. This is a very positive feature of the sixth form.

69. The results of the parents' questionnaire reflect considerable satisfaction, throughout the school, at standards, teaching, leadership and progress. Some parents (of pupils of all ages) are not satisfied by the quality of communication between school and home. Inspectors have found that the sixth form assessment and reporting system is good, and this is outlined in their report on assessment, above. The quality of reports to parents is good. The grade reports in November of each year are brief and informative, as is intended. The full report at the end of Year 12 is well designed and helpful. It reports clearly on each subject, generally under the headings of progress and achievement, motivation, powers of analysis, communication skills, and independence of thought. Results so far in AS are reported and A2 predictions are given. There is a useful summary report by the tutor. This report makes a very good basis for decisions on A2 choice and university application. There are very good opportunities for parental consultation, with three possible meetings in Year 12 and two in Year 13.
70. Students' views on the sixth form are largely positive. They enjoy being in the sixth form, are well taught and have received clear information on courses and sixth form life. A quarter felt, however, that they are not well informed on their progress, while half felt that careers advice is not good. Inspectors have found that assessment of work is generally good, but that more specific targets could be set to help students improve. Careers advice does not begin until the second term of Year 12, so that half the students completing the questionnaire would not have been aware of the programme. Careers advice is well provided as from that date, and guidance, formal and informal, on university entrance, is very good.
71. The sixth form prospectus is clear and helpful, and examples of letters and circulars seen confirm that the head of sixth and tutors keep parents well informed of sixth form events. When need arises, tutors are happy to meet parents and to help with individual problems.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

72. The leadership given by the head of sixth and headteacher is excellent. All aspects of sixth form leadership and management have been clearly considered and provided for. For example, the sixth form development plan reflects the school's overall plan very well, while all procedures are very clearly set out and supported by good working documents. Head of sixth, the deputy and tutors work closely together to ensure that students are well looked after and their progress through the sixth form is very carefully monitored and supported. Planning for the new sixth form curriculum has been exemplary. The result is a wide and flexible curriculum, with considerable choice of subject and level of course.
73. Leadership of the sixth form by the governors is very good. Governors have been closely involved in the development of the sixth form, for example in the widening of its entry criteria and the well established link with a local college of further education. Governors and the bursar have worked very carefully on the financing of the sixth form. They have ensured that income and expenditure are well balanced, so that the sixth form neither contributes funds to the rest of the school, nor receives support from it. The very extensive range of courses and activities reflect a very good strategic use of resources, so that all students in this large sixth form are given generous opportunities to develop intellectually and socially. Cost effectiveness is very good, seen particularly in the relatively large AS level classes, where economies in the staffing ratio in Year 12 allow a wide range of A2 courses to be funded the following year. The sixth form, in common with the school overall, provides very good value for money.

Resources

74. Resources for staffing are well allocated. There are sufficient teachers for all sixth form subjects, though it is proving hard to find staff in some specialist areas, for example science. Class sizes are very carefully calculated, so enabling a wide curriculum to be maintained at AS, A2 and in the pre-A level course.
75. Resources for learning are good. These are higher than average across the school at large, including the sixth form, and provide a generally good level of resources for the many subjects. The library is a well run and welcoming place, very well used by sixth formers for private study. The provision of computers around the school is satisfactory, and is at the national average level. Computer suites are well maintained and run. Within sixth form subjects, however, ICT is not generally widely enough available, so that it is not in regular use as much as it could be. Business studies is a very good example of how much the regular use of ICT can add to students' learning, but in other areas, for example science, it is not regularly used.
76. Accommodation is generally adequate, though the rapid growth of the sixth form has made it difficult to find good accommodation for all classes. Some subjects are taught in temporary classrooms which have acquired an unwelcome air of permanence. Accommodation for PE is very unsatisfactory, so that a sports session for all sixth formers would be hard to run, even if timetabled. The sixth form common room is very small for the numbers it now caters for, though students generally use it well. The governors and senior staff have worked very effectively to improve the sixth form's accommodation over recent years. Sixth form science is now taught in very good new laboratories; an impressive and much needed arts building has been approved, so giving very welcome specialist accommodation for a range of subjects, particularly photography, which at present produce remarkable results in difficult circumstances. By

degrees, the temporary classrooms are being phased out, and the sixth form is acquiring more suitable accommodation.

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

In the inspection, 15 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	3	33	62	0	15	0.	1.5
Biology	2	50	52	0	2	0.5	0.8
Religious Studies	3	100	85	33	26	2.3	2.4

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	37	89	87	41	43	5.6	5.8
Chemistry	24	100	90	42	43	7.2	5.9
Biology	27	100	88	26	34	5.3	5.3
Physics	13	100	88	54	40	6.9	5.7
Design and technology	20	100	91	50	30	6.9	5.38
Business Studies	29	100	92	55	32	6.41	5.5
Computer Studies	20	100	86	35	23	6.3	4.6
Physical Education	12	100	92	33	25	6.0	5.1
Art and design	36	100	96	78	46	8.9	6.6
Music	8	100	93	63	35	7.8	5.7
Drama	20	95	99	65	38	7.5	6.6
Geography	40	100	92	43	38	6.6	5.7
History	36	97	88	42	35	6.2	5.5
Religious Studies	5	100	92	20	38	4.8	5.8
Sociology	12	75	86	50	35	5.5	5.3
Government and politics	6	100	85	50	30	6.0	4.9
English language	18	100	92	33	30	6.6	5.3
English literature	30	90	95	37	37	6.1	5.9
French	9	100	92	56	38	7.3	5.6
German	5	100	91	60	40	7.6	5.8

Spanish	2	100	93	0	56	5.0	6.8
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Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	16	75	76	6	-	0	-

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

77. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and biology. Lessons in chemistry and physics were also sampled. Physics and chemistry are also taught at AS and A2 levels, and a range of work from students in Year 12 and Year 13 was sampled. It was also possible to talk with students and some teaching of physics and chemistry was observed. Attainment and progress in physics and chemistry are good in lessons. Recent examination success at the higher grades is above the national average in both subjects.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The management of the department is very good. It creates very good teamwork and opportunities for professional development for all staff and student teachers.
- The quality of planning is very good, leading to very good course and lesson planning which enables students to build upon prior knowledge.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good, enabling students to ask questions to gain further understanding.
- A level results in recent years have been above national averages. Six out of eight students gained either A or B grades in Further Mathematics in 2002.

Areas for improvement

- The use of English or mathematical shorthand by students needs improvement, to explain processes whilst developing written solutions.
- Methods of enhancing the learning of the combined group of GCSE and City and Guilds students need to be found.
- The number of students progressing from Year 12 into Year 13 needs to be increased.
- The further development of ICT is needed to enhance teaching and learning.
- Improvement is needed to the ramps to the classrooms at Colesmead, which are at present a health and safety risk.

78. The inspection covered the AS and A2 courses in statistics, decision, pure mathematics and mechanics. GCSE modular and City and Guilds numeracy were also inspected. It was not possible to observe the lessons of the 74 students preparing for Application of Number as part of their key skills qualification. Some students were therefore interviewed on their progress.

79. The mathematics department does well for its 154 sixth form students, enabling students of all abilities to build upon their GCSE experiences. Since the last inspection, students have usually gained results in line with, or higher than, the national average. Whilst the number of advanced level students has risen since the previous inspection, the average points score has fallen. This trend was reversed in 2002 when the average points score rose to 7.2, well above the national average. Those gaining A and B grades in A2 examinations in 2002, 61 per cent, was the best proportion for four years. Of the eight students entered for further mathematics, six gained A or B grades whilst the other two gained grade Cs. These results represent good achievement. Overall, male students do as well in mathematics as in their other subjects. However, the female students generally do less well. Of the 29 students who sat the AS examinations in 2002, 15 have

continued to study for their A2 examinations. Five girls who gained either B or C grades at AS decided not continue their A level mathematics, preferring to concentrate on their three other A levels, so reflecting a national trend.

80. The standard of students' written and oral work in Year 13 is above average. The attainment of the five Year 13 Further Mathematics students is very good. A female student's presentation revealed a thorough understanding of the concepts and an appreciation of all the basic skills required to solve complex number problems. Her fellow students benefited from the clarity of her exposition, the model solutions and the accompanying diagrams. The Year 13 single mathematicians have good algebraic skills that are used effectively to prove trigonometrical identities.
81. The attainment of Year 12 AS level students is good. They can, for example, define a continuous random variable in statistics and the use of normal distribution tables to calculate the probability of a value falling between two given numbers. However, there is a tendency to use calculators unnecessarily to interpolate tabulated values.
82. The attainment of GCSE students is close to the course expectations. The recent sitting of the first module that tests their numerical skills has boosted their confidence; for example, they are able to calculate a pay rise of 7.5 per cent. The attainment of students studying for City and Guilds Numeracy Levels 1 and 2 is below expectations. Since September, they have made good gains in confidence. They are very aware of their weaknesses, for example to write 3.7 million in full, and show a strong determination to overcome them. Whilst the management of the class containing a mixture of GCSE and numeracy students is good, the students' learning is only satisfactory. This is because the needs and abilities of the two groups are very different and alternative ways should be considered to enhance students' learning. A general weakness amongst students of all abilities is the unwillingness to write words in English or in mathematical shorthand to explain parts of their solutions.
83. In 2002, the Year 12 Application of Number students achieved 100 per cent success rate at Level 2. The department has now clarified the criteria which, if met, will enable Application of Number students to gain Level 3 for the first time. Having had some initial doubts regarding the value of this part of the basic skills course, the students are developing their independent learning skills whilst researching all the numerical components of running a car or owning a mobile phone. They now have a much greater realisation of the value of money, having measured their potential earning power against the predicted expenditure. They find that the course specification enables them to focus their efforts towards demonstrating that they have the necessary skills to produce projects of the required standard. Concern is expressed by some of the 32 Level 3 and 43 Level 2 students that, whilst striving towards gaining useful key skills points which may help their entrance to university, their efforts may have an adverse effect upon their AS grades.
84. Overall, teaching and learning are good, with examples of very good and excellent teaching. The underlying strength is the quality of long-term and short-term planning. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons carefully. They use question and answer techniques effectively to determine students' levels of understanding and to involve them in the development of the lesson by building upon prior knowledge. Preparation is thorough, from the course specifications that enable students to know exactly what is expected of them, to the informative handouts which students annotate with understanding. Students' attitudes are very good. They are appreciative of, and responsive to, their teachers. Students have confidence in their teachers to raise their levels of attainment, recognising that they give generously of their free time by holding well-attended workshops after school. In the instances where teaching is

satisfactory, students' learning would be improved if teachers spoke less and involved their students more.

85. The management of the department is very good. The head of department has a clear sense of direction, evident from the new schemes of work designed to meet the demands of all the AS and A2 modules. End-of-topic tests are integrated into the schemes and identify for the students and teachers individual strengths and weaknesses. Students appreciate the opportunities to use the marking schemes that inform them of lost opportunities to gain marks. Extensive use is made of computers to store students' assessment data which is carefully analysed and shared to raise standards or to look for reasons for trends. A key feature of the department is the very good teamwork engendered by the head of department. Her delegation is enhancing the professional development of all teachers and student teachers who benefit from the support and encouragement given generously by the team. The library provides good support for students. However, ICT is not integrated into the sixth form courses as suitable software has yet to be traced.
86. Since the previous inspection, the department has generally been successful in maintaining standards above the national average. It has prepared 14 sixth form schemes of work for different AS or A2 modules, one for GCSE, one for City and Guilds Numeracy and two for the Application of Number courses. All staff have been monitored and observed in accordance with the school's performance management procedures. This is in addition to all the new developments within the 11-16 section of the school.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teaching and the planning of lessons are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good and strongly contribute to successful learning.
- Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of biology and are enthusiastic for the subject.
- Relationships are very good and attitudes of students are positive.
- Standards in external examinations are high and continue to rise.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT in biology needs further development.
- The further development of extra-curricular activities is needed.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching needs development.
- Results in A2 examinations need further improvement, particularly in the achievement of higher grades.

87. Biology is taught to AS level in Year 12 and to A2 level in Year 13. The retention rate is good and across the two years about two in three students remain to the end. For example, of the 41 students who started the AS course in September 2000, 27 have continued into the present A2 course in Year 13. A small number of students enter the course with previous experience from nearby schools and they have good success and feel well supported. In the present groups there are many more girls than boys.
88. Students' examination success in post-16 biology is largely good with most gaining grades in the range A to E. By the end of the AS course, nearly one in two students attain grades A or B. In 2001, the proportion of candidates gaining the higher grades in the A2 examinations was below the national average, though the average points score

was in line with the average. Predictions for the present A2 students are good and it is expected that the proportion of students who will gain grades A-B in 2003 will also be in line with or above the national average. This would continue the pattern of previous years, which results in points scored have been above the national average.

89. The standard of work seen during the inspection is above average. Attainment is good, sometimes very good, and students make good progress. In both year groups, students show that their earlier experience of biology was good and that concepts are well established. Students in Year 12 understand the mechanism of genetic replication and can explain the role of DNA polymerase in the production of new material. In Year 13, students have well developed practical skills and they understand the effect of varying light conditions on the rate of photosynthesis. They cope very well with the considerable demands of both AS and A2 courses, including the taking and making of notes. Communication skills also are well developed and there is spontaneity and good experience of cogent discussion and debate.
90. The quality of teaching is very good and reflects the considerable experience of the staff. Teachers' expectations are high, and students try hard to meet them. Post-16 biology is taught by the head of department and four other specialist teachers, all of whom show very good subject knowledge and understanding. They have very good relationships with the students and use time and resources effectively. The range of teaching methods is wide and, as a direct consequence, students respond well. For example, in the investigation of the effect of pH on the action of catalase with hydrogen peroxide responses were focused and mature and levels of confidence were very high. In all lessons seen, preparation was very good and resulted in learning where students were aware of the aims of the lesson and fully engaged with the new material. Students are attentive and work productively in lessons. Pace and challenge are good and students in Year 12 demonstrate clear understanding of the requirements of practical assessment and safe working practice. In Year 13, there is a general air of increasing maturity, responsibility and self-assessment, and students are quick to benefit and make good progress. The regular assessment of work and supporting commentary is good and students feel well informed and that their learning needs are well supported.
91. Students' learning is good, and they work hard and make good progress. In the lessons observed, the quality of students' work was high. They take a keen interest in scientific investigations. Assessed practical work and projects show well developed skills and include those of practical investigation, the competent handling of apparatus and equipment, confidence in written work and the ability to follow detailed instructions. Students generally show good understanding; their files and the recording of practical work are properly organised and written work is well presented and up to date. The careful guidance and advice from teachers is effective and students generally take considerable pride in maintaining their folders to a high standard. The quality of students' work on display is very good and some work is exceptional.

92. Leadership and management of the subject are very good and there is a clear direction to its development. The head of biology handles people with sensitivity, is well organised and a positive role model. She supports staff and students with considerable skill and there is a direct effect on the successful learning of students. The mechanisms for regular assessment, recording and reporting are secure and effective. This new head of department has been recently appointed and significant changes have been made which support learning well. The residential field trip is a major event in the experience of Year 13 students, and additional extra-curricular activities are planned. Documentation is very well organised, schemes of work and teaching strategies are being thoroughly revised and are well supported by new texts and resources. The tracking and recording of students' progress is good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

93. The focus of the inspection was on design and technology. This subject is taught at AS and A2 levels, in four areas - food technology, product design (graphics with materials technology), product design (textiles technology), and resistant materials technology.

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

Strengths

- Attainment is high in all four subject areas.
- There are well-constructed schemes of work, which have excellent systems for informing students of their progress, so that they can improve their work.
- The commitment and self-motivation of all the students enable them to produce coursework of good quality.
- Well-organised and enthusiastic teaching leads to excellent relationships between teachers and students.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation which matches the needs of the course for every lesson needs to be provided.
- Improved ICT equipment is needed, so that it can be used to support all coursework lessons.
- A wider range of graphics equipment is needed, to give greater richness to the course and a better match to the needs of the syllabus.

94. The school offers four AS courses in design and technology, which students follow for the first year, and then an A2 level course for the second year. In both courses, students have a choice to either specialise in product design in graphics or textiles, or in food technology or resistant materials

95. Over the last three years, results in the A2 level course have been above national averages, while the proportion achieving A or B grades was well above average. Last year, every student who entered for an A level examination passed. Students who study textiles achieved very good results, and those who studied the other materials got good results. The largest entry was 11 for graphic products. At AS level, the number of entries over the past years has been low, but last year with a much larger entry of 23, the pass rate was very good although there was an absence of the highest grades. However, the department takes in students of all abilities, many of them with only C grade or below at GCSE level, and in this context, the students do very well.

96. In lessons, standards of achievement are good. Students are well prepared by teachers so that they succeed in producing well-constructed coursework. Teachers review the students' work regularly on an individual basis. Students listen well, respect their teachers' expertise and conscientiously carry out their work. The relationship between student and teacher is excellent. Teachers treat the students as if they were their own, and this mutual respect is a hallmark of the departments' work. Good humour, good manners and hard work are all part of the ethos of the department.
97. Communication, both in drawing and writing, steadily improves as the course progresses, but the use of ICT and computer aided design (CAD) and computer aided manufacture (CAM) need further development. The range of media too in Graphics is limiting the range of outcomes possible and should be improved. Social and moral issues are tackled effectively in lessons and in the personal studies.
98. Teaching is never less than good and is often very good. Teachers work together in teams to plan and deliver each course very effectively. Lessons are very well prepared and have very good teaching materials. Teaching expertise is very good, but there are variations in the way staff work, and there are good practices that should be more widely shared. This should form a larger part for the departmental development plan. Learning is at least good in every lesson. The good pace and thoughtful approaches by teachers, together with supportive attitudes, allow all students rapidly to gain in skill and understanding.
99. Lower-attaining students feel very well supported and give of their best so that they too make very good progress. Students are engaged on individual design tasks and the course is designed to allow each student to work on tasks within their capability; as they improve, the work is extended to stretch them further.
100. The learning environment is good in the main but the limited accommodation at Colesmead is not helpful, despite the efforts of the staff to provide suitable materials. Here, ICT resources are poor and students do not get the access they need each lesson. Resources such as graphic markers, spraying facilities and good quality stocks of papers and cards are absent. Overall, these facilities do not support students as they should in generating exciting and effective design proposals. The students who study graphics are generally the lower-attaining and more needs to be done to give them effective support.
101. The management of design and technology is good and all staff are very involved in the departmental development plan and contribute to its outcomes. However, the split site and the range of staff involved have not enabled the department to be as unified as it should be. This was mentioned in the last report, and although matters have improved, still more needs to be done.
102. Overall, there has been a good improvement in further developing the subject since the last inspection and the four AS and A2 levels are a tribute to the wide range of skills, taught at a very high level.

BUSINESS

103. The focus of the inspection was on business studies, in which AS and A2 and GNVQ intermediate level courses were inspected. Business studies is a popular subject. Standards are very high in Year 13, students achieve well in all years, and provision for students is very good.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Standards are high.
- Increasing numbers of students are choosing business studies; they appreciate the high quality of provision.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is very good.
- Management of the department is very good.
- Assessment information is managed and used very well.
- Good quality resources and informative handbooks are available for students.

Areas for improvement

- More links with and visits to local business would provide a valuable extension to students' learning.
- Standards in the vocational course in Year 12 are low.
- Some teachers do not have recent experience of working in business or industry.

104. Standards are very high in the academic courses. In 2001, students achieved very good results in comparison with national standards, particularly in the high proportion of students achieving A or B grades, and this quality of performance was repeated in 2002. The trend has been for year-on-year improvement and the present Year 13 has many higher-attaining students, and standards are clearly well above the national average. Individual students have exceptional results at AS. However, the present Year 12 is clearly a less strong cohort and standards are lower. Students are achieving well in both years. Students can choose to study business at GNVQ Intermediate level and this provides a valuable progression route onto advanced courses for some students who would otherwise not be able to continue to study the subject. Students are achieving appropriately given their results at GCSE.

105. Attitudes to the subject are very good. Males and females succeed equally well, although there are more far more of the former in most classes. The subject clearly challenges the highest-attaining students but also supports those who encounter problems with some aspects of learning. Students are succeeding at A2 having completed their GNVQ. A particular feature of learning in Year 13 is the way that able students help others to understand difficult concepts, such as correlation and extrapolation and their use in marketing.

106. Students are achieving well because of the high quality of teaching and of their own very good response. Teachers are very skilled at questioning, to assess understanding and to encourage students to think for themselves. For example, intermediate students in Year 12 showed a clear understanding of simple break-even analysis at the end of the lesson because their teacher, through questioning, had identified their problems and provided expert support. The use and management of assessment data are also very good throughout the department and its use in setting targets is raising standards.

107. Teachers use their high level of knowledge to ensure that students have a variety of apt examples to help their understanding of topics such as industrial relations and total quality management. Learning is very effective because of the pace and challenge which encourage students to apply their numeracy and ICT skills. In Year 12, they focus well on tasks set in class and most show a good general knowledge of business theory. In Year 13, students are able to apply this knowledge to a more theoretical approach, for example their work shows a clear grasp of motivational theory. The majority of students

in Year 13 clearly have the detailed knowledge and understanding to succeed at the higher levels.

108. Students make use of good resources produced by the department including the handbooks. They can all become involved in Young Enterprise and GNVQ students benefit from work placements. The school has some links with local industry but students feel that they would benefit from a greater variety and more frequent visits. Not all teachers have the recent experience of business or industry that would be valuable in teaching vocational courses.

109. The department is managed very well. Trainee teachers are supported very well and the new courses have been effectively introduced. Planning is very good and documentation is comprehensive and readily accessible. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. This is a department that provides a quality of care and advice for its students that they value very highly.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

110. The focus of the inspection was on information and communication technology.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good, particularly teachers' knowledge of the subject and management of students in lessons.
- Students' response, interest in the subject and ability to work independently on practical work are excellent.
- Teachers' demonstrations of the work to be done on the electronic whiteboards are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- There is at present a small number of students taking the key skills course at level 3.
- The time allocated to teach the key skills courses is limited.

111. Standards are very good overall. Standards on entry to the sixth form are average for the school. In 2001, 20 students took the A level course in computing; all passed and seven obtained the higher A or B grades, a result well above the national average. The results of the A2 level ICT examination, which replaced the computing examination in 2002, were similar. This is a very good achievement. All students, with the exception of those taking re-sit examinations, take key skills courses at either Level 2 or Level 3, achieving good results. Of those who completed the course at Level 2 in 2002, nearly all passed the assessments and all six students who completed the course at Level 3 passed – a good achievement. Male and female students perform equally well. Attainment in lessons is good overall and sometimes very good. Gifted and talented students progress well, taking full advantage of the requirement that students work independently on coursework and portfolios.

112. The overall standard of learning is very good and sometimes excellent. On the AS level course, students learn very well about information, systems and communications and by undertaking practical tasks. In a very good lesson in Year 12, students were learning to use a software routine to modify data in a spreadsheet by converting numerical test marks to letter grades. In another equally very good lesson in the same year, students

were producing powerpoint presentations on various basic applications of ICT for future use by younger students. Last year, a student had undertaken a practical task well, producing an improved tracking system for a company's tenders. On the A2 course, students learn about communications, systems and systems management by taking more advanced practical tasks. In a good lesson in Year 13, students were learning about ICT input and output devices. In this lesson, they were given a very good demonstration of voice recognition. In an excellent lesson in the same year, students were seen learning to use access and queries software to filter, sort and combine tables of data.

113. In the one year key skills courses, students learn to search for, select, develop and present information, by developing portfolios based on major applications. In a very good lesson in Year 12, Level 2 and 3 students produced presentations and documents for their work in geography, photography and religious education.
114. Students have some opportunities to apply ICT in other A level courses, particularly those in business studies and design and technology. In other subjects, use is sometimes restricted by lack of time or equipment, though several, for example mathematics, have a wealth of software and staff expertise available. Students, often at home, use the internet to research topics and word processing to improve the presentation of their work. In photography, students produce and modify digital images and in design and technology they use computer-aided design and manufacture to produce both two and three dimensional products well.
115. The overall quality of teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. All teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject and manage students very well in lessons. They give very clear introductions to topics and demonstrations of work, using electronic whiteboards. Teachers have a good rapport with students and use questions well to involve them in learning as lessons progress. As a result, students respond well, are eager to learn and have a good opinion of the courses. Students need more opportunities to write about their work and to take more notes in lessons. All work is assessed and marked well according to the awarding body's requirements. More time is needed to teach the key skills courses; allocation of extra time would enable more students to succeed in the Level 3 course.
116. The departments of ICT and key skills are both well led and there is good co-operation between the two heads of departments. The application of ICT in other subjects is currently under review. There have been very good improvements since the last inspection. The key skills courses are now well established and more students are taking them. The A level course has changed to one in ICT and is beginning to attract more female students. The computing and learning resources are now very good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

117. The focus of the inspection was on physical education.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching is at least good, and often better.
- Students' attitudes are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teachers are very motivated and committed to their work.

Areas for improvement

- The marking of written work needs to provide more information to students.
- Teachers need to continue to develop strategies to raise the number of students achieving higher grades.
- The school should develop opportunities for all students to participate in sixth form physical education.
- The range and quality of accommodation require considerable improvement.

118. Standards seen during the inspection are above average. In the A2 examinations in 2001, all students passed, while the proportion achieving A or B grades was above the national average. AS level examination results are also above the national average. However, based on the levels these students have achieved by the start of the course, more could achieve higher grades. All students currently following examination courses are meeting course requirements. There are no differences between the standards of male and female students. No physical education opportunities are provided for those not studying PE for examinations.

119. Students in Year 13 are producing work of above average standard. They can identify from previous learning and transfer relevant knowledge to new work. A good example of this was seen in the practical lesson observed when students were preparing for their synoptic interview; they could clearly recall work in previous years on a specific sport, link it to transference of skills, and apply physiological and anatomical understanding. The more able needed prompting to use exact technical terminology. The quality of written work is clear and purposeful, although students of higher and middle ability need to use exact technical terminology, especially in extended answers.

120. Students in Year 12 have made a good start to the AS course. Due to the timetable, it was not possible to see the practical performance of any students. In their theory work, they were able to apply Newton's Laws of Motion to practical examples from sporting performance. The amount of oral contributions to open-ended questioning was limited at the start of the lesson; this improved as the students became more comfortable with the topic.

121. Overall teaching of AS and A2 Level PE is at least good. The most effective teaching involves very good subject knowledge, the clear identification of what and how students should learn, and a range of techniques to meet the demands of the examination specification and individual needs. However, some of the middle and higher ability students need to be challenged in terms of tasks much sooner in Year 12. Teachers

expect students to write clearly, to use independent research and link their theoretical understanding with practical performance. Teachers do not mark written work well. Their marking is not informative enough.

122. Students are very positive, well motivated and show enthusiasm for their work. Work output was clearly high in the Year 13 lesson observed. However, in Year 12, some of the students who were rather passive in their contributions. A good number of students help with lower school PE. They value their teachers and the work that they do for them.
123. The head of department provides very good leadership and management to a very enthusiastic and dedicated team. She has a clear intention to raise standards and believes that the students can achieve more. A range of extra-curricular opportunities is offered and many students take part. There is no regular departmental teaching base or resource area. The department makes the best use it can of the unsatisfactory accommodation available. Both the quality and range of accommodation need review, and some is in urgent need of repair and refurbishment.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

124. The focus of the inspection was on health and social care.

Health and social care

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well, and very well in coursework projects.
- Students use visits to care settings to develop good skills.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and good relationships with students.
- Students develop very good attitudes to their work.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not use ICT enough in lessons, particularly for statistical analysis.
- Students depend too much on teachers to provide materials.
- Some lessons are not challenging enough.

125. AVCE (Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education) courses have recently been established and the six unit course, equivalent to an A Level, is proving popular. Very few students drop out of courses. Intermediate GNVQ courses are not currently run, but several students move on to AVCE courses from GCSE in child development.
126. In 2001, the four students entered completed the first AVCE course successfully, achieving results generally in line with the national average, though numbers are too small for valid national comparison. Year 12 students in 2002 (now Year 13) attained overall grades slightly below average, but achieved well, and very well in their coursework module, above teachers' expectations based on students' average GCSE points scores. Current Year 12 and Year 13 students are making good progress in lessons and achieving well. Standards of work seen were satisfactory overall.
127. In a good Year 12 lesson seen, students developed a good basic understanding of the need for confidentiality in care settings. For homework, they used ICT well to word process their notes, but some students' written evaluations were too brief, and some work was unfinished. The quantity of written work was good and overall standards were

in line with average expectation. Year 13 students took careful notes from the teacher about health service funding and shared their knowledge with each other very supportively. Students generally research information well from the web, but do not use ICT enough to word process drafts or produce graphs from statistics on population and diets, because computers are not always available in lessons. Students use teachers' well-organised visits to early years settings well to plan children's games, but do not have sufficient time to carry out their interactions with young children in sufficient depth because they do not go on a long enough work placement.

128. Teaching and learning are good overall. In the small sample of lessons seen, teachers made aims clear to students and created positive learning conditions, supporting students effectively, so they clearly enjoyed the subject. When given the opportunity, students enthusiastically discussed their views in groups and prepared presentations on codes of practice in care settings. Teachers' thoroughly structured lesson plans and clear handouts enabled students to gain a good deal of information about legislation in care settings, although students were not always able to choose their own ways of learning, for example when evaluating ethical dilemmas in care settings. For example, Year 13 students were given facts on health funding rather than being given the opportunity to research and present their own suggestions.
129. Completed Year 12 coursework, moderated by the examining board, showed good knowledge and understanding of communication theories, well evidenced through digital photographs of one-to-one interactions in a local nursery. Students compiled very effective action plans to improve their interaction skills, well monitored by teachers, who set homework regularly and mark work very thoroughly. Clear targets given to students on coursework progress sheets are very helpful and show students how to improve their project grades. The well-coordinated course helps students sustain very good attitudes and excellent behaviour.
130. Leadership and management are good. Staff work well as a team, sharing expertise of vocational practice effectively. Students' progress is well tracked, and schemes of work make good use of up-to-date textbooks, videos and visits to local care settings, though students' use of extended work placements to enrich their assignments is under-developed. This, together with more opportunities to use ICT to improve key communication and number skills, are the main areas of development. There is insufficient information to gauge improvement since the last inspection but the subject has good capacity for further improvement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

131. The focus of the inspection was on art (photography), music, and drama. A lesson of art (drawing and painting) was also seen. In this, teaching and learning were outstanding. Because students had been so well prepared, the teacher was able to give the class complete freedom to get on with their individual work, and students learned rapidly and well. The concentration on the improvement of their own standards which this allows leads to rapid progress and very good results in this subject.

Photography

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

Strengths

- There is an extremely high level of attainment in both A2 level and AS syllabuses.
- First-rate teaching enables students clearly to understand what needs to be done and gives them the capability to succeed.
- Excellent support is given to all students, including clear targets and deadlines.
- Conscientious and self-motivated students take their work very seriously and are determined to succeed.

Areas for improvement

- Improved accommodation is urgently needed, to give students sufficient room to work.
- More digital cameras, both still and video, are required, so that students can have access to images more quickly. More ICT equipment is needed.

132. The school offers both an AS course and a new A2 level course in Art – Photography. Students in both Years 12 and 13 can take the AS course and Year 13 students can then follow the A2 course. There have been exceptional students who have covered both courses in a single year.

133. Photography has become an extremely popular and successful course over the last few years. Results have improved until they are now exceptional. Last year, of the 57 students entered for AS examinations, 24 gained A grades and 13 gained B. In the A2 level examination last year, 23 students entered, 11 gained A grades and 9 Bs, all the others passing. The majority of candidates matched or improved on their AS level grade. For all students, these grades showed significant achievement, being generally far higher than could be anticipated at entry.

134. In lessons, standards of achievement are very good. Students' portfolios contain work of very high quality, and students are expected to continue to improve their work week by week. In consequence, many students are thinking and working on a wide range of activities, equipping them with a capacity to solve problems and produce outcomes of quality. Technical skills are high. Students work with equal facility on digital images as well as with classical wet photography. For example, they develop their work in the context of studying artists like Andy Warhol, whose achievements significantly influence their technical development.

135. Social, cultural and moral issues are tackled very effectively in lessons and in the portfolios and are a significant influence on the young people concerned. The spiritual dimension is very strong, with a real appreciation of beauty and art challenging the human condition.

136. Each student has sensitive and personal support throughout the course and their teachers guide them very effectively. This is because assessment is built into the course and students know what they are doing well, what they are doing less well and how to improve their performance.

137. Teaching is very good and sometimes really excellent. This is because it affects the students so directly, enabling them to achieve in a way that they never knew they could. Students are amazed at their own progress. Relationships are at the heart of this highly successful teaching and learning. Teachers challenge and drive their students. The

students accept the challenge because they know they will never be allowed to fail. So learning is very good or better in every lesson. The lower-attaining students in the subject feel very well supported and give of their best, so that they too make very good progress.

138. Accommodation is adequate, but limited space and resources have to be skilfully organised to allow students access at all. This process needs yet more structure, as boys tend to hog the computers and students have to find other parts of the school in which to work.
139. The management of photography is excellent. Charismatic leadership and thoughtful approaches allow the staff to work together well. Although the course is very well structured, systems are informal. The subject is now growing so rapidly these now need formalising. Photography offers students the opportunity to work on AS and A2 level courses, so offering a liberal studies dimension in curriculum.
140. This subject has been introduced since the last inspection and has made exceptional progress in this time.

Music

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

Strengths

- Results at A2 and AS level are excellent.
- The achievement of students is very good.
- The standards of teaching and learning are very good.
- There is very good extra curricular provision for all pupils and students.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities for students to experience ICT in the classroom.

141. Recent results in music at A2 and AS level have been excellent. Although group sizes at A2 level are small, the proportion of students gaining grades A to B is well above the national average. A similar picture is seen at AS level where there are larger teaching groups. A high proportion of pupils come to the AS courses with A* grades at GCSE. Similarly, they begin the A2 level course with very high attainment at AS level. The achievement of students is very good, as they improve on these exacting standards. All students who begin the A2 and AS level courses are entered for the final examinations.
142. Attainment seen in class and in sampling work is above average. Year 13 students can effectively compare different genres of music, referring to a wide range of musical repertoire. They can accurately identify musical elements by ear and use high levels of technical language to describe them. Year 12 students can sing spontaneously in parts from memory and can fluently analyse musical features in composition.
143. Overall, the standard of teaching and learning is very good and the quality of teaching ranges from excellent to good. The lessons are very well structured and planned to be highly challenging. Standards of learning are very good overall and pupils show high levels of interest in their work and are able to reflect on and build on their weaknesses.

144. In a Year 13 lesson on Baroque music, teaching was very well informed and students were extensively challenged, with well-paced teaching and searching questions. As result, students became more fluent in using technical terms in different languages. They were able to make effective stylistic connections between different works that they had studied.
145. Year 12 students had the advantage of excellent teaching about the music for 'ET'. The lesson began with good humoured and energetic revision of nine different concepts and moved swiftly on through a wide variety of tasks and tests. As a result, students were highly motivated and discussed aspects of the music in ever-increasing detail. A strong spiritual point was made when the teacher demonstrated how the structure of the music was directly linked to the emotional content of the film.
146. Teachers make good use of assessment. Work is regularly marked with detailed, supportive comments. Students are actively involved in assessment through discussion of their progress and by target setting. The quality of information and guidance given to students is good and teachers give their time freely. Students value the opportunities offered to them, in and out of the classroom.
147. There is a wide range of challenging extra-curricular activities for students to extend their learning. These include the Senior Choir and Orchestra as well as 'Slide'. Students are also involved in regular informal concerts as well as organising their own concerts and performances in the school and community.
148. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. All staff are involved in teaching and meet regularly to co-ordinate their teaching, to discuss students' progress and to fine-tune the curriculum. They receive regular training to keep up to date with course developments.
149. Since the last inspection, there have been several important improvements to the course. These include the attainment and achievement of students at AS and A2 level as well as leadership and management of the subject.

Drama

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

Strengths

- Very high standards are achieved by students.
- Teaching in drama is very good.
- The curriculum in drama is imaginative and challenging.
- The subject makes a positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- The department's handbook and schemes of work need to be updated and extended.

150. Although it was only possible to observe a limited number of lessons, these, along with rehearsals for the school production, indicate that standards in the subject are very high and well above average. Standards in 2001 were above the national average, with two thirds of students gaining an A or B grade in their A2 level examinations. This compares to a national average of 40 per cent. Standards improved further in 2002, with 16 of the 19 students who completed the course gaining A and B grades.

151. The majority of students entering the course have already studied drama at GCSE level and arrive in Year 12 with a good range of skills and techniques. They build on these skills and use them within more demanding and complex situations. Students study the philosophies and ideas of a number of leading drama practitioners such as Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud and incorporate this knowledge in to their own devised work and scripted activities. This was observed in two very good lessons in Year 13 as students prepared for their final assessment in their devised work as they explored such issues as 'Dreams and Nightmares' and used Edward Munch's painting *The Scream* as a stimulus for some high quality drama work on the issue of mental illness. Students combined a range of literary and drama forms in order to create an exciting and imaginative whole. Their final work included mime, movement, dance-drama, music and poetry, choral work and physical theatre as well as using scripted monologues and extracts from specific plays. Students engage in very good collaborative learning. They listen to and value each other's ideas and opinions and arrive at a consensus of opinion as to the outline and framework for their improvisations. Students make positive and constructive comments about each other's work, and use them to improve their work, through repetition and the use of good rehearsal techniques.
152. Observation of rehearsals for the school production of The Young Vic's version of *The Nativity* indicates that students are able to incorporate what they have learned over the two years into an imaginative and very well performed production. Students have a clear understanding of how to create a range of characters, through appropriate emphasis on the physical, the use of voice and the use of space to indicate relationships between characters. Students are able to sustain a character over time, are selfless in their efforts, and are highly committed to very good quality ensemble work.
153. Whilst the focus of the lessons observed was very much on the rehearsal of devised work prior to internal assessment, with limited opportunities for direct teaching, the high quality work produced by students gave plenty of evidence that it could only have been arrived at through very good teaching. Teachers provide students with a very good range of demanding, challenging and even exciting learning opportunities. Students are given the chance to engage in a number of dramatic and theatrical forms, including music-hall, pantomime, puppet work and choral work. They consider Commedia dell'Arte, the Theatre of Cruelty, naturalistic drama and physical theatre. This provides students with those skills which enable them to combine all of these elements into high quality pieces of 'theatre' in its broadest sense of the word, rather than simply the performing of plays.
154. Leadership and management in the subject are good. The department is led by a well-informed and enthusiastic head who, along with a team of talented teachers, is committed to maintaining, and improving upon the high standards of work achieved by students.
155. Regular opportunities are provided for students to perform their devised and scripted work to their family and friends, whilst the very good school productions are much appreciated by students and the school community as a whole. Students are given the chance to attend local and national theatre productions to support their learning in the subject.

156. The department provides a satisfactory range of documentation to support teaching and learning, though the department handbook needs to be extended and updated. It would also be advantageous to both teachers and students to extend the current curriculum map in order to show more clearly how the content of the A level syllabus is delivered in practice.

157. With emphasis on the need to work together in a collaborative manner, the exploration of drama and plays from different cultures and traditions, as well as the examination of a number of universal truths and morals, the subject makes a valuable contribution to students moral, social and cultural development. A real spiritual dimension could also be seen in students' devised work and the school's production of *The Nativity*.

158. Standards in the subject have improved significantly since the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

159. The focus of the inspection was on geography, history and psychology. In addition, one lesson in each of government and politics, and sociology, was visited. In the Year 12 politics lesson on the function of the House of Commons, the teacher's very clear grasp of the subject led to very good progress, so that students learnt rapidly and with enjoyment. Such good teaching and progress are the basis of the very good A2 level results in this subject. The well taught Year 13 sociology lesson on gender and religion was attended by students from the local college of further education. Students made good progress in this lesson, showing a level of attainment around that expected nationally. Results in this subject are in line with the national average.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about their subject.
- Lessons have a clear structure and are very well planned and resourced.
- Students work hard and enjoy their studies. Relationships and conduct are very positive.
- Standards at A2 level are above national averages.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring and recording of progress and attainment in the early weeks of AS and A2 courses require more attention.

160. In 2001, A2 level results were above average; all candidates passed, with 43 per cent achieving the higher A or B grades. In 2002 this figure has increased to 69 per cent. Standards attained at AS level are also high. Almost every student gained a graded result at both AS and A2 Level in both 2001 and 2002. There were no significant differences in the standards attained by students of different gender or ethnicity.

161. The observation of students in lessons and analysis of samples of their work show that standards are well above average. Students started on the courses with above average levels of GCSE attainment, and these standards represent good progress over the course so far.

162. Students show good knowledge and understanding of introductory topics both in physical

and human geography. They work with confidence on their own, collect information from a variety of sources and form sound judgements from the data. Their map work and their ability to make use of photographic evidence are very good. Students use these skills appropriately to support their practical and fieldwork assignments, which are of a consistently high standard. Students make very effective use of new technologies, including the internet, to enhance the accuracy, range and presentation of their work.

163. Overall, teaching is very good with some excellent teaching in Year 12. Lessons have a clear structure. Resources, whether in the form of text, maps or the students' existing knowledge, are used very effectively. Internet sources are employed very well to provide relevant, topical and interesting information, statistics, photographs and articles to challenge higher-attaining students and extend others. All teachers show very good subject knowledge, not only through what they say, but also in how they check students' learning and give effective support to slower learners and those with special educational needs. Extended pieces of writing are carefully marked and students are given clear and accurate judgements on the quality of their work, which helps them to improve it. A weakness in the teaching is that there is not enough attention to marking and recording progress at the start of each course. Assessment practices otherwise are good and students have clear targets. Numeracy skills are developed well by, for example, plotting tourist numbers against coral reef damage using best-fit principles. Geography makes a very important contribution to development of key skills in information and communication technology and communication. These skills in turn greatly enhance the quality of work in geography. A fine example involved Year 12 students in preparation of a photograph, diagram and text presentation, developed as paired work and presented to the class with spoken commentary, followed by probing questioning. Students show high level information and communication technology, communication and interpersonal skills in this work about coastal defence strategies. They also demonstrate detailed and accurate knowledge and understand of the topic and very good command of technical language of the subject.
164. Students learn well, have very positive attitudes and conduct, work hard and relate well to their peers and teachers. Relationships, conduct and the mutual support of students and teachers ensure that learning can proceed at a good pace without loss of time to disruption and this raises standards. Students are highly motivated to succeed. They enjoy the subject and speak highly of the quality of teacher support and encouragement they receive. Fieldwork opportunities are a very important factor both in attracting students to continue their studies in geography and in enhancing their understanding of, for example, erosion and deposition processes and human responses to these on the Dorset coast. Students can talk authoritatively on the aspects of the course they have studied. There is good growth in geographical maturity both in oral work and in writing during the first term of the AS course, which is further developed during the second A-level year.
165. Leadership and management of the subject are good, with good capacity to maintain or further improve standards. Teachers are well motivated and work as a very effective team, focused on achieving high results for their students. The good sequencing of topics and themes in the scheme of work and the up-to-date nature of the case studies contribute significantly to the very good teaching and learning. Resources are good and very good use is made of new technologies to enhance teaching and learning. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

History

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

Strengths

- Teaching and students' response are very good.
- Standards are high and students achieve well.
- The department provides valuable study guides for its students and library resources are used well.
- Support for the highest-attaining students and those with learning difficulties is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Computers are not used in the classroom as a regular part of teaching and learning.
- There is not enough focus on key vocabulary in some lessons.
- Some rooms used are away from the main building and are not well suited to advanced level work.

166. Results were above the national average in 2001. In 2002 all students passed and more than half were awarded B grades. In AS, students were able to meet course requirements in 2002; many were awarded the highest grade but some are retaking papers to improve their overall grade. The overall trend is upward. Students achieve appropriately or better in relation to their results at GCSE. There is no significant difference between the results of male and female students and most stay on to A2. Standards in the present Year 13 are very high. It is clear from the number of higher grades that the highest-attaining students are achieving well, as are students with special educational needs. Individual students in Year 12 are already working at a high standard.

167. In Year 13, students have a good level of knowledge and real maturity in their approach to the subject. They can understand complex issues, for example when examining the revolutionary movements in Tsarist Russia. They all clearly show the ability to conduct independent investigation and to use computers effectively. The highest-attaining students can discuss key factors in early twentieth century Russia and understand the impact of war on a fragile economic situation, while average students show a good level of understanding of key events such as Bloody Sunday. The oral and written work of the highest-attaining students shows a very analytical approach and the ability to use a wide range of sources to study historians' views on Elizabeth 1. The key skill of communication is developed well in written work and discussion in class. Students use ICT very effectively but computers and projectors are not available in the teaching rooms and this limits some aspects of learning. In Year 12, students are already showing a good understanding of the Reformation in Germany, although in some lessons lower-attaining students are insufficiently well prepared for the challenge of using unfamiliar vocabulary. Higher-attaining students show a real knowledge of the range of belief in Germany and appreciate that Luther was in many ways a conservative.

168. In both year groups, students are active participants in lessons. Teaching is very good and students learn very well because they take responsibility for their own work by researching different themes and then reporting back to the group. They make decisions about the past based on what they have read rather than relying on class notes. Teachers are really knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the subject and students share this enthusiasm. Questioning is particularly effective and it focuses classroom discussion very well. Assessment procedures are good and students in Year 13 are made very clear about examination criteria. Self and peer group assessment is being used very effectively to raise attainment of all students.

169. The high standards and the quality of teaching and learning are a result of the very good management and development of the subject. Resources have been developed very well and they are readily accessible despite the limitations of available accommodation. Procedures and documentation are good. The library is a valuable resource and is used well. Teachers work together effectively as a team. It is clear that the subject has improved well since the last inspection. Students judge their experience in the subject to be very good.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- The students reach well above average standards in the A2 level examinations.
- Students are taught very well by relating psychological theory to their lives and interests.
- The students' enthusiasm for the subject leads to stimulating discussion and debate.
- Attendance at lessons is very good.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is not used enough to support students' learning.
- Marking is not always clear enough about how students might improve their work.
- A small group of boys are not benefiting from the course, as they have not been adequately guided about the demands of the courses.

170. Results at A2 level in 2001 have been well above average, with all students attaining a pass grade, and a well above average proportion achieving A or B grades. Students following the AS level course reach above average standards overall. These results represent very good progress for A2 level students in 2001 and good achievement for AS students in relation to their earlier GCSE results. The most recent unconfirmed results in the 2002 examinations show a similar pattern. Male and female students reach comparable standards, though it is mainly female students who reach the highest grades. Standards have steadily risen over the years and are set to remain high as a result of very good teaching and the interest and enthusiasm of the students. Though about a quarter of students do not continue with the subject into A2 level, almost all those following the A2 level course complete it successfully. A high proportion of the students intends to study psychology at university.

171. Lessons and the work seen reflect the high standards reached in examinations. Students join the AS course with wide ranging levels of attainment. Not all approach the course with a realistic sense of its demands, with the consequence that a few struggle with the more demanding work. This is particularly true of male students. Students in Year 12 build well on the common sense understanding they bring to the course and show a growing sensitivity to the rigours of psychological enquiry. In the study of normality, for instance, they use a good range of technical language to express their opinions and are sensitive to the importance of grounding opinions in evidence. They develop increasing sophistication in handling relevant statistical concepts. They understand the difference between causal and correlational accounts of the relationship between stress and life-changes. Students in Year 13, conduct tests with varying degrees of competence but all come to see the significance of questions of reliability and validity when drawing conclusions. Their confidence in applying psychological theory to their own lives and interests is a strong feature, for instance, of their work on dreams.

172. The students are taught very well. A striking feature of all lessons is the teachers' very

good knowledge of what they teach. This gives the students the confidence to ask demanding questions, with the assurance that the answers they receive will be illuminating. The teachers provide a good balance of practical activities, discussion and explanations to sustain the students' interest and help them to engage critically with their own ideas. Students are encouraged to take good notes and read beyond the basic requirements of the course. The limited access to information and communication technology limits the range of resources used. Though teachers work hard to ensure that written work is marked regularly, comments are occasionally not clear enough about how well students are performing or about how they could improve their work. There is some evidence, also, that students tend to accept their predicted grades too readily as the target they should reach. Students are good learners and appreciate the fact that they experience psychology not as a dull involvement with books and theories but as a dynamic engagement with the understanding of real life experiences. They thrive on discussion and debate. Students with special educational needs are helped to engage with lessons to the full extent of their competence and achieve as well as their peers.

173. The subject is very well led and managed and is supported well by the humanities department. The subject benefits from experienced and well-qualified teachers who continue to extend their expertise through appropriate in-service training. Accommodation and resources are adequate. However, students do not use information and communication technology enough to support learning, as there are difficulties about getting access to computers. The subject is on a very firm footing in the school and is set to continue to attract large numbers of students.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

174. The focus of the inspection was on English and French. French was the main focus of the inspection of languages, but German in both Years 12 and 13 were inspected. It was not possible to inspect Spanish.

English

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

Strengths

- Good standards are achieved by students in A2 level Literature.
- Teaching is good and students learn well.
- Syllabuses are imaginatively interpreted and a challenging and demanding range of activities are provided for students.

Areas for improvement

- Students need sharper and more detailed medium-term targets for the improvement of their work.
- The current scheme of work needs to be extended so that the contents of the A-level syllabuses are more clearly identified.

175. Standards in English are good overall. Evidence from GCSE results indicates that attainment in English upon entry into A-level courses is good, though a significant minority of students begin their course with a C grade, rather than the more secure A or B. Students go on to achieve well in relation to their prior learning and sustain good progress over time.
176. Attainment for the higher grades in A level literature in 2001 was on the national average, with just over a third of students gaining an A or B grade. In points scored, achievement was just above the national average. Standards improved further in 2002 when over half the students gained an A or B grade, an achievement above the national average of recent years.
177. The school introduced a combined A-level language and literature course in 2000 with the intention of widening the A-level English options available to students. This attracted a number of lower-attaining students, with the result that standards in 2002 were below average, with just over a quarter of students gaining an A or B grade. The scrutiny of students' written work in the current Year 13 indicates that standards in this new course are improving.
178. The re-sit course offered to students in Year 12 makes a positive contribution to students' progress and learning with the large majority of students achieving an acceptable grade.
179. Students' oral skills are good overall. A number of higher-attaining students speak with confidence and make very perceptive and mature comments about the texts they study. In contrast a number of students, particularly in Year 12, lack confidence in their oral skills and defer to the more articulate members of the group. Teachers recognise this issue and provide regular opportunities for students to engage in group oral activities. They ask direct questions to the quieter and more passive members of the group, challenge students initial responses and encourage all students to speak in more detail and at length.
180. Students' reading skills are likewise good. More able students display high order reading skills. They appreciate the writers' use of linguistic and poetic devices to explore concepts, ideas and issues. Lower-attaining students have good technical reading skills, but do not always fully comprehend sub-text and have some problems in interpreting such elements as satire and irony and the writer's use of the implied and the unstated. Students are given the chance to develop good critical and analytical skills throughout the sixth form, though some students still find these activities somewhat demanding.
181. A detailed examination of students' written work in the two A-level courses offered indicates that standards in writing in the sixth form are good. A number of higher-attaining students are able to make a strong personal response to the texts that they read. They present well reasoned arguments supported by evidence from their texts and well selected quotations to support their ideas and opinions. There is good evidence that students 'read around' their texts and engage in personal research to extend their knowledge of the books they read. In contrast some lower-attaining pupils rely too much on the ideas and opinions of accepted academics and the notes and photocopied materials supplied to them by their teachers.
182. The overall quality of teaching is good, and no lesson seen was less than satisfactory. Most lessons are well planned organised and managed. Lesson objectives are shared with students and are evaluated at the end of lessons to see if they have been achieved. Lessons are active and animated, with timed targets ensuring that students stay on task

and that the lesson moves forward with a clear sense of direction and purpose. Teachers have high expectations of all students and provide them with a good range of challenging and demanding activities. Teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge and convey it to students in a meaningful manner. However, they do not always ensure that students are able to use the information they are given, as for example in a lesson on linguistic devices, when students struggled to understand how irony worked in the poem they were studying.

183. Leadership and management in the subject are good, with all teachers being committed to the raising of standards. The department uses a good range of assessment and marking procedures, though targets for improvement need to be sharper and regularly reviewed.
184. The department uses a satisfactory range of documentation to support teaching and learning, though it would be to the advantage of both teachers and students to provide a more detailed scheme of work in order to show how the content of the syllabuses used by the department are to be delivered in practice.
185. Standards in the single English Literature A level offered at the time of the last inspection have improved.
186. All students not taking English in the sixth form are provided with key skills communication lessons. The majority of students gain Level 2 in these skills, with a significant number of students gaining the higher Level 3. When combined with the development of literacy across the curriculum the provision for students to develop their literary and communication skills is good.

French and German

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

Strengths

- A-level results in French and German are well above national averages, with a much higher than average proportion of the top two grades.
- Overall, teaching is good across the two languages.
- Students' very good attitudes to their work and the considerable support given by their teachers contribute significantly to their achievement.
- Long and medium-term planning is very good. Students receive helpful course guides and much supportive material.
- Work is carefully marked and students are set well-considered targets for improvement.
- The school offers a rich languages curriculum. French, German and Spanish taught throughout the school are further enriched by opportunities for home visits, European work experience and a weekly Russian club.

Areas for improvement

- Students' grammatical accuracy is below average for the course, particularly in Year 12 French.
- The department lacks language-learning software which would help independent language improvement.

187. Attainment in AS and A2 examinations in both languages is well above the national average. In 2001, all candidates passed, while the proportion of grades A and B was well above the national achievement. Results have been rising in recent years.

Standards seen in French

188. Standards in Year 13 are above average and in Year 12 are average overall for this relatively early stage of the academic year, with listening, reading and accents above average, and the highest-attainers well above average, because students are taught almost entirely in French. Grammatical accuracy is below average. Teachers prepare students thoroughly for their coursework assignments, show them how to raise the quality of their language and provide high-quality supportive material so that students' written prepared assignments are above or well above average, showing a very good range of vocabulary and structures, several with above average accuracy. Spontaneous speaking and unrehearsed or first draft writing clearly convey a message, but, other than in the work of the highest-attainers, contains several basic grammatical errors, particularly in Year 12. Year 12 students are coming to grips with the big jump from GCSE to AS. Access to reference books and dictionaries in their GCSE examination has reduced the amount they committed to memory and left some major gaps, for example several cannot use accurately basic tenses, such as present or imperfect. They appreciate and benefit from intensive revision of basic and some more advanced grammar. By Year 13, students have made significant progress and use their extended vocabulary and increased structures with greater confidence and accuracy, but several still make basic grammatical errors in first drafts of written work. They tackle topics and texts of appropriate difficulty, such as discussion or essays on racism and current politics in France, or commentaries on literary extracts, for example from Camus.

Standards seen in German

189. As in French, standards in prepared coursework assignments are mostly above, and a few are well above average. Standards overall are broadly average for this time in the course in Year 12 and above average in Year 13. The strongest areas are listening, reading and accents which benefit from teaching conducted predominantly in German. Grammatical accuracy is less strong, and a little below average. In Year 12, the higher-attainers speak quite fluently with a good range of vocabulary. In Year 13, in the grammatical lesson observed, a poor grasp of adjectival endings held back students' fluency, but they speak with good accents, have good understanding and are working on texts and topics of appropriate difficulty. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve well.

Both languages

190. Students have very good attitudes to their work. They listen carefully to each other and the teachers. Relationships are invariably good. Year 12 students are aware of, and work hard to improve, their grammatical weakness. Some of the boys in particular are pleased to be learning and applying rules. Year 13 students enjoy tackling more complex and adult topics, such as contemporary French politics, environmental issues and drug-related problems. Studying such issues contributes well to their personal development.

191. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. It is rarely less than satisfactory and most is good, and occasionally very good. Teachers use French and German extensively. Most are very strong linguists. Lessons are well prepared. In Year 12, at this early stage, teaching sensibly concentrates on improving grammatical accuracy and widening vocabulary. Most teachers pitch the work at an appropriate level and ensure that students improve their language to meet the demands of the course. The better teaching maintains a slick pace and time is used to the full. Teachers encourage students to discuss and express opinions on current events or guide them to improve written and spoken accuracy by exploiting many grammatical examples. They enliven lessons by use of current news reports. Such lessons result in good gains of vocabulary,

structures, accuracy and confidence. Teaching was unsatisfactory in one lesson, where it was insufficiently challenging, the pace was too slow, and pupils made too little progress. Most work is carefully corrected with much helpful comment. Teachers are generous with individual help.

192. Leadership, management, organisation and long and medium term planning are good, with several very good features. Spanish has been successfully introduced since the last inspection and A-level results have improved in both French and German. Resources are very well organised and used. Language assistants are well deployed. Teachers provide students with guidance and material for self-study, including a list of interactive websites, but the department has no language learning software; such programs would enable students to work independently on improving grammatical accuracy, particularly useful for the small Year 13 German group which has one hour less tuition. Whilst the main languages rooms are well-equipped, several sixth form lessons, especially German, are taught in less satisfactory social areas or non-specialist rooms; teachers have to transport equipment and in some cases students have no writing surface, which hinders reference to more than one source of information.