

INSPECTION REPORT

LORETO COLLEGE

St. Albans

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117558

Headteacher: Mrs M Lynch

Reporting inspector: Mrs M J Kerry
9931

Dates of inspection: 14th-18th October 2002

Inspection number: 249720

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 11-18

Gender of pupils: Female

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr D Keiley

Date of previous inspection: 28th October 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is an 11-18 voluntary aided Roman Catholic comprehensive girls' school in St. Albans in Hertfordshire. It is heavily and increasingly oversubscribed, with more than twice as many applicants as there were places in 2001. Pupils come from a wide geographical area. It is a smaller than average school with 774 pupils, of whom 161 are in the expanding sixth form. Overall attainment on entry is above average. A high proportion of pupils (21.2 per cent) has English as an additional language (EAL), but none are in the earliest stages of acquisition, and many are fully fluent. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average (7.6 per cent) and the proportion with Statements of need is well below average (0.5per cent). A small number of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school with areas of outstanding practice. Students in the sixth form receive a very good quality of education. Throughout the school, standards are high and are supported by very good teaching and learning. Results in external examinations are well above average at age 14, age 16 and in the sixth form. Leadership and management are of very good quality, and the governing body is effective in supporting improvement. Strategic planning for the use of resources is satisfactory. The principles of best value are applied well and value for money is good. The sixth form is cost effective.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- High quality teaching and learning throughout the school means that pupils make very good progress, achieve well and obtain well above average results in external examinations
- The excellent support provided by teachers for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, both in lessons and through the wider life of the school, ensures that pupils become self-confident, mature, and highly responsible, as learners and as people
- The arrangements for supporting the learning of pupils with special educational needs and EAL ensure that they make very good progress
- The headteacher and key staff provide leadership of very good quality, identifying highly relevant priorities for development, and managing very skilfully the changes needed to bring those improvements about
- The governing body is very effective in supporting improvement

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Pupils' learning could be better supported by the use of carefully formulated targets, in addition to expected grades, which are discussed with pupils in order to help them improve
- Reviewing the work of departments could be sharper, more focussed on improvement in teaching and learning and better informed by more sophisticated analysis of data, including value added data

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since it was last inspected in October 1996. All the key issues have been addressed successfully, and there has been excellent improvement in the role of the governing body and in constructing a timetable that allows the curriculum to be taught effectively. There has been very good improvement in the process of departmental review and the accountability of heads of department to the senior management team, including the introduction of performance management. Partnership with parents has improved. The quality of teaching has improved significantly, with a much higher proportion

now being very good or excellent, and none now being judged unsatisfactory. There has also been a significant improvement in standards, particularly at GCE A level where results have risen from broadly in line with the average to well above average. Within subject departments overall improvement has been good, except in mathematics in the sixth form where it has been unsatisfactory. Improvements have also been made to accommodation, notably a new gymnasium, increased computer facilities and the extensive refurbishment of accommodation for modern foreign languages and learning support.

STANDARDS

The table below 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				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A*	A	A*	A*	<i>well above average</i> A <i>above average</i> B <i>average</i> C <i>below average</i> D <i>well below average</i> E
A-levels/AS-levels	N/A	N/A	A		

Attainment on entry is above average, and pupils maintain and improve their high standards as they progress through the school. Achievement is very good. At age 14, results overall, and in the separate subjects of English, mathematics and science, have been well above average for the last four years, rising at a rate above that achieved nationally. At age 16, standards are well above average with the proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C in the top 5 per cent nationally in 1999 and 2001. Results in English, mathematics and science are significantly above average. Post-16 results are well above average overall, and have improved over each of the last four years, but improvement is needed in mathematics. Work seen during the inspection confirmed the standards achieved in examinations. Results for 2002 indicate similar standards to those achieved in earlier years. Pupils have good skills in literacy and numeracy, and the competence in key skills needed to undertake their sixth form courses. The school has exceeded most of its targets for 2002.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils show a very high degree of commitment to their work, and to participating fully in the life of the school. The effect of the school's expectations, aims and values is clearly apparent.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils show a very high degree of self-discipline and acceptance of personal responsibility. Behaviour around the school is excellent.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils become mature, confident and assured, with a clear moral perspective and concern for the needs of other members of society. Relationships throughout the school community are a fundamental strength, and enable pupils to make very good progress in their personal development.
Attendance	Well above average with little unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching sampled across the curriculum within the main school is very good. In both Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11, two fifths of the teaching seen was very good, four fifths or more was good or better, and there was none that was unsatisfactory. In the sixth form teaching is also very good, taken across all the subjects inspected in detail or sampled, both at Loreto and in the consortium. Well over half the teaching observed in the sixth form was very good, and there were nine examples of excellent teaching across a range of subjects. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in the sixth form. Literacy and numeracy, and key skills in the sixth form, are taught effectively. A particular strength of the teaching and learning is the progress made by all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs or English as an additional language. Pupils' excellent attitudes mean that they expend considerable creative, intellectual and physical effort in response to challenging work and well designed activities. Another strength is collaborative working, where a high degree of mature co-operation and the ability to use and build on the ideas of others is evident. Pupils work at a good pace, and make very good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum meets pupils' needs well, especially in the sixth form, where the range of subjects on offer through the consortium is broad. It fully meets statutory requirements. There is very good provision for extra curricular activities which are enthusiastically taken up by pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. The arrangements for ensuring that pupils with special educational needs make progress are a significant strength. The requirements of the new Code of Practice have been thoroughly and creatively addressed
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils, many of whom are fluent in English, are well supported and make progress commensurate with that of their peers
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Outstanding. Pupils' personal development is supported by teaching that consistently allows them to explore spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions, as well as an ethos which promotes and supports high achievement for all and the development of the whole person.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Personal support and guidance for pupils, and procedures to ensure their welfare, are very good. Aspects of monitoring and supporting academic progress, especially the use of expected grades, could be improved.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Highly relevant priorities for improvement have been identified, and the changes which need to be made are being very skilfully managed. A great deal has been achieved in the last year.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is very effective in supporting improvement and now undertakes the full range of its responsibilities. Governors are well-informed and active participants in the development of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. There is regular review of the work of departments, including the quality of teaching and learning. This could be improved by better use of value added data.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Financial planning is adequate, and is being refined to give more detailed management information on which strategic decisions can be based, particularly with reference to the sixth form.

The school applies the principles of best value well. There has been a significant degree of challenge in the past year which has resulted in improved practice.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The fact that the school develops the whole person, and is not just focussed on academic success The high expectations of both work and behaviour leading to very good progress in learning and personal development, and very good behaviour The high quality of leadership and management The recent improvement in approachability The good range of extra curricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about progress Even closer partnership between the school and parents Teaching in mathematics in the sixth form

Parents express a very high degree of satisfaction with the school. Inspection evidence confirmed all the positive views of parents. The school is moving into a much closer partnership with parents in which they are partners in learning. There has been a particularly good initiative in this area by the learning support department which involves parents as educators with the school. Inspection evidence shows that parents receive sufficient regular information about progress, including a progress report in addition to the annual report. Inspection evidence shows that the overall provision for mathematics is unsatisfactory.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this urban 11-18 girls' Roman Catholic voluntary aided secondary school has 161 students. It serves a wide area: students come from neighbouring authorities and north London boroughs. Numbers have recently increased: most students have progressed from Year 11. Three students have Statements of special educational need, four have English as an additional language - none are in the early stages of acquisition, and five come from ethnic minority backgrounds. There are clear criteria for entry to courses students wish to follow. A wide range of subjects and courses is offered, mainly, but not exclusively, leading to GCE Advanced level certification. Students can also follow one of their courses in a school which is one of five consortium partners. Learning opportunities are also provided through a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities. Study and key skills are taught within all courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This highly successful and cost-effective sixth form provides a very good quality of education for all students. Very good quality teaching and learning enables students to achieve high standards in their work and well above average results in external examinations. A very broad curriculum to meet the learning needs of all students is provided. It is complemented by a wide range of enrichment opportunities, a rich and varied programme of extra-curricular activities, and excellent provision to support students' personal development. Leadership and management are of very good quality. Very good improvement has been made since the last inspection except in mathematics.

Strengths

- Standards reached in external examinations are now consistently well above average
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good and enables students to reach high levels of achievement in their work
- The support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding
- Students have excellent attitudes to school and to their work: they contribute very positively to their learning and to the wider life of the school
- The leadership and management of the headteacher, senior staff and the governing body is very good: their commitment to provide an ethos in which all students receive a high quality of education, and realise their academic and personal potential, helps the school to achieve its aims and be true to the values of the foundation

What could be improved

- The monitoring of, and support for, students' progress
- Provision for mathematics

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	Unsatisfactory. Standards are well below average. There is a restricted range of teaching and learning approaches and a lack of evidence of effective action being taken to improve outcomes. Leadership is unsatisfactory.
Biology	Very good. Standards and achievement are very high as a result of very good teaching. Leadership and management are good.
Music	Very good. Standards are above average. Very good teaching supports very good achievement. Leadership and management are very good.
Classical civilisation	Good. Standards are average. Good quality teaching enables students to achieve well. Leadership and management are good.
Geography	Good. Standards are above average and very good teaching leads to good achievement. Leadership and management are good.
History	Very good. Well above average standards and good achievement result from very good teaching. Leadership and management are excellent.
Psychology	Very good. Standards are well above average and very good teaching supports good achievement. Leadership and management are very good.
English	Excellent. Very good teaching supports high standards and very good achievement. Leadership and management are excellent.
French	Good. Standards are average. Good teaching and learning leads to good achievement. Leadership and management are good.

Other aspects of post-16 provision were sampled, including three lessons at a consortium school. This sampling included one lesson in art, chemistry, physics, German, child development and business education and administration and two lessons each in sociology and theatre studies. Teaching was good or very good in most lessons. In one lesson each of German, business education and sociology, teaching was satisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Systems for individual monitoring and guidance are good within subjects and targets set build on the comments in the marking and assessment of students' work. The revised review system takes full account of students' progress across a range of areas. However, the use of the current form of target grades is not well enough defined to make a significant contribution to tracking the progress of each student and subject area.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. A clear educational framework is provided within which provision can be made and the sixth form effectively managed. The governing body is systematically reviewing plans for future sixth form provision, as identified in the school's development plan. Recent operational changes have ensured full-time day-to-day leadership of the sixth form and more systematic monitoring and evaluation of its effectiveness.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of course and subject choices • Good teaching and high level of challenge • Opportunities for independent study • They are treated as emerging adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being better informed about their progress

- | | |
|--|--|
| • They generally enjoy sixth form life | |
|--|--|

Inspection supported the very positive views students had of the sixth form. Their concern for improvement was allayed somewhat by the first progress review of the term prior to the inspection. However, evidence shows the need for a review of the use of the current target grades process if the progress of both students and departments are to be effectively monitored.

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

High quality teaching and learning throughout the school means that pupils make very good progress, achieve well and obtain well above average results in external examinations

1. Throughout the school very good teaching and learning are taking place. Teachers' challenging expectations, their secure subject knowledge and the way in which many of them devise and plan a variety of activities to engage pupils in the learning, ensure that in the majority of lessons progress is rapid, and achievement is very good. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection.

2. As this was a short inspection, teaching in the main school was sampled across the curriculum, rather than being observed in depth. In this sample of 32 lessons, the teaching was judged to be very good in two fifths, and good or better in just over four fifths. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. As the sample covered all the National Curriculum subjects plus business studies and classics, this is a clear indication of high quality teaching across the curriculum.

3. In the sixth form teaching and learning were inspected in depth in nine subjects, and sampled in nine further areas. Sampled areas included a range of GCE AS and A level courses, an NVQ course in business administration, a GCSE course in child development taken in the sixth form and two GCE A level courses (business studies and theatre studies) taken within the consortium provision. The overall profile of teaching was once again very good, with well over half of the teaching being judged very good or excellent, four fifths being good or better and none unsatisfactory. There were nine examples of excellent teaching in seven different subjects.

4. The teaching has many significant strengths. In the best lessons there are clear planning and objectives, which are often shared with the class, and an imaginative range of activities combined with constant challenge to pupils' critical thinking. Searching questions are used, mixed with explanation, so that pupils constantly have to think, whether the class is working together, or whether individual work is in progress. This means that pupils are closely involved in the learning, and are developing their understanding.

5. A good example of such teaching was seen in the English Year 7 "stretch" group, who were working on Keats' "Ode to Autumn". In this lesson the pupils made very good progress in their understanding both of the poem itself, and in the use of, for example, figurative speech. Learning was at a high level because of the teacher's clear and continuing focus on the text, expressed through searching and well targeted questions, which enabled pupils to analyse the use of language, as well as to expand their vocabulary to meet the demands of the piece.

6. In much of the teaching seen questioning was well used, for a variety of purposes. In a Year 9 science lesson on photosynthesis, the teacher used questions to establish pupils' prior knowledge and understanding before they moved on to individual work devising a word equation for the process. In another science lesson, this time in Year 11, frequent questioning reinforced knowledge and understanding in work on covalent bonding. In mathematics in Year 7 questions during group work helped pupils to understand estimating and its use in problem

solving. Some questioning enables pupils to develop oral skills, as in music where in a Year 11 lesson probing questions meant that pupils had to structure long answers when talking about African drumming.

7. Another strength of many lessons is the active involvement of pupils in contributing to the learning. In a Year 11 geography lesson, the teacher welcomed and used pupils' suggestions on how to plan and undertake their coursework assignment. As a result of this, pupils were able to make clear and well out thought plans of how to construct an hypothesis, gather evidence, test and analyse that evidence with respect to the hypothesis, and then present their conclusions. Similarly, in a Year 9 history lesson on trench warfare, the teacher's skilful use of pupils' contributions generated a high level of interest and ideas.

8. The planning of the vast majority of lessons shows careful attention to matching the work to pupils' needs, to creating opportunities to explore spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues within the subject, and to providing a range of motivating activities which allow pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions really are embedded in the day to day teaching of the school. Pupils who have special educational needs, or English as an additional language, are carefully provided for and have full access to the curriculum. In a Year 11 music lesson the groups were thoughtfully constructed so that rhythms of varying complexity could be attempted by each group, supporting learning at different levels of attainment very effectively.

9. Often teachers provide strong individual support, or coaching in performance or skills when pupils are working independently. Examples of this were seen in science, in a Year 11 lesson, where the teacher constantly circulated to advise and help pupils as they worked independently to draw molecules. Very good use of immediate feedback to help pupils improve was seen in a Year 8 physical education lesson. The teacher reflected back to pupils, as a hockey game progressed, the level of skill they were showing, and the soundness (or otherwise!) of their tactics, so that improvement was evident as the game proceeded. In this lesson also the teaching was carefully adapted to two groups with differing attainment levels and learning needs.

10. Because teaching is of high quality, and pupils themselves bring strong motivation and excellent attitudes to their work, pupils achieve very well and reach very good standards in class, as well as in external examinations. This is the case across virtually all subjects, both in the main school and in the sixth form, with the exception of mathematics in the sixth form where standards need to improve. Pupils enter the school with above average attainment and maintain and improve their standards as they progress through the school.

11. Standards at age 14 are well above average. Over the past four years average points score has been well above the national average and increasing at a rate above that achieved nationally. In mathematics and science results have been well above national averages, and in English they have sometimes been in the top five per cent nationally. High proportions of pupils gain level 5 or level 6. Results in other subjects of the curriculum are all above or well above average. Achievement as compared to similar schools is well above average, and the school's own value added work, despite some limitations in its methodology, shows that many pupils achieve above their expected results. In 2002 results show that standards are similar to those achieved in previous years.

12. At age 16 standards are well above average. In GCSE examinations results are well above average, whether looked at in terms of 5 or more A*-C grades, 5 or more A*-G grades or 1 or more A*-G grades. In 2001 average points score was in the top five per cent nationally. The trend in average points score over the past five years is above that nationally and the school has won an achievement award two years in a row based on performance

compared to similar schools. In 2002 the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C passes has increased, although average points score has fallen a little.

13. The work seen in classrooms and in work scrutiny confirms the standards achieved in external examinations, at both age 14 and age 16.

14. Results in the sixth form are also well above average in terms of average points score. Standards in the sixth form are explored in more detail in the sixth form part of the report.

The excellent support provided by teachers for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, both in lessons and through the wider life of the school, ensures that pupils become self-confident, mature, and highly responsible, as learners and as people

15. Support for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, and is a major strength of the school. Pupils come to the school initially with positive attitudes and motivation, and they make very good progress in their personal development over their time in the school, as a result of the outstandingly good provision. When pupils leave, they are mature, confident and assured, with a clear moral perspective and concern for the needs of other members of society, and very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

16. Every opportunity is taken within subject areas to explore spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions within the context of the curriculum. In lessons observed during the inspection many examples were seen of teachers interweaving these aspects of learning into their subject teaching. A few examples will give an impression of how deeply these are embedded within the planning of subject areas. An exceptional degree of personal reflection is encouraged.

17. In art in Year 11, the teacher explored with the class the topic of self in order to create a mood board. This exploration went far beyond personal attributes and feelings, and articulated the spiritual dimension, with discussion of the soul, and of the eyes as windows of the mind. This teaching made strong demands on pupils, and its effects were evident when pupils produced ideas showing a good depth of reflection and understanding later in the lesson.

18. In several instances in geography, pupils were encouraged to consider the moral issues surrounding their area of study. In one Year 9 lesson, as part of considering family sizes in more and less economically developed countries, pupils came to recognise the difference in life chances for teenagers in the United Kingdom, and those in Mali. In history in Year 9 pupils reflected on the horror and wastefulness of war, and in Year 10 on the causes of poverty, and our duty of care to each other, as part of learning about the creation of the welfare state.

19. Similar isolated examples might be seen in many schools, but the strength of teaching at this school is in the consistency and skill with which such themes are introduced and explored. The pupils respond with thoughtful observations and significant insights, using very well the opportunities presented for personal reflection and the development of an inner life and moral values.

20. Worship plays a central part in pupils' spiritual development, and is used to mark significant events in the life of the school and individuals. The daily assemblies, either in year or form groups, provide a focus for reflection and a time for shared prayer before the start of the day. Pupils play a full part in planning and leading assemblies, as in the Year 10 assembly

during inspection week on the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. There are clear themes for each assembly, such as the use of talents, which help pupils translate spiritual and moral reflection into daily reality.

21. Pupils' attitudes to their work and to school life are excellent. Their motivation is high, and they are enthusiastic about learning, and about the wider opportunities that school offers them. The high levels of attendance and participation show the pupils' enthusiasm for school. There are excellent relationships throughout the school, with teachers and with peers. These relationships exhibit a high degree of mutual respect, and the culturally diverse school population forms an harmonious whole.

22. Social development is promoted through wide ranging extra curricular activities, residential trips, visits, and opportunities to be involved in the school community in leadership roles. As well as these planned activities there is a general expectation that pupils will act maturely, considerately and caringly towards others. An example of this is the formation of friendship groups for pupils who may have a particular need, so that they may be supported as a member of the school community.

23. Pupils respond readily to these opportunities and show a high degree of care and support to one another. In class they work together very constructively and co-operatively, and the same fruitful co-operation and mutual respect is seen in extra curricular activities such as drama club, where pupils collaborated well in an exercise to portray character. They showed confidence and trust in each other, as well as enthusiasm for the activity, as they tried to discover what character was being portrayed.

24. Pupils are made aware of a wide range of cultural diversity. For example, in child development they study the attitude to birth of different cultures; in music they perform African drumming; there are residential trips for language students, including work experience abroad. During inspection week a reading event was in progress involving three authors working with pupils, and there are numerous visits to concerts, theatres and sites connected with Classical civilisation.

25. Overall, this is an outstanding area of the school's work, creating an ethos of mutual respect, with high achievement supported by both teachers and peers, exemplifying the school's aims and values.

The arrangements for supporting the learning of pupils with special educational needs and EAL ensure that they make very good progress

26. Recent work undertaken by the learning support department, in connection with the implementation of the new Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, has resulted in very good arrangements for supporting pupils who have special educational needs.

27. A major strength of the arrangements is the very full involvement of parents and pupils, who attend extended interviews with members of the learning support team at which individual education plans (IEPs) and targets are fully discussed. This was done for the first time this year, and there was a very high rate of parental attendance, even though the time needed was during the working day. This demonstrates a commitment on behalf of both parents and the school to support these pupils' learning needs.

28. The IEPs are of very good quality, with specific, well formulated targets which are well linked to learning within subject areas. Staff are made aware of all pupils who have special educational needs through the circulation of a register containing brief details, and IEPs and planning for pupils who have special educational needs were evident in many classrooms.

29. There were numerous lessons in which pupils who have special educational needs were seen to be making very good progress, supported by well-written IEPs with specific targets. Pupils have complete access to the curriculum, as for example in geography in a lesson on planning coursework where all the pupils, including those with special educational needs were fully involved. Or again, in music where skilful matching of the work to the pupil's attainment meant that she could take a full part in the lesson and make a major contribution to the group's performance.

30. There is a similar register for pupils with EAL, so that staff are aware of the needs within their class, although in the case of these pupils many of them are fluent in English and none are at the early stages of acquisition. Those whose language is least fluent are supported by a specialist teacher, and the school monitors their progress. Excellent support is provided for these pupils in class through colour coded books containing subject keywords. Their progress and achievement is commensurate with that of their peers.

The headteacher and key staff provide leadership of very good quality, identifying highly relevant priorities for development, and managing very skilfully the changes needed to bring those improvements about

31. The current senior management team was formed just over a year ago, on the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher. Together with an experienced deputy headteacher, they have formed a cohesive team which is bringing about change within the school.

32. Much has been achieved in the past year. Relevant priorities for development have been clearly identified within a well formulated school development plan which makes provision for monitoring and evaluation in challenging but achievable timescales. Changes have been made to the processes of departmental review, making it more rigorous and providing a better link between departmental and overall school planning. There are still areas of departmental review which could be sharper, as are outlined in the section on what the school could do to improve. It is clear, however, that there has been very significant improvement since the last inspection when no systems of accountability for heads of department were in place. The headteacher and senior management team are beginning to form a clear view of the quality of teaching and learning within departments, and have taken steps to support improvement where this is needed.

33. A very good assessment has been made of the developments needed in the sixth form. The school development plan includes a fundamental review of the sixth form spanning several areas of its operation, including a review of the effectiveness of the consortium provision. The need to obtain better management information on sixth form cost effectiveness is also included. These are most certainly the right priorities to support further development of the sixth form. Some changes to the overall management of the sixth form have already been made and the beneficial effect of these is beginning to be apparent.

34. Responsibilities within the small senior management team have been reviewed and sensibly restructured. This has gone alongside increased delegation to heads of department, in the matter of analysing results, for example. There have been some changes to departmental allocations of money, and these will continue as part of a plan to rationalise departmental spending and link it more closely to development planning. Much work has also been done with the governing body, and governors now have a much better involvement in planning than in the past.

35. A high degree of challenge to established ways of working has rightly been given by the newly appointed headteacher. Changes have been introduced over the past year which have established the school on a good basis for further improvement.

The governing body is very effective in supporting improvement

36. Since the last inspection there has been significant improvement in the role and effectiveness of the governing body. They now provide very good support for improvement, and are properly involved in the strategic leadership and management of the school.

37. The chairman of governors has a clear vision for the work of the governing body, operating through a series of committees, which have been successfully established since the last inspection. There is good delegation to these committees, and the work of the governing body is kept coherent by both formal and informal links. The governing body has recently undertaken its own self-review.

38. The vision and values of the foundation are a constant touchstone for all the decisions made, and Trustees who are also governors help to ensure that the inspiration fundamental to education within a Loreto school is kept alive and intact through changing circumstances. This demands not just spiritual insight, but also a practical grasp of how these values can be shared and lived out within the community of Loreto schools worldwide. This living out of the school's mission is a major strength of its work, providing a unity of purpose that is clearly reflected in the school's ethos.

39. Governors receive succinct and informative reports from the headteacher, and presentations from other members of staff which ensure that they are well informed about the school, and about the strategic issues which need to be dealt with. These reports have included an investigation into specialist status, and consideration of local provision in the sixth form. The governing body and its chairman have a good knowledge of the educational environment in which they are working, and likely changes which will affect the decisions they need to make.

40. All the committees are actively involved in the school's work. The monitoring of financial expenditure is thorough, and there are definite plans in place for reducing the large surplus, some of which had already been wisely spent by the time of the inspection. There are now better links between budgeting and school development planning. Governors are also beginning to put in place better strategic planning to manage, for example, the considerable task of maintaining and improving the premises.

41. The governing body is now undertaking all of its responsibilities, and will have earlier involvement next year with formulating the school development plan. There have been major changes in the past year, which have been very successfully managed and have strengthened enormously the role of governors. The headteacher has been highly instrumental in bringing these changes about.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Pupils' learning could be better supported by the use of carefully formulated targets, in addition to expected grades, which are discussed with pupils in order to help them improve

42. The personal support and guidance given to pupils is very good, and many feel that their form tutor is a person who knows them really well and to whom they would turn unhesitatingly in any need. The monitoring of pupils' academic progress, however, is less successful, especially as regards the use of expected grades and targets.

43. Expected grades for GCSE, based on previous performance, are given to pupils in Years 10 and 11, and are used to monitor underachievement, or pupils who are achieving above what might be expected. There is mentoring for supporting those who are in danger of underachievement. However, expected grades are not discussed with all pupils, and are not, in their minds, clearly linked with what they need to do within their subjects to improve. Sometimes expected grades are insufficiently challenging, and sometimes they are unrealistic and pupils feel demotivated by having to achieve equally well in all subjects.

44. For these expected grades to support pupils properly in their learning, they need to form part of a coherent strategy. The degree of difficulty represented by the expected grade within each subject for each particular pupil needs to be rigorously assessed. Then a challenging but realistic target grade should be arrived at, which is linked into discussion which might include other related targets, about what the pupil needs to do to improve her work to reach that level.

Reviewing the work of departments could be sharper, more focussed on improvement in teaching and learning and better informed by more sophisticated analysis of data, including value added data

45. Regular, structured reviews of the work of departments are undertaken by the deputy headteachers, and this is a major improvement since the last inspection.

46. There is a focus early in the year on results, but the analysis of these, particularly in terms of value added, is basic. The main comparison is that between expected grades and grades achieved. Targets are set for departments, but these are frequently exceeded, and there is a need to review the process by which they are set, to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging and motivating.

47. Departmental development plans now follow a common format, and overall their quality is good, although there is significant variability. Often, however, they are formulated in terms of activities to be carried out, rather than as coherent strategies for improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning within the department. Funding for the department, including that available to support professional development, also needs to be more coherently linked to planning for improvement.

The monitoring of, and support for, students' progress in the sixth form needs to improve so that a clearer view is obtained of progress

48. As in the main school, the current method of using target grades, based on the total points gained by each student in their GCSE results, is not supporting students' learning as well as it might. It is not a good enough measure of progress, as sometimes grades are imprecise, nor is it sufficiently motivating and challenging for students. Students and parents do not see these grades as a good indicator of progress and sometimes they are below what is currently being achieved. More rigour in this aspect of the assessment process would provide a clearer view of the progress of individual students, as well as more precision in the measurement of progress within a subject department.

The provision for mathematics in the sixth form needs to improve so that higher standards are achieved by students

49. Within the main school, the sampling of the teaching of mathematics in Years 7, 9 and 11 indicated that it was satisfactory, as it was judged to be at the last inspection, and that some of the weaknesses mentioned in the last report remain. Within the sixth form, teaching was satisfactory overall with some good teaching. In 1996 the quality of teaching in mathematics, although sometimes good, lacked strategies which developed pupils' mathematical understanding. Questioning was often restrictive and a need was identified to analyse more carefully the low uptake at A level and the corresponding poor performance when compared with pupils' GCSE results.

50. There is still both satisfactory and good teaching within mathematics, and it remains the case that more of it is satisfactory than good. In the lessons observed, there was some good use of questioning during group work, some good use of directed questions and clear explanations, and in one lesson a lively and interesting presentation and a good range of activity. In too many lessons however, pupils were too closely directed, questions were answered by the teacher before pupils had sufficient opportunity, and there were limited records of pupils' progress. There is still a low and declining uptake at A level, and performance which compares unfavourably with students' other A level subjects, without adequate analysis or explanation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

51. In order to raise standards even further, the governing body, headteacher and senior management team should:

- (1) Devise ways to give better support to pupils' learning by the use of carefully formulated targets in addition to target grades, which are discussed with pupils in order to help them improve
(Paragraphs: 42 – 44)
- (2) Improve processes of departmental review so that they are:
 - sharper and more discriminating
 - more focussed on improvement in teaching and learning, based on an analysis of effective practice
 - better informed by more sophisticated use of data including value added data
(Paragraphs 32, 45 – 47)

Sixth form

- (3) Improve the monitoring and support for students' progress so that a clearer picture of progress is obtained
(Paragraphs: 48, 74, 75)
- (4) Improve the provision for mathematics so that higher standards are achieved
(Paragraphs: 49, 50, 92 - 97)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	32
	Sixth form	47
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		36

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satis- factory	Unsatis- factory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 – 11

Number	0	13	14	5	0	0	0
Percentage	0	41	44	15	0	0	0

Sixth form

Number	9	19	11	8	0	0	0
Percentage	19	41	23	17	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	613	161
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	10	-

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	5	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	47	3

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	118

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10

Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15
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Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.4
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	123	123

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	122	109	115
	Total	122	109	115
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	99 [98]	89 [89]	93 [90]
	National	64 [63]	66 [65]	66 [59]
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	95 [83]	70 [69]	66 [63]
	National	31 [28]	43 [42]	34 [30]

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	118	109	120
	Total	118	109	120
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	96 [94]	89 [90]	97 [95]
	National	65 [64]	68 [66]	64 [62]
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	63 [57]	69 [71]	69 [75]
	National	31 [31]	42 [39]	33 [29]

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	120	120

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	0	0	0
	Girls	99	117	119
	Total	99	117	119
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	83 (84)	98 (97)	99 (97)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	57.3 (55.3)
	National	39 (38.4)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/a
	National		N/a

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	Year	Male	Female	Total
Who were entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations	2001	0	59	59

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	0	59	59
	Average point score per candidate	N/a	22.8	22.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	0	59	59	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	N/a	22.8	22.8	N/a	N/a	N/a
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

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	10	100
	National		76

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	11
Black – other	
Indian	8
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	5
White	727
Any other minority ethnic group	14

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	47.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.5

Education support staff:

Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	265

Deployment of teachers:

Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.7
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Average teaching group size:

Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.7
Key Stage 4	21.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	2	
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Financial information

Financial year	2002
	£
Total income	2374695
Total expenditure	2329205
Expenditure per pupil	3118
Balance brought forward from previous year	216451
Balance carried forward to next year	261941

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	12.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	7.15

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

774

Number of questionnaires returned

480

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	57	40	3	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	56	42	1	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	54	43	1	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	50	6	1	1
The teaching is good.	46	50	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	50	12	0	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	42	6	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	27	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	33	49	13	1	5
The school is well led and managed.	54	42	1	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	40	1	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	55	37	4	0	3

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

52. Students in the sixth form reach well above average standards and their achievement is very good. Retention rates are very high. Average points score, for those taking two or more GCE Advanced levels, has risen in each of the last four years, and was well above average in 2001. It has increased again in 2002. The percentage of grades A and B has also increased in 2002, with 44 per cent of students achieving these higher grades. In the vocational course all students achieved a pass in 2002.

53. When compared with other schools, either maintained schools or all post-16 providers, the school's results are well above average. The school's own value added work also supports a picture of very good achievement, although this analysis needs to be more refined to get a clearer picture of the progress students make and the level of their achievement. However, it is clear that students often exceed their expected target grades.

54. In the subjects inspected in detail, standards in work seen in English, history, psychology and biology were well above average; in geography, music and classics they were above average and this represents good achievement. In French standards were in line with the average, and achievement is good, with students doing better in French than in their other GCE A level courses. In mathematics, standards were in line with expectations, and achievement is just satisfactory, given that many students have only just started their courses. Results in mathematics have been disappointing in recent years, with students doing less well than in their other subjects, and this is an area where standards need to improve. In the sampled subjects, students were generally seen in class to be achieving above average standards. Overall work seen within subjects confirmed the standards reached in examination results, and students are on track to achieve results similar to last year. Their standards in key skills are fully sufficient for the demands of their courses.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

55. The school derives great benefit from students' responses to its ethos and expectations. They achieve high standards in their work, are involved in significant areas of the school's life and work and undertake these roles with both pride and commitment. The behaviour of students is exemplary. The self-discipline of these students is one of the hallmarks of their maturity: it is also a significant indicator of their concern to help and support others as well as to be successful on their own behalf.

56. Sixth form students have a keen understanding of the school's mission and aims and, as a result have great pride in their membership of this community. Students are inspired to respond to the challenge of the school's mission. They willingly accept the responsibilities of leadership, become role models in their work with younger pupils and selflessly contribute to the wider life of the school. A number of them are also involved in working with partner primary schools in sport and catechetics. Sixth form students not only have a high commitment to the school but also to their studies. They value greatly the support they receive from their subject teachers and form tutors. They work very hard, are active and willing participants in their learning, are well organised and increasingly manage their time effectively.

57. Students have a very mature attitude to their life and work. Their relationships with both peers and teachers are excellent. They work very productively with each other, in and beyond the classroom, as they discharge their various responsibilities. In lessons students are keen and eager participants in learning. For example, in most lessons they willingly share perceptions, experiences and prior learning, respond eagerly to questions, offer challenge to the views of peers and teachers and devise innovative solutions to problem solving exercises. In some lessons, this level of involvement in learning often results in excellent discussions and in the setting up of hypotheses that could be further explored. Students are less actively involved in mathematics learning and this contributed to them making less progress.

58. Students gain great benefits from the enrichment and extra-curricular programme that the school provides. The wide range of recreational sport and music, work shadowing and community involvement, as well as the opportunity to gain a community sports leader award, meets the diverse needs of students and is greatly valued by them.

59. The significant level of students' involvement in the wider life of the school and in their learning contributes greatly to their personal development. They learn to work with peers as well as those younger and older than themselves. They gain great benefits from the range of learning opportunities that are provided. Students also benefit from exercising leadership and taking responsibility for events, teams and other organisations. Some help younger pupils to plan assemblies, provide music for worship, prepare for Mass or act as Eucharistic ministers. Some provide a "circle of friends" for pupils who find it difficult to adjust to school life. Students also work with a range of adults within the school, as well as visitors, some of whom contribute to the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. In lessons students also develop understanding of significant ethical issues and moral dilemmas as well as of the social and cultural dimensions of great political and economic questions. These opportunities provide students with both intellectual and personal challenges, to which they positively respond.

60. Many students have clear and realistic aspirations and are very keen to do well in their courses of study. They value the opportunities, provided within PSHE and at other times, to explore careers and higher education, and the availability of tutors and the head of sixth form to talk to them about their future. Many reflect carefully on their academic progress and value the detailed comments on their written assignments that are provided by subject teachers. These comments often form the basis of their own personal targets. As a result, most students are candid in self-assessment about their own shortcomings, have clear perceptions about what they must do to improve the standard and quality of their work and set about rectifying matters with commitment.

61. In spite of the distances some students travel to school, their attendance is good and procedures for encouraging good attendance are well used as part of the self-review process. The procedures for monitoring attendance are under review as part of the further development of sixth form policies and procedures.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

62. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good. In over four out of every five lessons the teaching was good or better. In well over half of lessons teaching was very good or excellent. There were nine examples of excellent teaching: three in English and one each in art, French, history, music, psychology and classical civilisation. Teaching was good or very good in all the courses inspected in detail, except mathematics where it was satisfactory, and it was also good or better in the sampled courses that included art,

business, child development, theatre studies and sociology.

63. Much of the excellent teaching was characterised by clear, rigorous and focused exposition informed by the teacher's excellent subject knowledge, and supported by constant challenge and the use of demanding tasks. This combination of factors enabled students to take responsibility in their exploration of the learning and to develop independent thinking. In all of these lessons teachers built effectively on the excellent relationships within the class and the highly positive attitudes students have to their learning. In a Year 13 English lesson on *Pride and Prejudice*, the teacher constantly challenged students as, individually, they presented their analysis of the text, exploring Jane Austen's views on the role and status of women. Students responded very positively to the teacher's use of critical assessment criteria to sharpen the demand being made of each learner. In a Year 13 psychology class exploring the measurement of stress, the teacher's expectation that each student would contribute to the analysis of a variety of methods contributed to a highly interactive session. Students' contributions were subject to challenge, both by the group and the teacher, but always in a spirit of objective scholarly enquiry. In both of these lessons, progress was rapid, knowledge and understanding extended and achievement was high.

64. Some other strengths of the teaching are found in high quality planning supported by well-structured schemes of work to meet the range of learning needs in the class; the very high expectations teachers have of students that they skilfully use to develop participation in learning; the effective use of searching and demanding questions to promote and extend student understanding of the topic; and the very good use of a range of teaching and learning strategies and well-designed tasks that also support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Very good use is made of homework. The very good quality feedback, through marking and assessment, helps students identify and set targets for what needs to be done to improve their work. Within teaching and learning students respond well to the many opportunities provided, including coursework, lengthy assignments and practical fieldwork, to develop independent learning skills. Students respond well to the very good quality teaching, are highly motivated and work very productively. Key skills are well taught through courses, and students have sufficient competence to meet the requirements of the courses they are following.

65. Teaching in mathematics is mostly satisfactory, with some that is good. This is the same situation as reported at the last inspection. In lessons there is some good use of clear explanations, and questions to make links with previous learning. Sometimes lessons are managed through the use of a range of appropriate tasks, with learning being monitored during group work. Too frequently, however, students' work is too closely directed, or teachers answer their own questions before any learner has time to respond. This means that students' critical thinking is not encouraged to develop as it should. Records of students' progress are limited and incomplete.

66. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. There is now a greater a proportion that is good or better or that falls into the very good or excellent categories. The impact of the better teaching has been significant, particularly in the contribution it now makes to the level students achieve in their work and the standards they reach in external examinations.

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

67. The school's mission is to enable girls to realise their full academic and personal potential and to celebrate their Catholic faith by reflecting on the values of the Gospel, leading them towards the service of others and the pursuit of justice and mutual respect. The school will also work in partnership with parents to prepare pupils to become compassionate people of integrity who will be able to meet the challenges of a changing world, strengthened by trusting and supportive relationships during their formative years. Within this framework a wide range of learning opportunities is provided within the taught curriculum, the programmes for enrichment and extra-curricular activities and the wider life of the school.

68. The taught curriculum is broad, balanced and meets the learning needs of all students, including those with special educational needs or who have English as an additional language. The curriculum also meets statutory requirements: all students have a daily act of collective worship and follow a general course in religious education.. The range of courses within the school includes many leading to GCE Advanced level certification as well as two GCSE courses and one National Vocational Qualification. The GCE courses include National Curriculum subjects and religious education as well as classical civilisation, psychology and sociology. Good provision is made within each course for teaching the key skills of application of number, communication and information communication technology (ICT).

69. The school has a very close relationship with five other local schools. Together they constitute a sixth form consortium that complements and extends the range of subjects available to students in each of the schools. At present about a fifth of the sixth form study one of their option choices in a neighbouring school. These courses include subjects already on offer in the school as well as others such as business, technology and performing arts.

70. This imaginative method of making provision ensures maximum choice and excellent access for all students. The provision for each course is five hours in two blocks - a separate morning and afternoon session during the week. This can have a significant effect on learning in some subjects, as well on the shape of the timetable for Years 7 to 11.

71. The curriculum provides very good opportunities for progress into further and higher education as well as into employment or training. At the end of the 2000-01 academic year well over four fifths of students opted for higher education, some deferring entry, while the remainder entered employment or training. The school enjoys productive relationships with other local providers, as well as with further and higher education, employers and agencies such as the careers service.

72. Many opportunities exist to extend students' learning and support their personal development. A weekly enrichment programme includes working with local primary schools, undertaking community work or, for aspirant medical students, "work shadowing" in a local hospital. Many qualify for the community sports leader awards (CSLA), while others work within subject departments, the school library or in support of pupils with special educational needs. The extra-curricular programme also enables many students to develop their interests, enjoy leisure activities, and work with particular groups of younger pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

73. Across the curriculum there is regular and detailed assessment of students' work. Marking is detailed, often using examination assessment criteria, provides an evaluation of the pupil's work and offers advice and guidance on what areas need to be further improved. Many students find the marking very helpful and motivating, value the comments made and use them to frame their own targets for improvement. In addition, many teachers also provide oral feedback to the group: this often focuses on generic issues relating to the completion of the task. Students' work is carefully monitored through the detailed records of marks and grades awarded across the range of assessment criteria. Very good practice is found in biology, geography, history and psychology. However, in mathematics while work is marked it is not graded, feedback is limited and often subjective and records of assessments are incomplete and, therefore, not a useful tool to monitor students' progress.

74. Target setting has improved since the last inspection. Most subject areas enable students to set appropriate targets that focus on improvement in standards. There are some examples of targets that lack focus and sufficient challenge, for example that a pupil should read more widely. The regular review of progress, undertaken with sixth form tutors, has recently been improved and now includes a much closer analysis of the overall effectiveness of each student and targets for further improvement.

75. There is a good analysis of internal and external performance data within subjects. Good use is made of this analysis, and of other assessment data, to inform the planning of further teaching and learning as well as the development of the curriculum. However, the use of target grades, based on the total points gained by each student in their GCSE results, does not provide a sophisticated enough measure of progress. A grade of B/C or C/D, for example, is too imprecise a target against which to measure student progress. They are seen by students and their parents to be misleading as a target and an underestimate even of current individual performances. A review of this aspect of the assessment process would provide a clearer picture of the progress of individual students and by subject departments.

Advice, support and guidance

76. From the time of their application for entry to the sixth form, and through Years 12 and 13, students have a good programme of support and guidance, within tutor groups as well as through their courses of study. Year 11 pupils are well advised about entry and are provided with good quality written information and guidance to help them make their decision to apply for a place. The entry criteria for acceptance into the sixth form are well known by pupils and parents and are sensitively interpreted in the light of each pupil's GCSE results. During Years 12 and 13, the guidance programme within PSHE is well structured, includes modules on the development of study, planning and organisation skills as well as units on careers.

77. As they move through Years 12 and 13 students receive help, support and guidance within their courses, especially about further and higher education opportunities. This is complemented by careers work within PSHE on preparation for university applications. Students also feel well supported by the well-stocked and easily accessible careers library.

78. Form tutors play an important role in monitoring students' effectiveness to manage their workload and meet deadlines, among other things. The regular progress review also enables students to discuss with their tutor things that cause concern or need to be improved. Information about students who follow a course within a consortium school is shared with the home school. While some aspects of this need further development, meeting and supporting the needs of each student is a major objective in the current arrangements.

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

79. The school has a strong and effective partnership with parents, who hold it in high regard. Their confidence in the school was evident both at the parents' meeting and through the parents' questionnaire.

80. Parents are appreciative of the way in which the sixth form students are encouraged to participate in the life of the school, by running anti-bullying workshops, for example, and acting as role models to younger pupils. They are clear that the sixth form has improved significantly recently, and that consortium arrangements do offer additional breadth of study beyond the home school. They are generally very pleased with sixth form teaching.

81. Parents receive both a progress and an annual report. The home school is the point of contact for both home and consortium subjects. Parents can also attend consortium parents' evenings, and the dates for these are co-ordinated between consortium schools to allow this to happen. The school expects them to be as closely involved with their daughters' learning as in the main school.

82. Students have a very positive view of their experience in the sixth form. They appreciate the broad range of courses on offer, the challenging teaching and the opportunities for individual study. They feel well supported in their studies, and believe that they are treated like young adults. A very high proportion of them enjoy life in the sixth form and would recommend it to others.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

83. Overall, the leadership and management of the sixth form are of very good quality. The governing body and senior management team provide an effective framework for this area of the school. They have established clear admission arrangements and a useful range of policies. The operational management of the sixth form has been reviewed and the former co-ordinator is now fully responsible for its daily operation. There are clear arrangements for the maintenance of high standards of attainment through the monitoring of students' progress, the making of provision as well as for working with other consortium members. In this time of change, maintaining the morale and high level of student's commitment, both to their work and to the school has been a key priority. There is good communication between students and their tutors as well as with the head of sixth form and the headteacher. The school's aims, values and expectations are very clearly reflected in sixth form life and work.

84. Whilst recognising the very distinctive nature of the sixth form, the school adopts a coherent approach to the management of whole school issues and the implementation of policies. The governing body provides a clear educational direction for the school and has taken great interest in the role of the sixth form in contributing to that. The sixth form is successful, continues to grow and to play a significant role in the life of the school and the wider community.

85. The governing body continues to review those aspects of sixth form organisation and management that are identified priorities in the school's current development plan. The procedures for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness are currently under review, with the aim of developing a range of robust performance criteria. Recent work shows that the outstanding examination results, and the students' contributions to the school's life and work, were regarded as clear indications of the effectiveness of the provision.

Resources

86. Within tight financial constraints very good quality provision is made for a wide range of courses. Currently, in many sixth form subjects the take-up is high and group sizes are viable. However, while the current arrangements are well managed, the cost of provision is subsidised by a small amount from the Key Stage 4 teaching allocation.

87. The principles of best value are routinely applied, and there is wide consultation especially in making curriculum provision, changing the school day and considering expansion on pupil numbers. Pupils contribute their views on a range of matters, sometimes through the head girl and her deputies or head of sixth form to the headteacher. A range of communications with parents and staff also contribute to the application of best value principles. The cost effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The review and costing of current arrangements are a priority in the school development plan.

88. Teachers are well qualified for the courses they teach and they are well supported by good professional development opportunities, many of them provided by external examination boards. The level of resources available for the teaching of courses is good, although the basis on which many of them are allocated to subject areas is historical. In geography, history and psychology the provision of learning resources is very good. The provision and availability for ICT is good and networked machines are well used. Few sixth form students have difficulty in gaining access to a computer, except in the period leading up to a coursework deadline. Accommodation is generally good. One of the main teaching blocks was partially closed during the inspection and temporary teaching rooms were well used. Very good use is made of small group rooms for sixth form teaching: some of these seminar rooms need blinds, carpets and painting. Sixth form general accommodation is of good quality. The students have tastefully decorated their common rooms. These are adequate spaces for the current size of Years 12 and 13. All students have good access to study rooms, including the very good quality library, and to ICT.

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

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

90. 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
Biology	2	100	53	0	3	4.00	0.79
Business Studies	2	100	N/a	50	N/a	4.00	N/a
Chemistry	7	100	42	14	4	2.28	0.77
Classical Studies	13	76	N/a	30	N/a	1.69	N/a
Dance	2	100	N/a	50	N/a	4.00	N/a
Drama	4	75	N/a	25	N/a	2.00	N/a
Design technology	1	100	N/a	0	N/a	1.00	N/a
English Literature	6	100	N/a	33	N/a	3.00	N/a
Geography	4	75	N/a	0	N/a	1.75	N/a
German	1	100	N/a	0	N/a	1.00	N/a
Mathematics	6	50	62	0	15	0.33	1.51
Music	2	100	N/a	50	N/a	3.00	N/a
Media Studies	4	25	N/a	0	N/a	0.50	N/a
Physics	3	100	52	0	4	3.00	0.90
Psychology	5	100	N/a	20	N/a	2.40	N/a
Religious Studies	4	100	N/a	75	N/a	3.50	N/a
Sociology	2	100	N/a	50	N/a	2.50	N/a

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100	96	33	46	5.33	6.57
Biology	8	100	88	50	34	6.50	5.25
Business Studies	4	75	92	50	32	5.00	5.50
Chemistry	9	89	90	33	43	4.89	5.90
Classical Studies	25	100	95	36	49	6.64	6.51
Communication Studies	3	100	93	100	31	8.67	5.53
Dance	2	50	89	0	39	2.00	5.53
English literature	19	100	95	68	37	7.89	5.91
French	9	100	89	22	38	5.56	5.59
General Studies	58	85	93	17	30	4.76	4.91
Geography	25	100	92	56	38	7.44	5.74
German	11	82	91	27	40	4.00	5.81
History	13	100	88	23	35	4.31	5.45
Mathematics	5	80	87	0	43	3.60	5.80
Music	4	100	93	50	35	7.50	5.74
Other languages	2	100	93	50	56	8.00	6.84
Physics	3	100	88	33	40	6.00	5.67
Religious Studies	7	100	92	71	38	7.43	5.84
Sociology	8	100	86	75	35	7.00	5.32
Spanish	1	100	89	100	39	8.00	5.70
Sports Studies	2	100	92	0	25	4.00	5.09

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
NVQ Business administration							

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

91. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and biology, but one lesson in both chemistry and physics were also sampled. The quality of teaching in both chemistry and physics was good and in both subjects students were highly motivated. The quality of work seen in lessons shows that achievement is good. Standards in external examinations are above average, although comparisons are based on small entries of rarely more than ten.

MATHEMATICS

92. Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**

Strengths

- The attitudes and behaviour of students are good

Areas for improvement

- Overall examination results are variable with particularly poor AS level results
- The range of teaching and learning approaches is restricted
- The use of ICT is limited
- There is no evidence of effective action being taken to improve outcomes

93. Overall examination results have been variable. For the majority of recent years results for GCE AS level and Advanced level and for students retaking GCSE have been unsatisfactory. In recent years the GCE Advanced level results have been poor and they were particularly disappointing in 2000 when six of the 13 candidates failed to achieve pass grades. GCE AS level results have also been poor. In 2001 six of the 13 candidates failed and in 2002 seven of the 19 candidates entered failed to achieve pass grades. Grades obtained in mathematics by individual GCE AS and Advanced level candidates are also significantly below those obtained in their other subjects. GCE Advanced level results in 2002 are better than previously but in GCE AS level seven of the 19 candidates failed to gain pass grades in the A-E range. A small number of students retake GCSE mathematics usually during Year 12. In 2001 four of the five candidates achieved C grades. However results for other than this year have been disappointing.

94. Standards of work seen for current students are about average. Both GCE AS and Advanced level students have only recently commenced their courses and at present achievement of the majority is satisfactory. There is a wide range of attainment across the GCE AS level students. Students in one Year 12 class, for example, were discussing the main features of a basic statistical measure. Whilst most students showed an understanding of the properties, several clearly showed much more limited knowledge and understanding and were insufficiently confident to contribute to the discussion. Students in a Year 13 class showed a good knowledge and understanding of aspects of the requirements for the module on decision mathematics. On the other hand the same group showed relatively limited confidence in undertaking work involving the exponential function and forming part of the second level pure mathematics module.

95. The range of teaching and learning approaches used with sixth form mathematics students is restricted. Although there is no unsatisfactory teaching only a limited amount is good and there is no very good or excellent teaching. Students in several classes are closely directed. Students in some classes are expected to copy detailed notes from a white-board

and in some cases teachers dictate aspects of the notes. Some of the group

work is conducted at a laboured pace and, as a consequence, students are insufficiently challenged. Homework is regularly set, marked and returned to the students. However, the policy is not to grade the work and feedback to students is sometimes limited. Information kept by the teachers on individual students and their progress is also sometimes limited. Some use is made of calculators to support the graphical work. Other than this no use is made of ICT. Features of the good teaching, where this exists, include detailed planning with appropriate implementation, good connections made with previous work undertaken and references to every-day occurrences. Also, in the better lessons the pace with which the work is undertaken is appropriately challenging.

96. Overall attitudes and behaviour of the students are good. Work that is set for them to undertake during class and for homework is completed and standards of presentation are normally high. In a number of classes some of the students are unusually quiet and reticent in answering the questions that are asked of them during the group work. There is little evidence of students showing enthusiasm or enjoyment of the subject.

97. Aspects of the management of the sixth form provision are ineffective. There is insufficient evidence of effective action being taken that will lead to improved standards. The development plan for the department is of poor quality and makes no references to the need to improve outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation procedures include the observation of teaching and learning and written reviews of examination results are developed. However, the latter tend to focus on external factors that have affected outcomes rather than on identifying action that may be taken to improve the results. Although the teachers involved meet on a regular basis, discussions tend to concentrate on basic administrative issues rather than on aspects relating to teaching and learning and, in particular, the sharing of good practice. Students complete the courses which they commence, but the take up, particularly at A2 level, is low. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory.

BIOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good and facilitates learning
- Students are highly motivated
- Very good development of independent learning skills
- A high number of students achieve the higher A-level grades

Areas for improvement

- ICT is under-used in lessons
- Accommodation is outdated
- Some resources are becoming depleted

99. GCE Advanced level results in 2001 were well above average with all students achieving a pass. An above average number of students achieved the higher grades. In the year 2002, all students achieved a pass and over half of them gained the higher grades. The GCE AS level results for the year 2001 were well above average and were in line with predicted grades. In 2002, all students achieved a pass at GCE AS level, over half of them with A or B grades. Retention rates are high.

100. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average and these standards are achieved because of very good teaching. In relation to their standards at the start of their post-16 course, the achievement of students is very good. Their very positive attitudes mean that the quality of teaching and learning is very good so that they make good progress as they move through the course.

101. Students in Year 13 make good progress in lessons and are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. They are able to answer complex questions on respiration and showed competence in planning and designing an experiment to investigate the activity of enzymes at different temperatures. Students in Year 12 can discuss various types of gene therapy and have a mature approach to the related moral and ethical issues surrounding it. They are successfully building on work covered at GCSE level. Students in both years rise to challenging questions and make valuable contributions to discussion sessions. Their written work is of a very high standard, showing a clear understanding of some demanding topics.

102. Teaching in biology is very good overall, enabling students to learn well. Teachers show very good subject knowledge so that they are able to give clear explanations of facts and their enthusiasm for the subject is transmitted to the students. Lessons are well planned, have a brisk pace and include a variety of teaching and learning styles, which helps to maintain students' interest. Reviews at the end of each lesson help to consolidate learning. More use could be made of ICT in lessons, especially through the recently purchased laptop computers. Opportunities to experience biology first hand are afforded through regular fieldwork.

103. Students are encouraged to share ideas and help each other. The development of independent learning skills is fostered by small-scale research projects, following which students give presentations to their peers. Teachers' expectations are high and they question students frequently during lessons to establish and reinforce knowledge and understanding. Students rise to the challenge, and are keen to contribute to class discussions. There are pleasant working relationships between teachers and students during lessons: students feel able to ask questions if it is necessary. They are highly motivated, work co-operatively together in both theory and practical lessons, and help each other and share ideas in a mature and sensible way, showing respect for the views of others. Many of them have career aspirations involving biologically related subjects.

104. Written work is thoroughly marked and appropriately annotated, giving clear guidance to students on areas for improvement, with plenty of praise and encouragement. Assessment takes place through regular testing during and at the end of work modules, and targets are shared with the students so that they are always aware of their progress. Homework is set and marked on a regular basis and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons, often comprising past examination questions.

105. The department is led and managed well and the high standards seen during the previous inspection have been maintained. The teaching staff work as a team and support each other, meeting regularly to share information and expertise and to review progress. There is a clear focus on direction and commitment to the continued achievement of very good examination results. Monitoring of staff takes place through informal discussions and lesson observations. Assessment and record keeping are good. All staff are biology specialists enabling them to deliver lessons with confidence. Accommodation is satisfactory, but is due for refurbishment. As a result some lessons are taught in vacant classrooms as there are insufficient laboratories. The purchase of new textbooks, necessary for the new A-level courses, means that other resources, although satisfactory, are now becoming strained. The department receives good support from the technical staff. There has been

good improvement since the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

106. As the school currently makes no provision in this curriculum area, there was no detailed focus during the inspection.

BUSINESS

107. There was no detailed focus in this area of work during the inspection but one lesson in each of two business courses were sampled: GCE Advanced level business studies; NVQ Levels 1 and 2 business administration. The provision for GCE Advanced level business studies was in a consortium school. Teaching in business studies was satisfactory and in business administration it was very good. Achievement reflected the external examination results that is, in both courses, above average.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

108. As the school currently makes no provision in this curriculum area, there was no detailed focus during the inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

109. Although the school currently makes provision for physical education in this curriculum area, there was no detailed focus or sampling during the inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

110. Although the school currently makes provision for child development in this curriculum area, there was no detailed focus during the inspection. However, one lesson of GCSE child development was sampled and quality of teaching was good. Pupils were motivated and interested, made good progress and achieved well.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

111. The focus of the inspection was on music, but one lesson of art and two of drama and theatre studies were also sampled. The provision for the drama and theatre studies courses was made within a consortium school. In art teaching was excellent. Students were highly motivated, actively involved in their learning and very well supported in their personal development. The standards of work seen indicated very good achievement. In drama and theatre studies teaching was very good in one lesson and good in the other. Students' motivation was high and achievement was never less than satisfactory.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good
- The support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent
- Students' attitudes to the subject and their behaviour are excellent
- Extra-curricular activities are of a high standard

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of students gaining grades A-B at GCE Advanced level
- The accommodation and resources for ICT
- The use of computers in the teaching

113. The number of students entered for GCE Advanced level music over the past three years is too small for valid statistical comparisons and identification of trends. Overall most candidates achieve good grades although only a small proportion achieve grades in the A-B range. However, in the GCE AS examination for 2002, all candidates achieved at least a C grade, with some gaining A and B grades. Retention rates are high.

114. Standards in work seen are above average. Students respond well when listening to and analysing music and can identify such features as style, instrumentation, form and texture. When composing, although their theoretical knowledge of harmony is limited, their compositions show an intuitive grasp of style and a good level of creativity. This results from the high level of musicianship achieved in their instrumental and vocal performance. Standards are very high and are clearly consolidated by the very effective extra-curricular opportunities for music making offered to the students. Taking into account their high standards of attainment on entering the sixth form, students' achievement is very good.

115. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good. Both the class and instrumental teachers have very good subject knowledge, including specialist instrumental skills, and this is well used to illustrate explanations and guide the students in their own analyses. The very effective questioning techniques are a good example of this; the teacher makes the students think and justify their answers by drawing on their previous knowledge, thus reinforcing the learning process. Lessons are very well planned and move at a good pace, using the time effectively. The excellent attitudes and behaviour of the students contribute greatly to the very good progress made. They work well independently, relationships with each other and the teachers are excellent, and this results in productive working. The very high take-up for instrumental lessons and the strong support for extra-curricular activities, such as the sixth form choir, are examples of the very positive attitudes of the students. The teachers' management and organisation of the lessons are very good and tasks are designed to allow students to work at different levels. Homework is well used both to consolidate class work and also for research into new topics.

116. There are good assessment procedures in place. The marking of students' work is conscientious, and where appropriate, marking is related to the examination marking system so that pupils know how well they are doing. Written comments and extensive verbal feedback also keep the students well informed and enable individual learning needs to be met. Technology is well used in the teaching, for example in the use of electronic keyboards when composing, but there is insufficient use of ICT because of a lack of access to computers in the department.

117. Music makes an excellent contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Spiritual and cultural development is particularly stimulated by the focus on listening to and appreciating music of various periods, ranging from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, and performance of a wide repertoire, including sacred and secular music. Social development is enriched not only through extra-curricular activities and concert visits but also through giving the students responsibility for such things as organising the music for assemblies.

118. Overall, the improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The high standards reported then have been maintained and the quality of teaching and learning improved. The department enjoys very strong and effective leadership resulting in a well-managed and organised department that supports the school's aims and values.

HUMANITIES

119. The focus of the inspection was on classical civilisation, geography, history and psychology, but two lessons of sociology were also sampled. The quality of teaching in one lesson of sociology was good and in the other it was satisfactory. In the lesson where teaching was good, students were very involved in their learning, showed good levels of knowledge and understanding: work showed good levels of achievement. In the other lesson teaching was satisfactory. Students showed good understanding of social science methodology, but had limited challenge from the teaching to the detailed oral analysis they undertook of the hypothesis and proposed methodology to be used to gather data about teenagers' use of alcohol.

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

120. Overall, the quality of the provision in classical civilisation is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good with some very good and excellent
- The students think very highly of the teaching they receive
- Student numbers are buoyant

Areas for improvement

- Better use could be made of information about the students' attainment before they begin in the sixth form
- There is insufficient variety in the teaching methods used in some classes

121. The department offers courses leading to classical studies at GCE AS level and A2 level. The students read translations from Homer, Greek tragedy and comedy, learn about Roman Britain and study extracts from various Roman prose and verse authors including Vergil. Classical civilisation is a popular option. Attracted to it because of good experiences in lessons in Years 7 to 9, as many as thirty students a year choose to study it. Additional students are also attracted from consortium schools. Students complete the courses which they start.

122. GCE Advanced level results in 2001 were in line with national averages. Results for 2002 are rather better. No candidates were entered for AS level before last summer. In 2002 all 30 students entered for AS level obtained a pass grade of E or better and two thirds of them obtained higher grades A or B. There are no set entry requirements for the course and the students choosing to study classics have a wide range of prior attainment so that this

represents good achievement overall. As yet the use of test data to set challenging targets for the students is underdeveloped so that the department is not able to demonstrate fully the extent of its success.

123. The standard of work seen on the inspection was close to being above the national average reflecting results in recent years. Students in Year 13 are all capable of producing good descriptive work from evidence gathered from their reading of texts but only the higher attaining can evaluate this critically when answering questions. Students in Year 12 at the beginning of their sixth form studies were seen coming to terms with reading an extract from the Odyssey. New vocabulary related to seafaring was proving challenging for some. All responded well to very good teaching producing effective notes from which to revise and learn at a later date. Work in folders showed that most make good progress aided particularly by very good study materials prepared and provided by the teachers. These include very useful lists of questions to be answered that point the students in the right direction when studying either literary or historical topics.

124. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teaching was never less than satisfactory and sometimes it was very good and excellent. All lessons are carefully prepared and clearly presented providing the right level of pace and challenge for the range of attainment of the students. Just occasionally teaching did not stimulate or involve students in a variety of activities other than listening and taking notes. In the best teaching students were provided with a variety of activities and approaches to the ideas and concepts being studied. For example, a teacher brought in a canvas bag containing a wooden cot in which she had slept as a baby. This had been bought for a family member during World War II, and used scarcely any metal in its construction because such materials were needed for munitions and machines. This and other examples painted a picture of the hardships created by war and provided a good introduction to students' work on the Punic Wars and its effects in ancient Rome.

125. The students have mixed views about the arrangements that entail their spending whole three-hour sessions studying classics. Some think this is too long, others see it as an opportunity to concentrate more fully on the topics at hand. All are grateful that the arrangements enable them to experience different approaches to teaching and learning. They have considerable respect for their teachers and feel that their own contributions to lessons are valued. Students also value the regular and detailed marking of their work, especially the positive comments and clear indications of what has to be done to secure improvement. Books are always promptly returned and thoroughly marked.

126. The classics department is well led. The teachers are well qualified, enthusiastic and pull together as a team. They are beginning to recognise the learning benefits that accrue from more detailed setting of targets for student improvement. There is a strong commitment to improvement, which has been satisfactory since the last inspection, and the capacity to see that it takes place.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good
- Standards in the sixth form are rising and are currently above average
- The leadership of the subject is very good
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour and the contribution the subject makes to their personal development are outstanding

Areas for improvement

- Increase the proportion of pupils gaining the higher GCE Advanced level grades
- Improve the effectiveness of the use of target grades and target setting

128. Students enter the course with GCSE results that are quite modest, but rarely less than a Grade C. They make good progress as they move through Year 12 and gain results at the end of Year 13 that are generally above average. Over the past four years there has been an upward trend in standards. However, the rate at which standards are rising is determined by the above average proportion of students gaining grades in the C to E range, rather than the A to B range. This issue needs to be further addressed as part of the drive to raise standards. In the most recent GCE Advanced level examinations four-fifths of students achieved or exceeded their target grade in geography. Many continue to study geography beyond GCE AS level and few fail to complete the course.

129. Work seen during the inspection indicates that standards, especially in Year 13, are still rising and achievement is good. Students have a secure and confident understanding of key geographical concepts. They can, for example, explain with supporting evidence a variety of policies and projects being developed locally, nationally and internationally to combat pollution in order to achieve a sustainable future. As they move through Years 12 and 13 students also make significant progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. They improve their ability to select material for essays or responses to a question and become increasingly effective in the analysis and presentation of data. Their literacy skills are of a high standard, especially in making oral presentations or in constructing a well-researched argument on an aspect of a topic for the whole class. Their use of a range of ICT applications is very well developed and is often used for research, presentation of information or in the completion of coursework and other lengthy assignments.

130. Students have excellent attitudes to the subject and as they move through their courses they gain in confidence, as learners and people. By the end of Year 13 this maturity is clearly reflected in their oral and written work. All students respond well to the opportunities provided for them to be actively involved in learning, and benefit considerably from the challenge and critiques provided both by their peers and teachers. Relationships between students and with their teachers are excellent. All students are highly committed to their studies and in class have high levels of concentration. They work well together, in pairs and small groups, as well as on their own and they are diligent in the organisation and presentation of written assignments.

131. The quality of teaching is very good and, during the inspection, was never less than good. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and their interest in, and enthusiasm for, their subject is clearly reflected in the teaching. Lessons are very well planned and are supported by detailed schemes of work. In all lessons teaching was well targeted to meet students' learning needs and motivation and challenge was maintained throughout. The spirit

of learning as a co-operative venture is strong.

132. In whole class and small group teaching, students were constantly challenged by the strategic use of question and answer sessions and in drawing attention to important references or experimental work. As a result, learning always proceeded at a rapid pace and interesting and demanding tasks were designed to enable all learners to explore the topic and demonstrate what they know, understand and can do. In a very well taught Year 12 lesson, students worked very effectively in small groups on a decision-making exercise regarding the development of two rural settlements in North Yorkshire. Also in a Year 13 lesson, students used the Internet to research current examples of strategies to combat pollution. They were well informed and armed with current data when they returned enthusiastically to the group to share their findings. Time in lessons is well managed and resources to support pupils' learning are well selected and of good quality.

133. The curriculum is well structured and generally provides good opportunities for pupils to progress smoothly from Year 11. A good programme of fieldwork complements the taught curriculum and extends students' knowledge, understanding and skills as geographers. However, within the current Year 12 course there are few opportunities to fully develop and use some of the higher-order writing and thinking skills required in Year 13. Very good support is provided for students' personal development and a number of moral, social and cultural issues are enthusiastically tackled within both of the courses offered.

134. All work is regularly and systematically marked. The detailed written comments at the end of each assignment provide an evaluative commentary on what has been done well and also what needs to be done to improve. Students find this approach helpful in setting their own targets for improvement. The provision of oral feedback also enables students to discuss detailed points with their teacher as well as to receive praise and encouragement. The current system of target grades, developed from GCSE average point scores, is not always fully understood or helpful to pupils in their efforts to raise the standard of their work.

135. The leadership and management of the department are good. The new head of subject is ambitious for the department. In partnership with the well-qualified team of geography teachers she has produced a well-founded development plan that will inform their future work, staff development needs and the use of resources, including capitation. With the implementation of the performance management system, teaching and learning are regularly monitored. At other times good practice is shared between teachers and standards of work are monitored and analysed. Accommodation is generally of good quality, but the smallest teaching base needs to be equipped for the use of both videotapes and the overhead projector.

136. Good progress has been made in geography since the last inspection. For example, standards in the sixth form are now above average, the quality of teaching and learning has improved and is now monitored, and the provision of resources to support learning across the curriculum is now more plentiful. This is an effective department that serves its pupils well.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards at GCE A level have improved significantly recently and good procedures are used to monitor students' progress
- Students achieve very well and work, both written and oral, is of a high standard
- Teaching and learning are very good
- Leadership is excellent
- Gifted and talented students' needs are very well met

Areas for improvement

- Further opportunities for sharing good practice, mutual observation and reflecting critically on teaching methods

138. There has been a significant improvement in standards at GCE Advanced level since 2001 when examination results were below average for the proportion gaining grades A-B and barely in line with the national average for grades A-E. In 2002 GCE AS level results were very good. All the 24 students entered passed: nearly nine-tenths gained grades A or B. At GCE Advanced level in 2002 all the students gained grades in the A-B range: half at each grade. In the group preparing for GCE Advanced level in 2003, all but two have GCSE grades in the A-C range. They are working well and making good progress towards achieving high grades. Retention rates are high.

139. Observation of students in lessons, together with the analysis of their work, confirm that the standards achieved are better than at the time of the last inspection, and represent very good achievement. The very good results in the most recent A-level and AS-level examinations are due to the high motivation of the students, the very significant improvement in teaching and rigorous preparation for the examinations.

140. Students show a very good knowledge and understanding of the topics being studied. They are working from a starting point of above average levels achieved in years 7 to 11 that provide a very good foundation for development of appropriate skills, and understanding of methods of historical enquiry. They work confidently on their own, analysing and interpreting a variety of historical sources and collecting information that they use to make secure judgements in support of their ideas and hypotheses. As well as having access to a very good range of resources, written and visual, they also access others on the Internet. Resources are sufficiently wide to meet the needs of the full range of attainment in the groups. Gifted and talented students are provided with additional materials that extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding.

141. Overall the teaching of history is very good. Teachers' own knowledge of the subject is excellent and they communicate their enthusiasm to the students, arousing interest and motivating them to respond to challenging questions. Resources are used very effectively with an emphasis on developing students' ability to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. There are also ample opportunities for students to share ideas in small groups and at class level and so evaluate their own progress and ideas. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, students were each allocated different texts and asked to identify ways in which the New Model Army emerged as a political force, suggesting reasons for this. They then shared their findings in groups before feeding back and engaging in lively discussion with the class teacher. The teacher demonstrated very good teaching skills by creating a

high level of challenge appropriate for each individual, supporting them as they worked. Students' ideas were valued and used to deepen understanding and awareness of the issues being investigated.

142. Teachers carefully monitor learning in lessons and give effective support to all students. Extended pieces of writing and essays are marked regularly and consistently, and students are given very clear and helpful advice and judgements on the standard of their work. Guidance is also provided on how to structure and write examination answers and essays and how to improve the levels of response possible to questions asked.

143. Students learn very well. They are very attentive, sustain their concentration well and work effectively and hard. This is in response to the very good quality of the teaching and their very positive relationships with one another and their teachers. They understand how to make use of the resources provided and use them well: organise their own notes systematically and effectively: speak confidently and articulately, asking and answering questions well.

144. Excellent leadership and management is provided for the department. The new head of department's analysis of the weaknesses which existed, together with the strategies he has put into place to remedy them, have made possible the very significant turn-around and improvement in standards of achievement. The numbers of able students choosing to study history has grown. Schemes of work have been reviewed and revised to reflect the requirements of the current examination specification, to inject greater rigour into teaching and learning and to improve efficiency. Very good use has been made of departmental meetings to encourage reflection on teaching and learning and to extend the variety of methods employed. There is systematic monitoring of teaching and learning, and assessment is carefully used to set targets for students. Additional opportunities for revision are made available and tuition is being offered to higher attaining students preparing for higher education. Resources are very good. The head of department's vision for history, his energy and determination in putting into place strategies for development and improvement, have made a major contribution to bringing GCE Advanced level standards up to those already achieved at age 14 and at GCSE levels. There has been very good progress since the last inspection.

PSYCHOLOGY

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

Strengths

- GCE Advanced level examination results are well above average
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good and occasionally excellent
- The attitudes, behaviour and relationships of students are outstanding
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good

Areas for improvement

- The range of data analysis of external examination results
- The quality of the accommodation

146. All pupils enter the Year 12 course with a keen interest but little understanding of the subject. Most have at least five or more A* to C grades at GCSE level. Students' progress in the first term of the course is considerable as they come to terms with the nature of the subject and its empirical methodology. By the end of Year 13 standards in GCE Advanced level are well above average and results this last summer contributed to an upward trend. In

2002 the department assisted many pupils to reach high standards: some achieved their target grade while over half exceeded it. This successful subject is comparatively new in the sixth form curriculum and entries for GCE Advanced level were made in 2000 and 2002. The number opting for the subject is growing fast and most students transfer from GCE AS to A2 level: to date none have failed to complete the course.

147. The standards of work seen during the inspection are in line with those recorded in last year's examination results and reflect very good achievement. Year 12 students have made an excellent start to their course and already show great promise as they develop both knowledge and understanding of aspects of cognitive development, especially in their study of autism. By the end of Year 13 students have a secure understanding of key psychological concepts, the theories that underpin them and their practical application by professionals working in the field. Pupils can also erect clear hypotheses as well as design and carry out empirical work to test them, especially evident in their coursework modules. As they move through Years 12 and 13, students further develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills to a very good standard. Their ability to analyse data, and provide an interpretation and rationale for their conclusions, is also of a high order. Pupils make very good use of a range of ICT applications, for research on the Internet and to word process and imaginatively present data in assignments and coursework.

148. Students have outstandingly good attitudes to this subject. The learning ethos encourages them to contribute to, as well as benefit from lessons. Consequently, students take a very active part in learning and relish grappling with new concepts and ideas. They ask and answer questions to clarify their understanding of a concept, and present views to the group that are fully supported by evidence. In Year 13 students make considerable use of their well-developed analytical skills to enrich their oral and written responses to highly demanding questions. They listen with great sensitivity and understanding to the views of others and, when necessary, provide challenge to both peers and their teachers. They undertake work in pairs and small groups with maturity, great discipline and concentration and contribute their findings confidently, and sometimes with good humour, to the rest of the class. Most students enjoy and respond well to problem solving exercises, research and analysis of text and data.

149. In most lessons teaching is very good and occasionally excellent. Teaching is very carefully planned to meet the learning needs of all students, including those with special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language. Planning is supported by very good subject knowledge as well as by well-structured and comprehensive schemes of work. Teachers always have the highest expectations of their students, use a wide range of teaching methods to explore the learning and provide interesting and demanding tasks to develop understanding of the subject matter. In a Year 13 lesson where teaching was very good, students' understanding of methods of measuring stress was enhanced by the contribution of every member of the group and by the analysis undertaken as a result of focused questions by the teacher. The pace of learning is maintained throughout lessons by using a variety of tasks: some undertaken by each learner, while others may be in pairs or small groups.

150. Great care is taken to ensure that the most appropriate approach is used to ensure that each member of the group is challenged and makes significant progress. Excellent use is made of the overhead projector and whiteboard to provide a high level of support when pupils learn new concepts or terminology. This rigorous approach to teaching and learning is also supported by the use of some excellent examples, from film, literature, as well as current psychological research. A Year 12 group had their development of understanding of autism enhanced by the use of an excellent videotape extract. It enabled them to further consider the concept of "theory of mind" in relation to the behaviour and response of an

autistic child. The methods and media selected to explore some difficult concepts and behaviour ensured that understanding was fully secured. This was supported by well-designed classroom tasks and demanding homework.

151. Within teaching and learning very good support is provided for pupils' personal development. In many lessons issues relating to important ethical and moral questions are considered. Students often gain a clearer understanding of the methodological questions that psychologists encounter as well as being able to think about the impact of these matters on the persons who are the focus of their studies.

152. Students' work is regularly marked with detailed comments and a well-structured evaluation. Most students value this approach and use the comments to frame targets for further raising the standard of their work. Oral feedback is also well used and students are reassured about their progress by the sensitive use of praise during lessons. The attainment and progress of each student is carefully monitored and informs the planning of further teaching and learning. External results would benefit from further analysis at GCE A2 level, especially in determining the average points score for each pupil and the details of marks gained by them for each unit of work.

153. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The teachers work well together, share good practice and plan effectively for further development. The annual self-review helps to determine priorities in the development plan as well as to identify professional development needs and additional resources for learning. Good support is provided for the newly appointed teacher. The work of the department is carefully monitored and the performance management system ensures that teaching and other activities are part of that process. The department is well resourced and appropriately staffed. Students make very good use of the library to support their learning. The accommodation is adequate in size but its quality is unsatisfactory and needs to be upgraded so that pupils can work, and a range of technology be used, even in bright sunlight.

154. At the time of the last inspection psychology was not provided. The subject is very cost effective, has high rates of pupil retention and works extremely diligently to meet their learning needs. The school's aims and values are clearly reflected in this department's work.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

155. The focus of the inspection was on English and French, but one lesson of German was also sampled. The quality of teaching in German was satisfactory. Some pupils were not well motivated; achievement was satisfactory.

ENGLISH

156. Overall, the quality of provision for English is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Consistently high standard of attainment in the GCE AS and A-level examinations
- High quality teaching that promotes very good achievement
- Students achieve very well and have an increasing awareness of their learning
- Leadership and management provide a very clear educational direction

Areas for improvement

- Strategic planning and analytical use of data to inform monitoring of progress

157. Standards achieved in English literature GCE AS level and Advanced level examinations are high. Results exceed the national average and show sustained and improving performance each year. The 2002 results were higher than the previous years' with well over two thirds of students gaining the higher grades. The GCE AS level results were strong with half of the students obtaining grades A or B. Overall, standards have risen substantially since the last inspection.

158. In lessons and work seen, Years 12 and 13 students display high level skills of analysis, interpretation and appreciation of literary texts. The standards reached confirm very good achievement. The overall quality of students' work is well above average and they achieve highly in all areas of work.

159. In speaking and listening, students speak authoritatively when debating, explaining, analysing and deliberating their views. They find that they have a voice, which is not diminished, and so use every opportunity to present their views and broaden debate when considering a writer's use of language. Reading skills are very well developed in the study of literary texts. Students reach a high standard in developing and presenting research papers on writers and their works, and give perceptive and original comments when discussing or giving a written response to texts. By Year 13, progress in reading is exceptionally good and the extensive wide reading enables students to develop a critical, discriminating and discerning voice when responding to texts language, style and form. Students also reach high standards in critical writing. At the start of Year 12, in making the transition to the sixth form, they begin to adopt a more sophisticated approach to expressing their ideas. By Year 13 there is greater maturity in extended critical writing.

160. Overall, teaching is very good with many excellent features. Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subject and plan well-structured lessons linked to examination criteria. The pace of lessons continuously challenges students, and over a period of three hours the momentum is maintained through a combination of discussion, seminars, dramatic presentations, group and whole class teaching. Expectations are high and the emphasis on wide reading, skills of analysis and of debate promote students' development as independent, critical thinkers with an increasing knowledge of their own learning. They use high quality research and analytical notes to demonstrate a very good understanding of how, for example, literary forms and structures shape and influence meaning in the works of authors such as Duffy, Shakespeare, Austen and Lockhead.

161. Teachers invest a high level of trust in students to take responsibility for their work and this enables them to intellectually challenge students. This is particularly effective when students present papers as the interventionist role of teachers challenges their thinking through probing questions and debate. Students value the range of teaching styles and the academic emphasis teachers place on developing their literary skills. Overall, teachers use assessment well to monitor students' progress, although tracking of progress could be improved. Marking is very thorough and contributes to students improving their work. Teachers use homework very well to increase students understanding of how to use the assessment criteria to produce well structured written work.

162. The leadership and management of the department are outstandingly good, and there has been very good improvement since the last inspection. There is clear vision for maintaining high standards and doing the best for all students. The curriculum is enriched by the Advanced Extension Award, which fully stretches the highest attaining students and those who wish to sit the examination. The department is adjusting its approach to the new AS-course. Provision for students' overall development is excellent and positively supports their

cultural and moral development. Extra-curricular activities are very good and contribute to high level levels of attainment. Development planning is in place but there is scope for a more strategic approach. Whilst teachers have an overview of students' progress, there is insufficient use of data to track progress.

FRENCH

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good with some excellent features
- The provision to support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development within the subject is very good
- The students work well together: they are always attentive and hardworking
- The subject is well managed

Areas for improvement

- Not all students are always actively involved in their learning and working at maximum pace
- The occasional lack of a wide enough variety of resources and activities to ensure that all pupils, especially those that are higher attaining, fulfil their potential

164. Over the last few years, results in French have been average. All candidates achieve a pass grade and most fulfil their potential. Nearly all the students complete the courses and students do significantly better in French than in their other GCE Advanced level subjects.

165. The evidence from work seen in lessons, and in students' files, during the inspection shows that standards in Years 12 and 13 are in line with national averages. Achievement is good and, in the more stimulating lessons, progress is very rapid at times. Students in Year 12 understand written and spoken French well. A few higher attaining students speak French quite fluently and with a reasonable degree of accuracy, especially when they have prepared well for the lesson, for example on the topic of adolescence. Many students' pronunciation is, however, weak. Their written work displays many basic errors of grammar and spelling and they write sentences that are very simple in structure.

166. In Year 13, students' reading skills are well developed as a result of frequent practice with the textbook and other texts. Students have a satisfactory range of vocabulary on topics such as French education and the emotional life. Their wide knowledge of grammar enables them to translate well from English into French. This knowledge is not always applied in their free writing. Even the higher attaining students make basic grammatical errors, on verb endings and tenses, for example, and are sometimes inaccurate in spelling and the use of accents. Students' command of spoken French is below average. After some initial difficulty in understanding questions, particularly the tense being used, they sometimes struggle to find the correct tense for their reply.

167. Teaching is good overall. Teachers' knowledge of French language and culture is a particular strength. French is used exclusively in the classroom. As a result, students' understanding of the language is quite good although there are insufficient opportunities for them to develop their ability to speak it. The best lessons are planned in an exemplary fashion with a wide variety of activities and resources, all focused on students' learning. In one Year 12 lesson on the theme of adolescence, both teachers and students prepared thoroughly in advance to make the maximum use of the time in class. The teacher constantly challenged students to think harder and express their views, to re-use immediately

and effectively the vocabulary and structures that formed the core of the lesson. In a Year 13 lesson, on a film directed by Truffaut, video extracts were exploited to the full by constantly changing activities, backed up by carefully chosen and prepared resources. In lessons in which time is used less productively, students do not prepare the material in advance, and the objectives and focus of the lesson are not so clear, so that not all students are sufficiently challenged to produce their best, particularly the higher attaining ones.

168. Teachers encourage students to do independent research on topics using the Internet. Each student is provided with a dictionary, which they use extensively. Homework builds on that done in class and often results in an extended piece of writing. This is usually carefully marked with suggestions for improvement, although sometimes there is too great a tolerance of inaccurate work and errors go unchecked. Teachers make a great effort to ensure that students with special needs are provided with every opportunity to fulfil their potential.

169. Students learn well. They are very well behaved and polite in class, and enjoy very good relationships with each other and with the teachers. They are attentive, and persevere with tasks even when these are occasionally repetitive. Students respond to the more stimulating and varied lessons with keen interest and enthusiasm, eagerly using every minute to record their own notes and acquire new knowledge and skills. They are always willing to reply to questions and ask their own, in order to further their understanding.

170. Work in the subject is well led and managed. There is a shared commitment to improving standards and all members of the department co-operate well. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection. The head of department carefully monitors the quality of teaching, but there are insufficient funds for the continuing development and modernising of teaching skills. The schemes of work have now been developed in more detail, and a good new scheme has been put in place whereby students review their own progress and set targets each half term. The planning for the support of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is especially strong. The scheme of work identifies how the various topics in the sixth form can be used to further these elements and each lesson plan has a related focus: for example listening to others, respecting views and opinions, accepting constructive criticism and so on. The department also offers a wide range of enrichment activities that includes visits to the theatre and cinema, as well as trips and work experience abroad.