

INSPECTION REPORT

BIDDULPH HIGH SCHOOL

Biddulph

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124427

Headteacher: Mr. Stephen Collier

Reporting inspector: David Bate
1545

Dates of inspection: 3rd – 7th February 2003

Inspection number: 249727

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	13 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Conway Road Knypersley Biddulph Staffordshire Moorlands
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr David Fletcher
Date of previous inspection:	3 rd March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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1545	David Bate	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? The school's results and students' achievements What should the school do to improve?
9189	John Horwood	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
7020	Paul Chambers	Team inspector	Mathematics	
3278	David Roberts	Team inspector	English	
4720	Graham Carter	Team inspector	Science Physics in the sixth form	
31096	John Thornhill	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	How well are students taught?
10209	Vincent Gormally	Team inspector	Art Citizenship	
24894	Clive Petts	Team inspector	Design and technology	How good are curricular opportunities offered to students?
29972	John Webster	Team inspector	Geography	How well is the school led and managed?

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3930	Roy Pitcher	Team inspector	History Religious education	
1332	John Marshall CBE	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
11672	Peter Harle	Team inspector	Music	
31192	John Stewart	Team inspector	Physical education	
2085	Brian Ogden	Team inspector	Leisure and tourism in the sixth form	
12897	Maurice Mealing	Team inspector	Sociology in the sixth form	
28002	Sue Taylor	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language Educational inclusion	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Biddulph High School is a 13-18 comprehensive school serving the town of Biddulph and its immediate area, receiving students from two feeder middle schools. The town and immediate area have experienced economic decline with the demise of the coal, steel and pottery industries. There are currently 823 students on roll including 135 in the sixth form. Since the last inspection the school has undergone a significant reduction in numbers before recovering to its present level. The school has become increasingly popular in recent years. The pupil profile reflects a comprehensive intake, but with 170 having special educational needs, this is above the national average. There are 30 students in receipt of a statement of need. The students' needs relate mainly to specific or moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural needs. The number of students receiving free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. The students are from predominantly White British backgrounds with a very small minority of students coming from other ethnic groups. Attainment levels on entry in 2002 were well below the national averages in English and below average in science and mathematics. The school has gained the School Curriculum Award in 2000, Sportsmark 2000 – 2003, DfES Truancy Busters Award, DfES top 100 most improved schools 1997 – 2001 and Staffordshire's most improved school 1997 – 2002 (GCSE). DfES 45th most improved GCSE results nationally 2002. The school has recently been designated as a specialist sports college.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very effective school where students receive a very good education with some excellent features. The quality of teaching is good overall with a significant amount of very good and excellent teaching. Students are positive about learning and behave very well. There are very good relationships throughout the school. Overall standards for students attaining 5+A*-C grades at the age of 16 are above national average and well above similar schools. The school adds good value to students' achievement as they move through from Year 9 to 11. Leadership and management of the headteacher and other senior staff are excellent. The governing body is very effective in fulfilling its responsibilities. The school is giving good value for money.

What the school does well

- The quality of teaching is good overall with a significant amount of very good and excellent teaching.
- There are very good relationships throughout the school and students behave very well.
- Attainment of 5 A*-C grades at the age of 16 is above national averages and well above similar schools and is improving significantly over time.
- Leadership and management of the headteacher and other senior staff are excellent and the governing body is very effective in fulfilling its responsibilities.
- A very good shared commitment to improvement by all parties throughout the school.
- There are very good financial and budgetary procedures in place and the school fully adheres to best value principles.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance and taking effective action are very good.
- Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are excellent.

What could be improved

- Standards in English and literacy by the end of Year 9.
- Information and communication technology across the curriculum.
- Library provision.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Standards of attainment at GCSE have improved significantly over time and have improved at a greater rate than nationally to now be above the national average. The school improvement plan is now a very clear strategic tool with school

improvement and raising standards firmly embedded as the guiding factors. All departments now have detailed and strategic development plans which are evaluated annually along with performance data. The role of the governing body has developed significantly since the last inspection and the governors now hold the school fully to account at all levels. The checking of teaching is now an integral part of the school's self-evaluation cycle, with classroom observation being an accepted part of school life. The school has developed a very effective system for collecting, analysing and using performance data at all levels for whole-school, departmental and individual pupil's target setting. Students are fully involved and know their own personal targets well. Provision for ICT has improved significantly as have standards of attainment.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

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

NB: similar schools are schools with between 8 per cent and 13 per cent of students entitled to free school meals.

In the GCSE examinations in 2002, the proportion of students gaining five or more higher grades was above the national average and much better than in similar schools. The students' overall performance was the same as found in most schools and matched that of students in schools whose students have similar backgrounds, although, overall, the students' results were not as good as might have been expected given their results in the National Curriculum tests two years earlier. The girls did better than the boys, overall. Results in the GCSE examinations have improved since 1998 and at a faster rate than nationally. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above those expected nationally in English, mathematics, science, ICT, design and technology, art and music. Standards seen in all other subjects, except geography, were in line with national expectations. The school's below average performance in comparison with similar schools, as indicated in the table above, is wholly due to the school not entering a significant minority of Year 11 students for GCSE. Instead these students followed the work-related and flexible learning programmes and were successful in gaining accreditation through their courses at local colleges.

In 2002, in the national tests at the end of Year 9, the students' performance in mathematics was broadly the same as in most schools across the country, whilst in English and science it was lower, particularly in English, where the results were well below average. When the students' earlier levels of attainment are considered, the results in mathematics were better than might have been expected and in science, they were as expected. In English, the students did not do as well as their earlier attainment suggests. The boys did not do as well as the girls in English and science. Overall, the results in the tests at the end of Year 9 have risen in recent years, in line with the trend nationally. Standards of work seen in ICT during the inspection are above average. Standards seen in all other subjects, except English and RE which are below average, are in line with national expectations. This represents good achievement and progress by students in Year 9, compared with their standards on entry to the school at the end of Year 8.

The school's GCSE targets for 2003/2004 are very challenging and indicate an even more significant increase in five A*-C grades as well as improvements in five A*-G grades.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Students like school and participate fully in lessons and activities during the day. Around the school there is an air of trust and respect. They have good attitudes to learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Behaviour in lessons and throughout the school is very good with only a very few occurrences of inappropriate behaviour. Bullying is rare within the school but when it occurs is well dealt with.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Students are confident, friendly and polite. Very good relationships exist throughout the school both between students and adults and with other students. Opportunities for students to demonstrate initiative and for personal responsibility are limited.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance is well above the national average with unauthorised absence below. Exclusions are low for this type of school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Year 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and has contributed significantly to the improvement in standards. Teaching is good in almost all subjects. It is satisfactory in modern foreign languages. Some very good teaching was observed in PE and music. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects overall with very good knowledge in English, design and technology, ICT, history and PE. They use this knowledge to plan effectively for lessons, setting clear and challenging tasks to motivate students. Teachers share learning objectives with the students and review the learning at the end of lessons. Teachers encourage students to succeed and set high expectations. Pace of lessons is usually brisk which assures full concentration for the whole lesson. Teachers have good relationships with students and use a range of classroom management techniques which are very good overall. Teachers use resources well and a strong feature is the positive use of learning support assistants. Teachers use a range of techniques to provide a good working atmosphere, but often lessons are too teacher-led. In most lessons, teachers use ongoing assessment well. There is a lack of consistency in the marking of work. The teaching of literacy is effective in many lessons but the teaching of numeracy needs further development across subject departments. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good - The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum that meets statutory requirements in Years 9 to 11. Good provision is made to meet the academic and social needs of the students; good quality vocational provision is developing.
Provision for students with	Good - Curricular arrangements promote the inclusion of all students

special educational needs	with special educational needs and they have access to the same curriculum as their peers.
Aspect	Comment
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good – Overall, the provision of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Considerable effort is extended to promote very good moral and social development.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. The school provides very good care of its students with a strong emphasis on health and safety. The pastoral systems ensuring that students are well known to staff and there are effective procedures for supporting pupil care in place.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent - Leadership and management are excellent. There is a very strong, shared commitment to self-evaluation and a drive and determination to raise standards still further.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good - The involvement and support of the governors whose partnership in shaping the direction of the school is exceptional.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good - The powerful school ethos stems from a desire to analyse what works, why it works and how that success can be shared.
The strategic use of resources	Good - Resources for learning are used well and the school has invested heavily in ICT in recent years, but the school library is poorly equipped.

The school monitors its performance well in relation to best value principles. Staffing is generally adequate to deliver the curriculum. Much of the accommodation is good. Resources for learning are generally good with the exception of food technology. The school library is poorly equipped, with inadequate and ageing stocks.

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 school is well led and managed. The teachers high expectations of the students. They feel comfortable approaching the school. The range of activities outside lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How closely the school works with parents. The amount of homework. To be kept better informed about their child's progress. The teaching.

The response from the parents' questionnaires was very small and cannot be used as a reliable reflection of the views of all parents. The inspection team investigated the concerns of this small group of parents and found all aspects to be at least good, except issues relating to homework where a more planned approach would be beneficial to the students. Individual comments made by parents, many of which were supportive, were considered during the inspection and are dealt with within the main report.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this 13-18 comprehensive school is located within the main school complex with a segregated area known as the sixth form centre housing the common room, some sixth-form staff offices and some dedicated classrooms. The sixth form is led and managed by an experienced member of the senior management team who was appointed to the post at the beginning of the year. Teaching takes place in specialist rooms around the school where support services are also located. The students are allocated to a tutor group and have a tutor base within the area the tutor normally teaches. It provides a range of subjects at both AS and A2 levels as well as a choice of vocational subjects. There are currently 135 students on roll which is higher than previous years. The majority of students in the sixth form have transferred from the main school. The numbers of students on some courses are very small.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is effective and students receive a good education. The quality of teaching is always satisfactory, mostly good and often very good. The students make good progress over time and they are mature and motivated. The sixth form is well led and is now improving after a period during which there have been significant staff changes. In spite of low student numbers in some subjects the sixth form is cost effective. The pastoral and guidance systems are good within the sixth form but relatively large tutor group sizes restrict the time available for independent guidance and support. The advice and guidance on future options have been limited in the past but the school has good systems now in place. The main strengths and areas that could be improved in the sixth form are:

Strengths

- The leadership and management.
- Provision in information and communications technology.
- Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' progress.
- Attendance.
- Excellent behaviour and very good relationships.

What could be improved

- Smaller tutor group sizes to increase time available for direct tutor/student communications.
- How general studies and key skills are delivered.
- The content of the personal, social and health education provision to include up to date information and to meet the requirements in the provision of religious education.
- Systems for students' views to be considered and for them to feel part of a democratic society.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Satisfactory. Results in 2001 were below average. As a result of good teaching, students make satisfactory progress.
Physics	Good. Results are broadly in line with the national average and standards are improving as a result of good teaching and learning and mature student

	attitudes to work.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Information and communication technology	Very good. Results in 2002 were significantly lower than 2001. Standards are now above average due to the good teaching. Students' attitudes are very positive and they make substantial effort to progress knowledge and skills.
Leisure and recreation	Good. This is a developing subject area with increasing numbers opting for it. Teaching, care for students, relationships and team spirits are all good.
Art	Good. Teaching is good. Attainment is above average. In the most recent year students gained 80% grades A-B at A level.
Geography	Good. A popular subject, well taught. Students generally achieve better results than in their other subjects.
Sociology	Good. Students make good progress during the year as a result of very good teaching in a well-led department. Communication skills are well developed.
English literature	Good. Very good teaching inspires students to work with commitment and achieve well. In 2002 all students achieved A-E grades in the A2 examinations. This was an improvement on 2001. At AS level in 2002 all four candidates achieved A-E grades, with three obtaining A or B grades.
German	Satisfactory. Year 12 students have made a satisfactory start to the subject and are making progress in most aspects of the work. Teaching is good.

Other work was sampled through observations of lessons in general studies, psychology, business studies, health and social care, music, history, design technology, PE, chemistry, biology, English language and performing arts. Standards reached were appropriate for the students and the courses being studied. The quality of the teaching was always at least satisfactory and mostly good or very good. The attitudes of the students were very positive.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Satisfactory. The academic progress of students is well monitored by teachers of individual subjects and their tutors who have close working relationships with them. Advice on careers, further study and personal development have improved from what was an unsatisfactory position. Relationships are very good throughout the sixth form in which behaviour is excellent.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. The leadership team within the sixth form is relatively new but is working well as a committed team and already making a significant impact. There are particular strengths in the monitoring and tracking of progress which is being enhanced by a computer database. The increased numbers in the sixth form have resulted in relatively large tutor group sizes which restrict the opportunities for individual guidance by the tutors. Students themselves are still involved with the main school where there is joint provision of specialist equipment and accommodation. All students

	have equal access to courses, equipment and facilities.
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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">• The teachers are accessible to help with difficulties.• Choice of subjects suits their talents and aspirations.• They are well taught and challenged.• They are helped to study independently.• Their work is thoroughly assessed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The advice about future options.• The advice given on choice of course.• The way the school responds to their views.• Being treated more like adults.• The information about progress.• The support and help with personal problems.

Students interviewed during the inspection confirmed the very mixed views of the sixth form indicated by the questionnaires. The inspection team investigated the concerns and believe that most of these arise from unavoidable staffing changes and poor provision from an external agency which had been identified by the school and been addressed. Systems are now in place to provide improved advice on courses and options and information on progress. The way the school responds to students' views, the personal support and the way students are treated as mature adults are all good but with some areas that could be further developed.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

- The word 'results' refers to how well the students are doing in national tests, GCSE and GCE examinations.
- The word 'standards' is used to define how well the students are doing when their work is compared with what students nationally are expected to know, understand and do at the ages of 11, 14, 16 and 18 years.
- The word 'level' refers to a particular standard of work described in the National Curriculum.
- The word 'grade' refers to the public examination grading systems for GCSE and GCE.
- The word 'achievement' refers to how well the students are doing at the age of 14 compared with what they were able to do at the age of 11, similarly at the age of 16 compared with what they could do at the age of 14 and finally what they can do at the age of 18 compared with what they were able to do at the age of 16 years. It indicates how much progress the students are making.

Results and standards on entry to the school at the beginning of Year 9

Students' attainment on entry is below the national average for all schools.

Results of standardised tests carried out by the school early in Year 9 clearly indicate that students' attainment on entry is below the national expectations in English, mathematics and science.

The school's results and students' achievements

Results, standards and achievement at the age of 14 years

Strengths

- Improving standards.
- Good progress overall by most students.

Areas for improvement

- Raise attainment in English and literacy by the end of Year 9.

1. Results for students attaining Level 5+ in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were below the national average for all schools in English and in line with the national averages in mathematics and science. The proportion of students attaining at Level 6+ in English was well below the national average, above the national average in mathematics and close to the national average in science. The school's results were below those of similar schools. Results, as judged by average points score, in 2002 showed a slight improvement from 2001 in English and mathematics. The trend over time based on points score has been broadly in line with the national trend. Whilst girls attain slightly higher results than boys in English, the reverse was the case in mathematics and science.

2. Overall, by the age of 14, students' literacy skills are below average and their numeracy skills are satisfactory.
3. The statutory teacher assessments in 2002 in modern languages indicated students were reaching the nationally expected standards by the age of 14 years. Attainment in design and technology, ICT, and music were above average. Attainment in history, geography, and art were below average. Attainment in PE was well below average.
4. Progress was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons seen during the inspection in Year 9 with over two thirds recording good or very good progress and advances in students' learning across all subject areas.
5. Standards of students' work seen in ICT are above average. Standards seen in all other subjects, except English and RE which are below average, are in line with national expectations. This represents good achievement and progress by students in Years 9, compared with their standards on entry to the school.
6. Students with special educational needs make good progress by age 14 years and their needs are fully met within the school. All members of staff understand their particular requirements and practical, supportive mechanisms are shared by teachers to ensure full inclusion of these students and all those on the SEN register.

Results, standards and progress at the age of 16 years

Strengths

- Above average results for 5+ A*-C grades.
- Rapidly improving results over time.
- Improvement trend above the national trend.

Areas for improvement

- The standard of students coursework in geography.

7. The school's results are above the national average for five or more A*-C grades. This figure for 2002 represents a very significant improvement on the results reported in the last inspection, and performance over the intervening years has been improving rapidly. In comparison with similar schools the average points score of 38.4 was below average; this is wholly due to a significant minority of students who are not entered for five or more GCSE examinations because they are involved in the work-related and flexible learning programmes run in conjunction with local colleges. In relation to students' attainment on entry, the school is adding good value to students' achievements as they move from Year 9 to Year 11. Girls performed slightly better at GCSE than boys, but the boys attained in line with the national average for boys.
8. Results for students gaining five or more A*- G grades showed a slight improvement on the previous year and since the last inspection, although overall they are below those of similar schools. Again, due to the school's provision of work-related and flexible learning programmes for a significant minority of students in Years 10 and 11 not all students are entered for five or more GCSE examinations. All students attempting five or more GCSEs gained at least passes in all their subjects. The students following the work-related and flexible learning programmes gained accreditation through their courses at local colleges.
9. The trend since the previous inspection in the school's average points score has been above the national trend. Even though some subjects are below average for students

gaining A*-C grades, there have been significant improvements since the previous inspection in all subjects. Attainment in 2002 in business studies, double award science, design and technology, English literature and PE was well above the national average, whilst art and design, and mathematics were above average. Attainment in English was in line with the national average, whilst geography, German, history, RE and ICT were below average.

10. The students did significantly better in business studies, double award science, design and technology and PE/Sports Studies than they did in their other subjects. They did less well in art and design, English, geography, German, history and ICT.
11. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above those expected nationally in English, mathematics, science, ICT, design and technology, art and music. Standards seen in all other subjects, except geography, are in line with national expectations.
12. Most students make sound progress by the age of 16 years as indicated in the national comparison against prior attainment. Progress was never less than satisfactory in 78 of the 80 lessons seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11. Students made good or very good progress in seven out of every ten lessons seen across all subject areas.
13. Students with special educational needs make good progress in their lessons and in the withdrawal sessions for specific teaching by learning support staff. There is clear evidence of good increase in students' reading ages. The school has admitted students who have transferred from special schools and they have made very good progress, gaining examination successes.
14. The school has identified those students who are gifted and talented. These students generally make good progress overall with some exceptions in design and technology, geography and modern foreign languages where they are not sufficiently challenged and do not achieve as well as they should.
15. Standards of literacy are generally satisfactory at age 16 years and numeracy standards are good.
16. The school's GCSE targets for 2003/2004 are very challenging and indicate an even more significant increase in five A*-C grades as well as improvements in five A*-G grades. The school is making good progress towards achieving these targets.

Sixth form

Strengths

- Improving average points scores over time.
- Male students' attainment.
- Standards of work seen in lessons.
- Good progress from GCSE in most subjects.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment of consistently high levels of higher A/B grades across all subjects.

17. Attainment for A levels, which matched the national averages at the last inspection, has improved and average points scores overall in 2001 were above the national average. Male students achieved significantly better than female students with the average points score of 19.5 being above the overall national average and well above the average for males' achievement. For students gaining grades A/B, business studies, computer studies, sociology, and PE/sports studies were better than the national average. Geography and history were close to the average whilst biology, chemistry, English literature and general studies were below average. Other subject entries were too low to make valid statistical comparisons. Students' attainment in GNVQ leisure and recreation are above average.
18. There was a significant amount of variation between subjects for students attaining the higher A/B grades.
19. There are clear indications from unvalidated 2002 results of improvements in AS and A2-levels attainment this year in most subjects, especially in biology, ICT, art, geography and English literature.
20. Students are making good progress from their GCSE attainment in mathematics, ICT, art, geography and English literature. The standards of work seen in the sixth form were generally good in all subjects.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

Strengths

- Relationships are very good with mutual respect between staff and students.
- The very good behaviour of the students.
- Students have good attitudes to the school and to learning.
- Very good attendance.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for initiative and personal responsibility.
- Skills of independent learning.

21. Students have good attitudes to school and to learning. Most students live close to the school or are brought by car; they arrive at school, mainly in social groups, in an orderly manner. Students are confident, well mannered and show courtesy to staff, visitors and to each other – this includes movement around the school when, despite the inevitable congestion due to the design of the buildings there is purposeful movement. Their attitudes in lessons are mainly good and often very good with students concentrating well and usually working hard. There are a very few lessons where students are less motivated and here the teachers use skilful management techniques to control behaviour issues. The school is a calm, orderly and caring environment. Students' attitudes have been maintained at a high level since the last inspection.
22. Attendance for 2001/2002 was well above the national average with the level of unauthorised absence below the average. Analysis from the start of the year to the time of the inspection shows continuing very good attendance although during the inspection attendance was significantly lower due to illness. Registration is carried out efficiently at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions - procedures are secure. Punctuality at the start of the day and for lessons is good. There were 69 fixed term exclusions and no permanent ones in the year 2001/2002 which is relatively low for a school of this type. There has been a significant improvement in attendance since the time of the last inspection.

23. The overall level of behaviour is very good both around the school, including breaks and lunch-time, and in most lessons. No bullying or other oppressive behaviour was seen during the inspection although students identified that it does occur but when it does it is very well dealt with. The school has a very effective isolation unit on site to support students with behaviour difficulties.
24. Students form very good relationships with one another and with their tutors and teachers resulting in a good working ethos in the school. In classes the very good relationships have a positive effect on learning as students support each other well. Students are supportive of the tutor system which encourages these effective close relationships and provides time for individual contact and guidance. They show clear respect for each other and the mutual trust is fundamental to the ethos of the school demonstrated, for example, by the students being allowed in most areas of the school at lunch- and break-times. There is no evidence of sexism or racism in the school which is working as a harmonious community.
25. Opportunities for students to show initiative and take responsibility are limited. Some students take on responsibilities as members of the school council, which now meets regularly, and others take on duties as careers library helpers. There are very good opportunities for students to be involved in activities both during and after school which include clubs linked to academic subjects, social activities and many sporting activities. Year groups have their own social areas where they can join in activities during the break periods. The clear ethos of the school and the very good learning environment demonstrate that students understand the impact of their actions and that they should respect others.
26. Through the very good relationships, the tutor guidance, the personal social and health education programme and the citizenship provision the students' personal development is well supported. Students are mature and sensible.

Sixth form

Strengths

- Very good relationships.
- Very good attendance.
- Excellent behaviour.

Areas for improvement

- Development of personal and learning skills.
- Students' perception of the sixth form.
- Opportunities for students to play an active part in the operation of the sixth form.

27. The attitudes of students in the sixth form are significantly affected by the experiences they have had during their transition from the main school and the advice and guidance they have received during the early stages of their sixth-form life. There have been significant difficulties for the students as a result of unavoidable staffing problems, which resulted in some having several tutors during their first year as well as changes in leadership of the sixth form. There is now good strong leadership within the sixth form with a good supportive tutor team who are working hard to overcome previous problems. Students have also been significantly affected by poor guidance from an external agency over advice on careers and opportunities – the school has addressed this issue and the external support is now greatly improved.

28. Students' attitudes to learning are very good but because of the difficulties described earlier they do not all appreciate the experiences of sixth-form life within the school. The sixth form is increasing in popularity and this has resulted in relatively large tutor group sizes which are restricting the opportunities for developing close tutor/student relationships and resultant guidance. A further consequence of the large tutor group sizes is that students do not see significant differences between the main school and the sixth form as the large numbers make them still feel like children rather than mature individuals in a smaller group.
29. They are given good support by the pastoral team and by the teachers, but their skills of independent working require development. Whilst most students have adequate key skills to support their studies, the direct teaching of key skills, as well as that of general studies, is not seen as beneficial by the students and this has a significant negative effect on their attitudes to the subject and to the sixth form. The benefits of the current method of provision of key skills and general studies should be reviewed.
30. Students welcome the more independent status they receive but also benefit from the close links to the main school. Students show an interest in school life but many feel that they are not benefiting from many of the sporting opportunities that are becoming available to the main school, especially as these experiences will be beneficial to their future careers.
31. The personal development of the students is good; they are well motivated in most subjects and even those who express dissatisfaction have very mature and sensible reasons as to why there should be changes. There are opportunities for students to join in activities outside lessons but these are on a limited scale at the present time and students would like more enrichment studies, especially with sporting opportunities. There is a school council and a sixth-form prefect team which give some sixth-formers the opportunities to take an active part in the running of the school – procedures do not, however, provide for all members of the sixth form to put forward suggestions and receive feedback on discussions.
32. Behaviour in the sixth form is excellent. All students choose to attend and clearly want to learn. The attendance procedure is rigorous and ensures students do attend and hence benefit from the opportunities available to them. The school does not keep detailed analysis of retention rates because the majority of students complete the courses they start apart from early in the course when they may decide to change courses. There are reduced numbers in some subjects in the upper sixth as a result of students reducing their numbers of subjects covered – i.e. subjects studied for AS level only. Whilst a small number of students do leave the courses during the year this is compensated for by students who return to the school having sampled college life elsewhere.
33. Relationships are very good both within the social area and in lessons and learning directly benefits from the positive attitudes of well-motivated students. In general, there is total commitment from the students. The school is preparing students well for future life.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

Strengths

- High levels of good and very good teaching.
- Very good management of students overall.
- Teachers plan lessons well and have good knowledge of subject.
- Good relationships have been developed.
- Strategies for the checking of teaching.
- Significant improvements since the last inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Strategies for using a wider range of basic teaching skills.
- Development of strategies to ensure regular marking and feedback to students.
- Creation of a more formal structure for the setting and marking of homework.

34. The quality of teaching for students in Years 9 to 11 is good or better overall and has contributed significantly to the improvement in standards. In Year 9 teaching was never less than satisfactory in any of the 48 lessons seen, and in seven out of every ten lessons it was good with almost a third of lessons being very good. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is good overall, with only three unsatisfactory lessons out of the 80 observed. In seven out of every ten lessons the teaching is good or better with at least four out of every ten lessons being very good. This represents a significant improvement in teaching quality since the last inspection. The headteacher and senior management introduced strategies to monitor and improve performance which have enabled students of all abilities to make good progress.
35. Teaching is good in almost all subjects. It is satisfactory in modern foreign languages with some good quality teaching seen. Some very good teaching was observed in PE in Year 9 and in music in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects overall with very good knowledge in English, design and technology, ICT, history and PE. They use this knowledge to plan effectively for lessons, setting clear and challenging tasks to motivate students. Teachers share learning objectives with the students at the start of lessons and after suitable tasks and activities, review the learning at the end of lessons through questions and discussions. The standard lesson planning sheet that is used is helpful in ensuring a consistent approach to the structure and delivery of lessons. Teachers encourage students to succeed and set high expectations. Pace of lessons is usually brisk which assures full concentration for the whole lesson. Most students understand their own targets and the standards they are achieving.
36. Teachers have good relationships with students and use a range of classroom management techniques which are very good overall. Students respond well to the respect and concern teachers show to them and are ready to listen and learn. Teachers use resources well and a strong feature is the positive use of learning support assistants.
37. Teachers use a range of techniques to provide a good working atmosphere, but often lessons are too teacher-led. There needs to be further development in providing opportunities for students to develop their own thinking skills and independent learning. At present students rely heavily on teachers to provide all the impetus for progress.

38. In most lessons, teachers use ongoing assessment to provide guidance and assistance. They support and advise individual students to enable them to progress at their own level. There is a very well defined tracking system which provides detailed information about the progress of individual students and allows teachers to plan more effectively. Students are aware of targets, though less emphasis is placed on this aspect in Years 9 and 10. Examination classes are made fully aware of the requirements of the examination and course work. There is a lack of consistency, however, in the marking of work. Not all work is marked with constructive comments and returned within an appropriate time scale.
39. In the very small number of unsatisfactory lessons teachers did not challenge the students or meet their needs sufficiently. The management of the learning environment was not effective and students did not make as much progress as they should have.
40. The school has continued to develop the strategies for monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning. Teachers are observed in the classroom by senior management and all heads of departments and provided with some opportunities to observe colleagues. All teachers are involved in this programme and where appropriate, teachers work with mentors either in their own departments or from other departments. There is a very constructive induction programme for teachers new to the school. Special consideration is given to newly qualified teachers who are provided with support in the classroom and within and outside the school.
41. The teaching of literacy is effective in many lessons and has an impact on the students' learning, but the teaching of numeracy needs further development across subject departments.
42. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good in lessons. They are also taught well in withdrawal groups, where the teaching is characterised by a purposeful approach, appropriate pace and content, good working relationships between adults and students and the linking of work to that done in lessons. Overall, teaching assistants' work in class is satisfactory. In some lessons there is good teamwork between the teaching assistants and subject teachers. However, a number of teaching assistants are new to the school, are inexperienced and have little training, and so in a few lessons the support is unsatisfactory. The teaching assistants work well as a team and are aware of the progress made by individual students towards the targets in their individual education plans. There is insufficient support in some lessons.
43. Individual education plans contain clear targets and are the product of close co-operation between the learning support staff and subject staff. Despite this, in some lessons there is insufficient planning for adapted teaching strategies and resources to meet the needs of students with special educational needs.

Sixth form

Strengths

- High levels of good and very good teaching.
- Very good management of students overall.
- Teachers have good knowledge of subject.
- Lesson have very good pace and high expectations are set.

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant areas for improving sixth-form teaching.

44. The quality of teaching is good overall. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory and teaching is good or better in seven out of every ten lessons and very good or excellent in three out of ten lessons. The quality of teaching is similar in Years 12 and 13. This represents good progress since the last inspection.
45. Teaching, overall, is good in most subjects and very good in ICT. There are a number of strong features in the teaching in the sixth form. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and plan lessons well, using a range of teaching skills and providing a wide ranging and coherent modern view of the subject. Teachers set very high expectations and targets for students, who respond positively and build on these. The structure of lessons is designed to develop the students' own awareness of their learning, and management of students is very good. This effectively encourages them to take responsibility for their own progress and they have a very good knowledge of their progress and what they need to do to extend their knowledge and skills.
46. Teachers are very effective in assessing the progress of students and tracking and monitoring are well developed. They provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge of topics by making presentations to fellow students in a lucid and fluent manner. Students are encouraged to use the school's resources to expand their expertise in a productive manner. Marking of work is positive with good advice on how to improve and advice is available to ensure that students have every opportunity to attain standards in all work appropriate to their own ability.
47. There are no particularly weak features in the lessons seen. The depth and pace of learning are very good and lessons cover sufficient material. Issues within subjects are generally examined with some intensity and good specialist knowledge supports the progress of students. They are confident in their own work and readily seek advice and guidance from teachers. Students work independently and respond to the good quality and skilful teaching. The impact of the good teaching is that students make good advances in both their knowledge and understanding, as well as skills in practical subjects.

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

Strengths

- A broad and balanced curriculum is offered that meets statutory requirements.
- A very effective process of curriculum review.
- Curricular aims are successfully met by the school.
- Study support sessions successfully meet GCSE attainment targets.

Areas for improvement

- Plan and implement cross curricular ICT.
- Improve the quality of careers guidance and support.
- Plan more structured opportunities for spiritual reflection.

48. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum that meets statutory requirements in Years 9 to 11. Good provision is made to meet the academic and social needs of the students; good quality vocational provision is developing. The school has gained national recognition for the quality of its curriculum. A good range of extra-curricular

activities is provided with particular strengths in PE and sport, art, ICT and music. A very effective process of curriculum review is in place, featuring successful governor, senior and middle management collaborative work.

49. Overall, the curriculum in Year 9 is satisfactory. Curriculum continuity and progression from feeder middle schools is weak. Students arrive with variable learning experiences; for example, many students have no food technology skills. The Key Stage 3 strategy, though recently implemented, needs to be given more emphasis to all subject areas. In Year 9 students are offered GNVQ Intermediate ICT.
50. The quality and range of curriculum opportunities in Years 10 and 11 are good. Accreditation is mainly through GCSE with GNVQ Intermediate ICT, vocational GCSE and NVQ available. All students study a core of mathematics, English, English literature and science (single, dual award and separate sciences), modern foreign languages, design and technology, ICT, PE and short course RE. Option choice is made from art, business studies, computer studies, geography, history, music, design and technology, GCSE PE and full course RE. A significant number of students are disapplied from modern foreign languages to have the opportunity to study ICT in Year 10 and work-related programmes or ICT in Year 11. Work-related courses provide good opportunities for these students to access more appropriate learning experiences. More able students can study single sciences and in mathematics talented students are entered early for GCSE.
51. In Years 9, 10 and 11, good personal health, social and RE (PHSRE) provision is provided via a structured weekly single extended registration session; good opportunities are provided to incorporate aspects of citizenship. The programme aims to promote personal, social and health development; it includes careers, drugs and sex education. The programme needs to be closely monitored, not only the weekly-extended registration but also morning registration to ensure that all available time is used profitably to maximise students' personal development. Good use is made of external speakers, from the wider community, in keynote assemblies to address current issues, for example effects of terrorism. Recently revised arrangements for more regular careers officer direct pupil contact have improved provision. Further improvements in the quality of provision are required to address negative pupil perceptions of careers guidance and support.
52. Overall, the curriculum for Years 9 to 11 is socially inclusive with a commitment of equal opportunity for personal development. This underpins the promotion of positive pupils' attitudes to learning and the development of caring young adults.
53. A good range of extra-curricular activities enables students to extend their interests. Good use is made of school facilities during the day to promote good social skills and develop responsible attitudes. The successful use of study and homework clubs in Years 10 and 11 to support targeted attainment is a particular strength.
54. The work-related programme in Years 10 and 11 makes a good quality contribution to school provision. Good levels of support have been secured from parents, business and local further education colleges to meet course objectives. Opportunities need to be extended to complete additional relevant accreditation, which will further raise confidence and self-esteem, ensuring students are even bettered prepared for employment and training.

55. The school has good links with the wider community, for example community sport links successfully underpin the school's special status bid. The very good practice in art, PE and music needs to be used as a model across the curriculum. Good business links, established to meet the needs of the work-related programme, also require wider development to give additional relevance to the curriculum in all subject areas.
56. Good links have been established with initial teacher training providers, including Keele, Staffordshire, Manchester Metropolitan and the Open Universities, and there is a good quality graduate teacher programme operating in the school. Links with feeder middle schools are variable; improvements in collaborative work before and during transition are needed to improve continuity and the quality of progression in Year 9.
57. Overall the provision of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school does not fulfil the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. In addition, students have knowledge of the spiritual dimension but planned coverage needs to provide more opportunities for spiritual reflection. Whole-year assemblies provide good occasions for the discussion of issues derived from different religious beliefs. Considerable effort is extended to promote very good moral and social development. More emphasis needs to be placed on the extension of cultural development across the curriculum.
58. Curricular arrangements promote the inclusion of all students with special educational needs and they have access to the same curriculum as their peers. They are usually taught within their class groups, but are occasionally withdrawn for specific teaching for basic skills or programmes of work related to the work being done in lessons. Those who need alternatives have access to college courses or work-related experiences. Classes to develop basic skills are offered before school and at lunch-time.
59. Curriculum changes made since the last inspection to provide a better match to students' needs have been instrumental in the significant improvements in pupils' attainment. However, variable quality before and during transition continues to impede continuity and progression in Key Stage 3.

Sixth Form

Strengths

- The curriculum offered has breadth and is socially inclusive.
- Enrolment numbers are increasing.

Areas for improvement

- Improve careers guidance across the sixth form.
- Extend the range of enrichment activities.
- Provide for more structured religious education and a daily act of worship.

60. The curriculum opportunities offered are broad and include A/S, A2, and AVCE. Religious education is integrated into the PHSRE programme; consideration needs to be given to more structured provision in order to fulfil statutory requirements. Course programmes are relevant to students' needs. Students recognise the openness of access to a developing range of courses, both academic and vocational. Pastoral arrangements and groupings need to be closely managed to reflect inclusive principles. In the last two years curriculum revision has led to five advanced vocational courses being offered alongside A/S and A2 courses. Enrolment rates are increasing and retention rates encouraging.

61. Students' tracking arrangements have been securely established and students receive target grades to raise levels of attainment. Enrichment activities are provided with very good provision in sport, music and art, although greater emphasis is required on the provision of independent study and learning opportunities. A programme of PHSRE, including careers guidance, is in place. Current careers guidance, although improving, requires more structure and close monitoring in order to ensure that students are able to make well-informed career judgements. This needs to include improved reference resources and Internet access.
62. Academic and vocational guidance is good and support for students is well organised and consistent in its quality. The curriculum opportunities offered to students have broadened significantly and are a better match to students' needs than at the time of the last inspection.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Strengths

- Very good care of students.
- A strong emphasis on health and safety.
- The procedures for monitoring and improving behaviour.
- The support and guidance provided by the pastoral staff.
- Excellent procedures for monitoring and supporting academic progress.

Areas for improvement

- Access to careers information.

63. The procedures for child protection, health and safety and for ensuring students' welfare are very good and are a strength of the school. The fully trained child protection officer is named in procedures and the high profile of the comprehensive procedures within the staff handbook ensures that all staff are aware of procedures. The system is secure.
64. The school has a very good approach to health and safety, with responsibilities well defined. The health and safety policy is regularly reviewed and is comprehensive describing the systems in place. Governor involvement in monitoring and review is clear. Records of essential checks and fire drills are readily available for inspection. Risk assessments are carried out for all activities. Whilst the school has very good provision for first aid there is not a room used exclusively for medical purposes. Accident reports are completed and external agencies are involved as required. Only two very minor health and safety concerns were seen during the inspection and these were identified to the health and safety officer.
65. The welfare of the students is underpinned by a very effective pastoral system which ensures close tutor/student relationships. Students transfer to the school from two middle schools and are integrated well. The pastoral system within the school is very strong, led through the senior leadership team and well supported by heads of year and form tutors. The whole system is well monitored through regular pastoral group meetings. Through the pastoral system, students are given very good guidance on dealing with school life. The flexible learning centre is well used to provide appropriate learning for students who are in difficult circumstances or require support.
66. The school monitors attendance and punctuality closely. Procedures are clear and the system is secure. The heads of year have taken on the responsibility for monitoring and promoting attendance, and competition between the year groups is an extra

incentive. The procedures for analysing and encouraging attendance are all in place including contacting parents on the first day of absence. A measure of the school's success in monitoring and promoting good attendance is the recent DfES 'truancy busters' award. The behaviour policy is very effective with good systems to encourage behaviour and effective well-known support and sanctions if incidents occur. The school's clear guidelines and expectations of behaviour are well known and adhered to.

67. The assessment system in the school is very good with many excellent aspects. It is used consistently within the built-in flexibility, throughout the school. The system facilitates easy tracking by the appropriate staff and enables comprehensive reporting to parents as well as providing grade and target information for the students. Monitoring is carried out by heads of year, heads of department and the senior management team - the information is used very well to guide curricular planning. On a whole-school basis analysis is carried out on a wide range of groupings to determine trends. The comprehensiveness of the system enables a wide range of data to be obtained very quickly and meaningfully. The grading systems used are clearly explained to parents and students.
68. Students' personal development is monitored through the direct contact of students and tutors as well as within the school assessment system. Students with learning needs are monitored closely through the special needs department. The morning and afternoon registration periods provide daily contact between tutors and students giving opportunities to further develop close relationships. There is a weekly guidance period which is used to deliver the citizenship programme which plays an important part in personal development. Systems for monitoring personal development are effective, mainly through the tutor contact and the reporting systems between teachers and the pastoral staff.
69. The provision for students with special educational needs is good. Annual reviews of statements are up to date and students are involved in their annual review meeting. The provision detailed on statements is in place. Links with external agencies are good overall and there is excellent support provided for students with sensory impairment. There are strong links with middle schools which, together with data available and close working with the pastoral system, are used to identify students who have special educational needs when they begin attending the school so that support and strategies can be planned. There are also effective systems for the identification of students who have special educational needs after they enter the school. The learning support department works closely with the subject departments, pastoral teams, the Flexible Learning Centre and Isolation Unit to provide continuity of approach for students experiencing difficulties. There is generally a very good rapport between the teaching assistants and the students.
70. Information provided by the learning support department is very good. There are very good quality individual education plans which give clear realistic targets and a wealth of other information. However, at present, progress is not specifically stated in relation to the targets set and needs tightening. Teaching assistants track students' progress in lessons.

Sixth form

Strengths

- The assessment and tracking systems.
- Procedures for monitoring and encouraging attendance.
- The support and guidance by all staff.

Areas for improvement

- Advice on course options.
- Advice on careers.

71. There is a very strong and enthusiastic pastoral team which is well led by the head of sixth. Students are supportive of the care and guidance currently provided in the sixth form and there are clearly very good relationships in existence. Staff are caring and dedicated but 'one-to-one' guidance opportunities are limited because of relatively large tutor group sizes. The formal programme of advice and guidance they receive is satisfactory, incorporating a specific guidance lesson each week and appropriate guidance within the subjects – the course content of the personal, social and health education programme requires revision to ensure that it is up to date and includes the statutory religious education provision. Students consider courses are appropriate to their needs but advice they received before joining the sixth form was not comprehensive.
72. Procedures for supporting academic progress are in place. The assessment systems are all very good with a computer database being developed to facilitate tracking systems appropriate to sixth-form studies – the school has clearly identified that the needs in the sixth form are very specific and is giving this priority attention.
73. Procedures for monitoring attendance are very good. The aim of the school is to ensure students attend school and hence benefit from the opportunities available to them. To make students more independent and to reflect their increased maturity, the Year 13 students sign in and out rather than have a register called and have the opportunity for some home study leave.
74. The advice and information available to students on future careers and education are satisfactory. Because of the problems with an external agency this was unsatisfactory last year but has now improved, with clear evidence that it will be very effective this year. Most of the students will be moving onto university courses or other types of further education and, although they are very critical of the advice they have received so far, confirm that there is a significant improvement now which should benefit future students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

Strengths

- The very good information on progress.
- Good communications.

Areas for improvement

- Encourage parents to become more involved in the school.
- Continue to develop satisfaction amongst the sixth-form students.

75. The partnership between parents and the school is good. A home/school agreement is in place and a well-designed and well-presented planner is used throughout the school by students. In general the planners are well used and form a useful vehicle for communication. Parents' views of the school expressed through the questionnaires and the parents' meeting are good, although the small number of questionnaires returned means that they cannot be used as a reliable reflection of the views of all parents. There are mixed views amongst parents and students about the sixth form, which mainly centre around the careers advice difficulties discussed earlier in the report.
76. The most pleasing aspects for the small sample of parents who responded to the questionnaire are the leadership and management of the school, the high expectations within the school, that they feel comfortable to approach the school with questions or about a problem and the range of opportunities of activities available to students outside of lessons. Areas these parents would like to see improved were: how closely the school works with parents, the amount of homework, the information they receive about children's progress and the teaching. Written concerns from parents were mainly about the irregular setting of homework, with individual parents identifying: sixth-form career advice too little too late, lack of independent learning and study skills, uniform, increasing dropout rate, students do not like uniform, work deadlines changed at last moment, use of supply teachers, headteacher not accessible, too much smoking, lack of setting in Year 9. All these issues are discussed within the report, except for smoking, where the school is doing as much as could be reasonably expected to control it. The issues of uniform, accessibility and deadlines were identified to the school.
77. Communications with parents are considered to be good. The school produces regular newsletters which are well presented and contain useful information and are supported by letters specific to curriculum and other issues as required. The school prospectus and the governors' annual report are very well presented, comprehensive and useful documents that fully meet requirements. The students' progress sheets and the annual reports are considered to be very good, containing comprehensive well-explained data and individual comments for each subject - they meet statutory requirements for reporting. The presentation of the reports is excellent and demonstrates the pride the school has in its achievements and the priority it gives to communications with parents. The school carries out regular parental surveys to determine their views.
78. Parents attend meetings in the school to discuss progress as well as any problems if they occur. The school works with parents of students with special educational needs very well. All parents of students attend their child's annual review due to the strenuous efforts of school staff.
79. There are only limited opportunities for parents to play an active part in their children's education but the majority of parents do support the school through membership of the parent-teacher association, as governors or by supporting their child through the use of the planners.
80. Students in the sixth form are supportive of the school and the opportunities it provides but many consider that the enrichment studies should be increased especially in the sports-related activities, which they feel are more available to the main school students. They consider that it is now well led and that they receive good support and guidance from the current teachers and tutors. The results from the students' questionnaires indicate very mixed views but the inspection team found that most of these result from

unavoidable staff changes during 2001/2 and poor advice from an external agency, which has now been addressed. As discussed earlier in the report the inspection team consider that the other concerns of students would be significantly reduced if tutor group sizes were reduced.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Strengths

- The excellent leadership and management of the headteacher and other senior staff.
- The shared ethos and strong desire to raise standards still further.
- The effectiveness and thoroughness of the way the school evaluates and reviews its own performance.
- The involvement and support of the governing body who are partners in shaping the direction of the school.
- A very good shared commitment to improvement by all parties throughout the school.
- The school's strong commitment to the training of associate teachers and induction of new staff.
- Financial management is very good.
- Subject leadership is effective throughout.

Areas for improvement

- There is no daily act of collective worship for all students.
- The School library.
- Administrative accommodation for the special educational needs department.

81. Leadership and management of the headteacher and other senior staff are excellent. At the time of the previous inspection, leadership and management were in transition. A new head and a substantially new governing body were attempting to put together a senior management team against a background of falling rolls and staff redundancy. National awards, which have raised students' and parents' aspirations, recognise both the very good progress the school has made and the effectiveness of the ethos the headteacher has so clearly adopted.
82. Over the past five years, standards have risen and the qualities of teaching and learning have rapidly improved. Decisions are made on strictly strategic grounds and are driven by the infectious vision of the headteacher whose educational direction is unambiguous. The school's aims and values are very well reflected in its work and the motivating sense of direction is a corporate vision shared throughout the school and embraced by governors, middle managers, teaching and non-teaching staff and, increasingly, by the students and their parents. There is a very comprehensive and useful school improvement plan, a strong shared commitment to self-evaluation and a drive and determination to raise standards still further.
83. This powerful ethos stems from a desire to analyse what works, why it works and how that success can be devolved. From the earliest stage of the process it was a case of if one can do it, so can the rest. Delegation of responsibilities is well supported by documentation. Much emphasis is placed on a strong and increasingly effective middle management tier of year and subject heads who are encouraged to make decisions without reference to senior managers.
84. The involvement and support of the governors, who are partners in shaping the direction of the school, are exceptional. Governors express total confidence in the headteacher and are supportive of the school yet shrewd enough to be its critical friend

and to hold the school to account. The structure of the governing body and its sub-committees make governors particularly effective. The governors are not currently fulfilling their statutory duty to provide a daily act of corporate worship.

85. The school's strategy for appraisal and performance management is very good. Appraisal of teaching is a two-way process involving lesson observation with an annual review meeting which illuminates the continuing process of professional development. Resources for staff development are allocated annually in accordance with the school's priorities for strategic development and it is the line managers' responsibility to secure appropriate training for their staff. All staff development activity is monitored and evaluated to assess the effectiveness of its contribution and these evaluation findings are used to steer the development of staff towards the achievement of the school's vision.
86. The work of subject departments is target driven. Annual reviews supplemented by external reviews undertaken by the LEA advisory team are comprehensive surveys of all aspects of performance. Subsequent review meetings bring governors and staff closely together in the resetting of targets and future planning, and, because they hold departments to account, are a powerful strategy driving standards upwards. A pupil input is added to the process via the Hey McBer 'transforming learning' initiative.
87. As a result, whole-school and departmental planning, previously reported as unsatisfactory, have become strengths. The whole-school improvement plan is strategically driven in a way which pre-empts change. The school, for example, is well prepared for the National Curriculum modifications due later this year and, via the careful preparations of the director of sport, for its future status as a specialist sports college. Departments have well thought-out and evaluative development plans
88. The school is committed to its contribution to teacher training, believing that it offers high quality placements in exchange for additional classroom support which can be moulded with the strategic objective of improving the quality of future recruitment. Many of the newly qualified teachers who have joined the school have come via this route. The induction arrangements for new teachers are excellent. Newly qualified teachers have a clear entitlement to a reduced timetable, a personal induction tutor, a school visit prior to taking up the appointment, observation and feedback on performance, training, regular review meetings and an action plan together with the opportunity to observe experienced teachers at work. They have the means of voicing concern about any aspect of the induction programme.
89. The school's use of new technology for administrative purposes is very good. Very sophisticated and effective data management systems are in place which lead to very detailed target setting at individual pupil level. Teachers are fully involved and most are skilled in data collection and interpretation. Whole-school and departmental targets in terms of GCSE point score, passes at grade C and above, A level and progress to the end of Year 9 are ambitious.
90. Very good fiscal controls and systems are in place. Procedures for dealing with financial planning are well established. Pay policy is up to date. Financial planning is rigorous and linked directly to the school improvement plan. The finance officer has an excellent day-to-day grasp of the school's finances and budgetary control. Specific grants are used effectively and for their designated purpose. The school monitors its performance well in relation to best value principles. The principles of best value when applied to purchasing operations are fully understood and practised at all times. In its wider context, the school's sophisticated performance monitoring is built around best

value principles in terms of its own evaluations. The school gives good value for money.

91. The special educational needs department is led very well by a strong, hardworking and reflective co-ordinator, who has a very clear idea of how the department should develop. Training is provided for all special needs staff when a need is identified and the co-ordinator provides training for subject staff. Administrative accommodation is unsatisfactory due to the cramped teaching space which also serves as an office, meeting room and storage space. Resources and staffing are satisfactory, although there is insufficient support in some lessons.
92. Staffing is adequate to deliver the curriculum. The English department is enjoying stability after a substantial period of turbulence. The headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body have worked hard to recruit and retain well qualified and effective staff and there is a good balance between more experienced and younger teachers, the latter invigorating many aspects of the school's life. The levels of support staff are adequate except in design and technology where the current part-time technician has insufficient hours in which to provide effective levels of assistance.
93. Much of the accommodation is good with bright, airy classrooms maintained to high standards by the cleaning team. There is little litter to be seen and no graffiti. Two science laboratories have been modernised and the governors have a planned programme of further refurbishment as finances allow. However, there is no specialist room for religious education and the sports hall heating is not adequate.
94. Resources for learning are generally good with the exception of food technology which is poor. The school library is poorly equipped, with inadequate and ageing stocks of both fiction and non fiction texts, and poorly arranged both for its traditional use and to support independent learning. The much enhanced ICT provision is adequate for the needs of both the IT department and work-related courses and strengthens curricular delivery, in music for example, but the provision is not fully adequate to meet cross-curricular needs generally. Greater ICT provision would enhance standards still further in art and enable English to incorporate IT as a systematic element in schemes of work. There is insufficient software to support some aspects of science.

Sixth form

Strengths

- After a period of instability, the sixth form is now strongly led.

Areas for improvement

- There is no daily act of corporate worship.

95. After some instability, the school promoted a head of department to the post of head of sixth form. She is a member of the senior management team in recognition that strong leadership is needed. Management of the sixth form is an integral part of whole school management and it shares the very effective strategic planning and performance monitoring. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the head of the sixth form who is proving to be a strong leader and has made an early impact by improving the quality of the systems which track student progress. In terms of expenditure per student, the sixth form gives good value for money. The school does not provide its sixth-former students with a daily and corporate act of collective worship.

96. Staffing, resources and accommodation are generally well matched to the needs of the sixth-form curriculum. Computer aided design and manufacture suffer from a lack of resources which affects standards in AS and A2 classes. Students are understandably pleased with their new social area which includes good ICT provision, but the school library is ill-equipped to support independent learning and the art department needs space dedicated for sixth-form students where they can leave on-going projects.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

97. In order for this very good school to raise standards further and become an even better school, the headteacher, governors and staff of the school should:

- (1) Improve standards in English and literacy by the end of Year 9 by:
 - improving liaison further with feeder schools to ensure better continuity and progression across key stage 3.
 - ensuring all departments contribute fully to students' literacy development.(Paragraphs: 1,2, 105)
- (2) Ensure more consistent use of ICT across the curriculum by:
 - establishing a senior management curriculum group with departmental representation to map, manage and monitor ICT across the curriculum;
 - enabling greater access to ICT resources for subject departments;
 - extending ICT resources in curriculum areas around the school;
 - developing a structured programme of in service training.(Paragraphs: 94, 102, 117, 126, 130, 146, 149, 164, 172, 178, 181, 194, 199, 201, 247)
- (3) Improve library provision by:
 - housing the library in dedicated accommodation;
 - ensuring it is fully integrated into the school's curriculum and literacy strategies;
 - undertaking a systematic review of library stock and assessing how it needs extending to meet the overall school's needs in order to support the National Curriculum;
 - ensuring the library is a stimulating environment for learning.(Paragraphs: 102, 108, 164, 239)

Sixth form

In order to improve provision and raise standards further, the headteacher, governors and staff of the school should:

- (1) Ensure tutor group sizes are reduced in order to increase time available for direct tutor/student communications. (Paragraphs: 28, 71, 80)
- (2) Review how general studies and key skills are delivered. (Paragraph: 29)
- (3) Review the content of the personal, social and health education provision to include up to date information and to meet the requirements in the provision of religious education. (Paragraph: 60)
- (4) Review systems for students' views to be considered and for them to feel part of a democratic society. (Paragraph: 31)

When drawing up the action plan it is recommended that attention also be given to:

- (1) Meeting the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship.(Paragraphs:51,84)
- (2) The need to put in place a system for maintaining a common approach to numeracy across the whole school. (Paragraph: 122)
- (3) Improving administrative accommodation for the SEN department to carry out its work. (Paragraph: 91)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 - 11	129
	Sixth form	55
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
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Years 9 – 11

Number	1	44	45	36	3	0	0
Percentage	0.8	34	35	28	2.3	0	0

Sixth form

Number	2	14	24	15	0	0	0
Percentage	4	26	44	26	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.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	685	138
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	88	4

Special educational needs

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	30	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	170	0

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	28

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.5
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	125	129	254

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	63	90	88
	Girls	74	89	81
	Total	137	179	169
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	54 (59)	70 (69)	67 (69)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (21)	48 (41)	28 (31)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	73	92	76
	Girls	96	96	67
	Total	169	188	143
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	66 (55)	74 (71)	56 (72)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	20 (17)	47 (42)	33 (32)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	111	88	199

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	63	99	108
	Girls	55	79	85
	Total	118	178	193
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	59 (54)	89 (88)	97 (95)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	38.6 (36.8)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting Year who were entered for GCE A level or AS level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	26	27	53

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	26	30	56
	Average point score per candidate	19.7 (20.4)	15.4 (16.9)	17.4 (18.6)
National	Average point score per candidate	* (16.9)	*(18.0)	* (17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	26	27	53	1	6	7
	Average point score per candidate	19.5	15.1	17.3	6.0	9.0	8.6
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

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

* National comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available. Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of students

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded
Information not obtained

Exclusions in the last school Year

No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
799	68	0
0	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
4	1	0
2	0	0
2	0	0
15	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	49.8
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	448

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.0%
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.8
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Financial information

Financial year	2001-02
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	£
Total income	2,356,592
Total expenditure	2,316,077
Expenditure per pupil	2,917
Balance brought forward from previous year	210,440
Balance carried forward to next year	250,955

Key Stage 4	23.8
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	18.83
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	18.73

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
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	823
Number of questionnaires returned	68

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	29	57	9	1	3
My child is making good progress in school.	32	54	6	3	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	24	60	9	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	60	16	1	4
The teaching is good.	29	51	13	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	15	63	16	3	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	37	56	4	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	43	54	1	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	6	51	21	3	9
The school is well led and managed.	37	46	3	0	15
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	31	54	3	4	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	54	4	0	1

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

What pleases parents:

- The school is well led and managed.
- The teachers high expectations of the students.
- They feel comfortable approaching the school.
- The range of activities outside lessons.

Parents' concerns:

- How closely the school works with parents.
- The amount of homework.
- To be kept better informed about their child's progress.
- The teaching.

The response from the parents' questionnaires was very small and cannot be used as a reliable reflection of the views of all parents. The inspection team did consider the concerns of this small group of parents and found them all to be at least satisfactory apart from the setting of homework where a more planned approach would be beneficial to the students. Individual comments made by parents, many of which were supportive, were considered during the inspection and are dealt with within the main report.

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- Teachers plan their lessons very well and manage their classes very well.
- Very good leadership and management are major factors in the improving standards that are evident in English.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers should maintain their strong emphasis on raising the attainment of 14-year-olds through the National Literacy Strategy.
- There is not enough planned and systematic use of the library. The fiction stock in the library is not adequate.
- There is insufficient planned and systematic use of information and communication technology.

98. When students enter the school aged 13, their standards are well below expectations for their age. During Year 9, they make good progress, although standards are still below average at the end of the year. All students undertake a good range of writing and the highest attaining students are able to write sustained, accurate pieces, blending simple and complex sentences to good effect. This is particularly evident in their work on literature, in which they write sensitively about the poetry of Dylan Thomas and Seamus Heaney. The vocabulary of these students is good. Other students also make progress in their ability to write, but they express themselves in simple sentences and in a more limited vocabulary. The sentence structure, paragraphing, spelling and punctuation of lower attaining students are not secure, although they do improve during the year. One reason for this is that teachers carefully structure the tasks that they give to students who find learning difficult. Another reason is that teachers make good use of the National Literacy Strategy, through which the students improve their grammar. Nearly all students can write neatly and legibly. Most students read well enough to understand the plot and the relationships between characters in stories. They read aloud readily in class, even when they find some of the words difficult. They enjoy reading parts in plays and higher attaining students do so with appropriate emphasis. Most students speak confidently and listen well. They take part well in the successful group work that is a feature of many lessons. In the National Curriculum assessments that students take after some eight months in the school, they do less well than their counterparts in similar schools. Girls have consistently outperformed boys, but in 2002, boys' results were closer to the national average for boys than the girls' results were to their national average. Students do less well in English than they do in science and maths.
99. By the end of Year 11, students achieve above the national average. Given their attainment on entry to the school, this represents good progress. Most students read the set texts with understanding. Higher attaining students can discuss some demanding poetry in groups at a high level and report with clarity to the whole class on context, language, structure and theme. Lower attaining students are able to understand literature on a factual level but find it more difficult to relate the ideas in the work to its language. Students have a good understanding of the language of modern

media. Able students who learn quickly can analyse perceptively the differences between the language and style of the Six O'clock News and Newsround. Lower attaining students can describe the differences between the language and format of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. GCSE English Language results are in line with national averages. In 2002, the boys' results were above the national average for boys. Fewer students are entered for GCSE English Literature than is the case in most schools. In both English Language and English Literature, students do less well than they do in their other subjects.

100. Teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and manage their classes very well. They make explicit what they expect students to learn in each lesson, how students can improve their work and what they need to do to gain the highest possible level or grade. Teachers are very good at planning lessons and sequences of lessons. For this reason, the department has been designated a leading English department by the local education authority in its strategy to raise the attainment of students in the lower secondary years. Experienced teachers are adept at seizing opportunities to develop issues that arise during lessons. Most lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and with a clear sense of purpose. Lessons follow a consistent pattern, with a short starter activity and a closing session that sums up what has been learnt. As a result of these factors, students are able to make good progress. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and students behave very well. Teachers' marking of students' work is detailed and gives helpful guidance on how the work could be improved. Teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is of a high order. The gentle and unobtrusive but firm support of teaching assistants helps to ensure that the special needs of students are met in line with their action plans or statements. Appropriate homework is set.
101. Lessons in English make a good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of the students. They study poems from other cultures and write with interest on social issues such as homelessness. In a Year 9 lesson, students improvised a scene dealing with teenagers in care. This arose from a study of Richard Cameron's play, 'Handle with Care'. They showed empathy for characters in that situation, as well as an awareness of dramatic context. Drama is taught through English and contributes effectively to the development of students' language skills.
102. Students do not have enough planned access to facilities for ICT, or to the library. The dual use of the library as a partially timetabled computer room, limits the access of English classes to both facilities. During the inspection, a Year 11 class was observed using computer facilities to locate, cut, paste, edit and synthesise information. They did this very well to produce a personal revision guide to assist their preparation for GCSE exams. However, students would benefit if all classes were able to use computer facilities regularly. Although the fiction stock in the library has been reviewed in the last year and some new material purchased, it is still not adequate.
103. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. In recent years, there have been many changes in staffing as a result of retirements, promotions and ill health. Three new teachers took up appointments in September 2002. Two of these teachers are newly qualified. Two other teachers had been appointed twelve months earlier. The present head of department was appointed two years ago. She has put in place a very clear and well thought-out plan to improve students' attainment. There is now a detailed scheme of work for teachers to follow. The National Literacy Strategy has been successfully introduced. Teaching follows a consistent pattern and its quality is monitored. New staff are well supported. Information about students' abilities and

progress is well used to assist planning. Revision classes are organised for those students who need help with exam preparation. There is a good programme of extra-curricular activities. Good links with partner schools are being developed. Resources are good and all English classrooms contain stimulating displays of students' work. These policies have not yet had time to make a decisive impact on students' results. There is a very strong sense of teamwork and purpose in the department.

104. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. It was sound. It is now very good. Assessment arrangements have improved and this information helps planning. However, boys and girls still do not achieve equally and students' results at 14 have slipped back. At the time of both inspections, GCSE results in English Language were in line with national averages.

Literacy

105. Standards of literacy are well below average when students join the school. Students find particular difficulty in writing in formal and analytical styles. Whilst the higher attaining students can write at length, justifying their opinions, other students write in a more superficial way and have less secure skills in paragraphing, spelling and punctuation.
106. The National Literacy Strategy has been introduced through English. This is improving students' knowledge and understanding of grammar. Year 9 classes use a good literacy pack during tutor time. A 'Marking for Literacy' policy has been introduced within the last year.
107. Overall, provision for the development of literacy skills across the curriculum is satisfactory. In many subjects, teachers help students to develop their skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening, but practice is not consistent. Geography teachers encourage students to write creatively. Discussion and debate are also encouraged. In science there are good standards of writing. Students also have the opportunity to develop speaking and listening skills but there is insufficient use of key word vocabulary. In the health-related aspect of the physical education course, students present their work well. They are able to use specialist vocabulary and teachers correct any spelling mistakes. Mathematics teachers encourage students to use correct terminology, but the incorrect spelling of key vocabulary is a noticeable feature of mathematics exercise books. The ICT course gives students some opportunity to read aloud. Here, there is appropriate emphasis on key words and students are encouraged to use technical vocabulary and explain the words and their usage. In the last year, some hard work has established an awareness of literacy issues. It is now important that the school draws on the training available through the National Literacy Strategy to extend good practice consistently across all subjects.
108. Library provision is unsatisfactory. The stock does not support the curriculum adequately. The library does not have a clear role in the development of the literacy strategy.
109. By the time students reach the end of Year 11, their standards of literacy are satisfactory. Given their starting point, this represents good progress.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teachers display good skills of class management leading to consistently good behaviour in the classroom.
- Teachers make explicit links with prior learning and with other areas of mathematics.
- There is an excellent system for tracking individual progress.
- Since the last inspection, there has been significant improvement in the GCSE results, particularly for boys.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT in teaching.

110. In 2002, results at the end of Year 9 were close to the national average. Numbers gaining level 6 or above were above the national average, and above average compared with similar schools. The average points score was in line with similar schools and close to the national average, with boys achieving similar results to girls. On entry to the school, attainment is below average, so progress in Year 9 is good.
111. GCSE results in 2002 were significantly above national norms in the percentage of students gaining grades A* to C, but were below average for the percentage of students gaining grades A* to G. There is little difference in the performance of boys and girls using either measure. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is good.
112. The standards of work seen in Year 9 are in line with national expectations. Students produce good work in algebra and satisfactory work in number, shape, and handling data. Able students can analyse sequences and give an expression for the n th term. They can manipulate algebraic expressions and use this to solve problems in trigonometry. Less able students can calculate the area of compound shapes, calculate percentages, and understand the symmetries of plane shapes.
113. In Years 10 and 11, students produce good work across all areas of mathematics that is generally above average. Able students in Year 11 can draw and interpret histograms, and can find the probability of combined events. They use negative and fractional indices with confidence, and combine pairs of numbers written in standard index form. Able students progress from expanding brackets and combining terms in Year 10 to factorising and simplifying algebraic fractions in Year 11, while low ability students progress from solving simple equations in one unknown in Year 10 to solving inequalities in Year 11. Across both key stages, students produce below average work when using mathematical drawing. Diagrams are often poorly drawn, and construction work with ruler and compasses is weak. Students' books also show weaknesses in literacy skills, usually in the spelling of key mathematical words. Where in-class support is available for students with special needs, this is used effectively to support students' learning. Provision for the most able includes an 'express group', selected prior to arrival at the school and entered for GCSE in Year 10. Early indications are that these students make good progress.
114. Teaching is good in all year groups. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use to break down the mathematics into manageable steps and focus on key ideas. They have high expectations, plan well, and use a variety of appropriate activities. Lessons are well structured and students behave well because the teachers show very good skills of class management. Learning is particularly effective where

teachers make explicit links with prior learning and with other areas of mathematics. The use of homework is satisfactory.

115. Teaching was less successful when the teacher focused on mathematical rules and procedures rather than on mathematical understanding. This led to a situation where students could perform the mathematical tasks, but had little prospect of long-term learning. On another occasion, learning was less effective because two different mathematics teachers taught the class. Although both teachers had planned together, and had made efforts to ensure continuity, the two lessons did not link together satisfactorily, and pupil progress was adversely affected.
116. In one very good lesson, the teacher used a starter activity to help students to review their learning on straight line graphs. The main activity then moved students' learning on at a brisk pace to drawing and analysing properties of quadratic graphs. A strong feature of the lesson was the plenary activity, which challenged students to apply their new learning to similar, but unfamiliar, graphs. In another lesson, the teacher used an excellent interactive style to develop students' understanding of dimensional analysis by establishing connections between algebraic formulae and the quantities of length, area and volume. This was effective because the questioning focused on key ideas, and the lesson was lively and moved at a good pace.
117. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory. Assessment in lessons was most effective when the teacher gave regular feedback to the class on whether their work was correct, as well as monitoring progress to check on learning. Marking in exercise books mainly focuses on homework. In the best examples of marking, teachers give grades and write suggestions on how the work can be improved. The department has a suitable range of resources. There are several text books and worksheets that are available for individual topics or lessons. Resources are not always used effectively. On one occasion an overhead projector could have been used to improve the visual impact of the mathematics. On another occasion, the projector distorted triangle diagrams in an unhelpful way. Students use spreadsheets, but otherwise their experience of using ICT in mathematics lessons is very limited. Consequently, although the use of resources overall is satisfactory, the use of ICT is unsatisfactory. Teaching accommodation is good. Classrooms are bright and well furnished, with displays on the wall, often including key mathematical words.
118. The department is well led by a new head of department, who has been in post since September 2002. The head of department has a clear idea of how the department needs to develop, and has appropriate priorities. These priorities have superseded the department's 2002-3 development plan, the aims of which have been only partially realised. The department handbook contains suitable policies, including one on equal opportunities, but the department has not sufficiently addressed its role in developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, or citizenship education. There are regular departmental meetings. Recent staff development includes training for four members of the department to become leading mathematics teachers. The annual system of monitoring teaching through lesson observation is clearly resulting in better quality teaching and more effective learning by the students.
119. The department has been active in seeking links with the two main feeder schools. One success of this is that the teaching for the Year 9 express group was started whilst the students were still in Year 8, but conducted by the Year 9 teacher. The Key Stage 3 Strategy has had some impact on teaching in the school, but its effectiveness is limited due to the change in schools during the key stage. The effect of the strategy is evident mostly in students' oral work and the use of correct mathematical vocabulary in

lessons. The department uses a very good computerised system for recording marks and tracking the progress of individual students. This helps to generate appropriate target levels for Year 9, and target grades at GCSE. Students know their long-term targets. In a very good recent development, the use of the tracking system has been extended to send parents a breakdown of their child's progress every half term. This interim report shows comparison with group norms and identifies areas of weakness, so providing help to students in knowing how they can improve. Recent curricular developments include a change in the course for the lowest ability group in Years 10 and 11, in order to give them access to GCSE qualifications. A new differentiated curriculum has been introduced in Year 9.

120. Progress since the last inspection has been good, but there has been insufficient progress in the use of ICT in teaching. This is a priority that the department has recognised. National results at GCSE have improved significantly, particularly for boys, and progress is now good in all year groups. Within lessons, the applications of mathematics are now integrated, and the use of practical work is developing. There has been an improvement in the quality of written feedback in students' books, although this is still uneven. The needs of the ablest students in Year 9 are now well served by their revised curriculum.

Numeracy

121. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory in Year 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. In mathematics, good practice in developing numeracy was seen where a teacher encouraged a Year 10 pupil to calculate 5×28 mentally by considering the related calculation 10×28 . Numeracy skills were less effectively developed where students were taught to calculate a fraction of a quantity using multiplication of fractions instead of a unitary method. Much good work was seen in geography, where in Year 11, students used flood hydrographs, population pyramids, and a demographic transition model, and where coursework required students to collect, analyse, interpret and present data. Work seen in science included transposition of formulae. A satisfactory level of graphical work was seen in design and technology, science, and geography.
122. The school has appointed one member of staff with responsibility for numeracy across the curriculum. This has led to good progress on liaison between mathematics and geography, and mathematics and science. The school needs urgently to put in place a system for maintaining a common approach to numeracy across the whole school, including a written policy from all departments. The school also needs to develop a strategy for monitoring the effectiveness of its numeracy policy.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The attainment of students by the age of 16 has improved since the time of the last inspection.
- The qualities of teaching and learning are good.
- Students show positive attitudes and behave well in lessons.
- Relationships between teachers and students contribute to the good learning.
- The quality of assessment procedures and monitoring of students' progress is very good.
- The department is well managed.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of ICT to support science skills and knowledge and there are insufficient computers and appropriate range of software.
- Marking of some books is not as good as it could be.

123. Since the last inspection the standards achieved by students in GCSE examinations have improved as a result of improved teaching and learning. In the 2002 (double award) examinations the percentage of students attaining A*-C passes was significantly better than the national average. When compared with national differences the performance of girls at 16 was slightly better than that of boys. In the 2002 National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds, standards were broadly in line with the average when compared with all schools and similar schools. Boys' attainment was slightly better than that of girls when compared with national differences. In 2002 there was a very significant improvement in standards in the GCSE examinations on the previous year - largely due to a combination of good teaching and clear management strategies for improvement.
124. The standards of work seen during the inspection reflect these improvements. By the age of 14 students have a sound understanding of how forces act. Students' past work indicates that they have a sound grasp of materials and the nutrition and growth of plants. They can competently plan, record and interpret investigations, as when comparing the solubility of various sugars. Most students, including those with special educational needs make good progress in their first year and achieve well. They take an active part in class discussion and higher attaining students can often transfer what they have learned to new situations. In a Year 9 lesson students used appropriate terminology to explain competently the way certain common machines, such as wheelbarrows and bottle openers, functioned as levers.
125. By the age of 16 most students make good progress and most, including those with special educational needs achieve well. Students have a good knowledge of different energy forms, periodic classification, and how to balance chemical equations. Higher attaining students handle numerical calculations confidently when using formulae to solve problems. This occurred in an excellent Year 11 lesson about forces when students solved problems using the concept of 'resultant force' using the equation $force = mass \times acceleration$. Progress in investigative work is good, overall, as in the investigations of rates of reaction using sodium thiosulphate, but evaluative skills are not as good as they could be. In some lower attaining sets in Years 10 and 11, students have difficulty using terminology in the appropriate contexts, and distinguishing between similar sounding terms, such as 'refraction' and 'reflection'.
126. Students' learning is good and in some higher attaining sets in Years 10 and 11 it is very good. They persevere with their work and contribute enthusiastically to class discussion at the end of lessons. The quality of teaching is good, ranging from excellent to satisfactory, with more than one quarter of lessons very good or better. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. This significant improvement since the last inspection accounts, largely, for the recent improvements in standards. In the very best lessons teaching has a very lively pace and teachers' knowledge is very well used to challenge students. As a result, students learn well and sometimes very well. In a very good Year 10 biology lesson, the teacher made students think hard when she asked, 'Why do cells need glucose and oxygen?' in a lesson about the lymphatic system and fluid exchange. Most teachers use time to good effect, plan well and review objectives at the end of lessons. In many good lessons, teachers help students to remember and understand scientific words by reinforcing them at the beginning and end of lessons.

Opportunities for students to consolidate numeracy skills are also adequately developed in many lessons. In most classes ICT is not used enough, although some teachers do, occasionally, use the computer suite for whole-class research, such as the Year 10 research into seismic waves and their effects. In classes for students with special educational needs the level of support provided by the learning support assistant varies in quality due to the levels of experience and expertise of the personnel.

127. Teachers' marking is regular but does not consistently achieve the expectations of the marking policy. The academic progress of students is monitored very well. The department assesses attainment using end of module tests and uses the resulting data to re-group Year 9 students and to refine targets of achievement for all students. Students are aware of these targets and most find them helpful.
128. The department is well managed and its aims are well promoted by all staff. Teaching and learning are well monitored and the department has very effective review procedures. Responsibilities are successfully delegated to key members of staff, who give good support to the head of department. The support given by the head of physics, as second-in-charge, is particularly effective. The quality of accommodation has been improved in the last two years by the refurbishment of two laboratories. The provision of text books is sound. The range and quality of reference texts in the library are insufficient. The six laptop computers provide a useful resource for the department, but they are insufficient in number and are not yet used systematically, with the appropriate range of software, across the department.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, provision for art and design is **very good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good at all levels.
- Management of the subject area is very good.
- The assessment of students' progress is excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Progress in the use of ICT is restricted by sparse resources.

129. At the end of Year 9, attainment is above average. Levels awarded in teacher assessments show a higher percentage of students gaining Level 5 and above than the average nationally. In work seen during the inspection, this level of attainment was confirmed. Students show strongly developed imaginative ability in their 'fantasy fish' project, linked with expressive and fluent drawing. Drawing and painting from the observation of silhouettes projected on a screen show searching observation. This work is part of a project on icons, which draws forth richly imaginative visual ideas and involves students in research.
130. Students have access to computers and use them, but opportunities are limited by the comparatively low level of resources in this area. Basic skills in literacy and numeracy are reinforced by discussion of subject terms, by measuring where appropriate, and the visual assessment of spatial relationships.
131. Progress through the year, from a relatively low level of general attainment on entry, is good. Students' progress is aided by very good attitudes and behaviour in lessons. Students with special educational needs and those with special talent in their subject,

make good progress due to the nature of work in projects, which allows for success at a wide range of levels.

132. In Years 10 and 11, students again attain a level higher than the national average. In the two most recent years, students have gained above average results in GCSE examinations. In work seen, standards are above average and, in some instances, well above average. Drawing from observation is strong and imaginative work in, for example, the 'card façade' project is particularly expressive. In this project, students produce portraits in relief, which are characterful and well constructed. Work in the round is restricted currently due to a kiln being out of commission, but work in card using interpenetrating planes is very well thought out sculpturally and of good quality. This work represents good progress through the key stage in both three-dimensional design and the development of ideas in a step-by-step way. Students with special educational needs and gifted students are, again, able to reach their full potential due to the nature of projects and their unrestricted nature.
133. The curriculum at Year 9 meets National Curriculum requirements providing for work in two and three dimensions. In Years 10 and 11, the non-specialised GCSE general art course allows students to pick up interests and skills developed earlier. A strong feature of the work of the department is the provision for extra-curricular work. Staff conduct after-school sessions on four evenings per week and welcome students who wish to use the studios at any time. Visits to galleries and museums take place on a regular basis and good use is made of visiting artists and teachers. The extent of this provision is a further indication of the level of commitment of the teachers in the department. The visits to galleries and museums provide an opportunity for the development of citizenship within the art curriculum. Students learn to be rationally critical and to respect the views of others.
134. The teaching in the department is of good quality, both in Year 9 and during Years 10 and 11. No lessons seen were unsatisfactory. There are important strengths in the teaching. These include a high level of commitment and subject expertise, excellent behaviour management and imaginative planning. A particularly strong feature is the tracking of students' progress. Target setting is used very effectively to motivate students and to raise standards. Students are fully acquainted with their progress in detail. They also know precisely what steps to take to raise their attainment.
135. The quality of management of the subject area is very good. The department is led by a head of department who plays a full role in the teaching. Aims and objectives are clear and staff share a commitment to the development of the subject. Relationships are very good and form a very good basis for progress. Documentation is thorough and resources carefully husbanded.
136. Since the last inspection there has been a significant improvement in attainment from a below average level of attainment at Year 9 to the present above average level. Attainment in Years 10 and 11 has also improved in the same way from below average to above average. Major changes of staff have taken place in the interim.
137. All the present teachers in the department have been appointed since the last inspection. The current complement has skills in different and relevant areas of the art curriculum. There are rich displays of work around the school, which aid learning and provide pleasure.

CITIZENSHIP

Overall provision for citizenship is **good**.

Strengths

- The high degree of commitment in the management of the subject area.
- The good quality of teaching.

Areas for improvement

- The development of an awareness of the distinctive nature of citizenship in the teaching.

138. The way citizenship is delivered is not prescribed, only that it should be delivered as a discrete subject. The school has chosen to deliver citizenship in time allotted to PHSRE, not as part of PSHE, and additionally as part of the curriculum in all subject areas. Each subject area is asked to identify topics, the study of which will help to promote citizenship; for example, in history, the Holocaust can be studied and, in religious education, intolerance and prejudice might provide a focus.
139. The school has designed its citizenship curriculum around four areas: government, media, law and order, and diversity. Each year studies a module in each area and builds upon it in subsequent years. The time allocated for the study of citizenship is 40 minutes per week. All years receive citizenship as part of the curriculum. Each form tutor has a citizenship file. This file details rotation of citizenship aspects and experience together with the programme for the year. Moderation of delivery is still in course of development. Currently, staff are asked to fill in a questionnaire detailing successes or failures. Form tutors' folders show a coherent plan but some uncertainty as to what constitutes citizenship as distinct from some of the conventional areas of PHSRE, for example careers and first aid. Nevertheless, significant effort has been devoted to the organisation and dissemination of citizenship as a subject.
140. A number of lessons were observed during the citizenship period. In one lesson, centring on the media, students were able to develop an awareness of the distinction between emotive language and objective reporting. The teaching in this instance was well planned and of good quality. In another session devoted to the same area, students generated a purposeful group discussion of the fireman's strike, with mature arguments and respect for the opinions of others. This lesson, again, was well planned with good quality teaching and learning and good intervention. In a lesson on crime and punishment, students were attentive and were able to focus well. This lesson was assessed as superbly organised. A lesson on stress management was well planned with clear objectives. The quality of teaching is good overall and represents a commendable response to the challenging new area of study.
141. Students' attitudes are, in the main, good. Interest is high in topics introduced and debate is keen. Only odd instances of apathy are reported in lessons.
142. On the evidence of lessons seen, a good start has been made in the introduction of this area of study. Students make good progress in the development of critical thinking and awareness.
143. The area is managed with great commitment and energy. Organisation is very good and teachers are cooperating fully in helping further the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well in their GCSE examinations.
- Staff are totally committed to raising achievement levels.
- Secure staff knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils' interest in all areas.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation in food technology presents risk with large classes.
- Poor levels of resourcing hinder achievement.
- Extended use of ICT requires urgent development to present more challenge.
- Graphical skills need raising in Year 9.

144. At the end of Year 9 overall standards of work seen are broadly in line with national expectations. Students have a good grasp of the design process but the generation and analysis of ideas is hindered by poorly developed graphical skills. Focused practical tasks allow students to think analytically but more challenge needs to be presented to talented students. Numeracy skills, for example estimating and dimensioning, need consistent development and application. Quality and finish of final product are good but accuracy of the final product in resistant materials needs to be improved.
145. GCSE results in all material areas are well above national standards with over two thirds of those entered gaining A* to C, compared with half nationally. These results compare very well with other subjects in the school. Girls achieve significantly better than boys and although broadly in line with that nationally, strategies need to be applied to establish a more positive ethos in which boys can raise their achievement. Coursework folders are systematically developed, are well structured and well presented. Research skills are secure but more effective use needs to be made of edited and adapted digital images. Graphical skills need further refinement including the use of computer aided design (CAD) software. Evaluation of ideas needs to be on going; annotation often lacks structure and technical depth; design specification needs to be made more detailed. Students' grasp of technical knowledge needs continuous reinforcement. Standards of making are good; finish and presentational standards are very good. All students need a wider range of computer aided manufacture (CAM) experiences; more challenge is required for talented students. Target setting is effective; very good use is made of exemplar work.
146. The Year 9 curriculum is broad and balanced although long-term staff absence has restricted textile experiences. In Years 10 and 11, curriculum provision allows for relevant technological experiences to be gained. ICT requires investment to properly establish existing bases. CAD needs urgent development and CAM resources need expansion to extend the quality and range of learning experiences.
147. Students' attitudes to the subject are very good. Despite significant variation of experiences before Year 9 entry, students display much interest and good, safe working habits. Students make confident responses to questions but more able students need to be more vigorously questioned and encouraged to work independently to extend their learning. More talented students need to show more initiative and adopt more sophisticated approaches to work.

148. Quality of teaching is good with some very good teaching in graphic products and food. Lesson planning is thorough and detailed. Teaching resources are thoughtfully prepared although sometimes are too prescriptive. Advice relating to students' special educational needs is incorporated into lesson planning. Effective use is made of target setting, including the use of time plans for coursework completion. Assessment procedures are sound with good use of group assessment in food. Data is concisely used to evaluative examination performance. Students' confidence in their ability to check their own work needs to be raised.
149. Leadership and management of the subject area are good with a clear vision for improvement successfully established to raise GCSE attainment. Subject staff share a strong commitment to teamwork. Raising the attainment of talented students requires a sharper focus. Inadequate resource provision for ICT needs to addressed in order to effectively embed skills for all and provide further extension opportunities.
150. Technical support time is barely adequate and equipment maintenance requires planning and investment. Generic risk assessments need to be systematically developed for complete sections of practical activity. Since the last inspection standards in examination performance have risen significantly although ICT resource provision remains unsatisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The well-planned curriculum and good teaching engender good progress and achievement by the end of Year 9.
- Good provision for students with special educational needs enables them to make good progress.
- Students enjoy geography.
- The subject positively fosters literacy, numeracy and study skills.
- Students have clear targets and know how to achieve them.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment and achievement at GCSE level.
- The department needs a full-time leader.

151. Overall, the standards currently being achieved in Year 9 in geography are satisfactory. The first term for Year 9 students at the school is an intensive revision course, largely skills based, designed to repair gaps in prior learning and to reinforce geographical ideas. For some, weaknesses persist, especially in terms of place and broad geographical knowledge. Overall, by the end of Year 9, attainment is broadly in line with national expectations indicating good progress. Comparative study of four contrasting countries gives some feel for the variety of global environments in which people live and students can offer simple explanations for these differences. Students with special educational needs, here and in Years 10 and 11, are well served by subject specific action plans, adapted worksheets discreetly distributed. They are effectively supported and achieve well.
152. Geography is a popular GCSE option subject but standards have declined since the previous inspection. In 2002, the percentage attaining at least grade C was below the national average and students typically performed less well in geography than in the

other subjects they were entered for. There were few high grades, pointing to the need to find opportunities in mixed ability classes to extend the provision for the most capable students. Standards of achievement overall in years 10 and 11 are currently not high enough.

153. Lessons are carefully planned with a structure that provides a mix of tasks interspersed with discussion to which students readily contribute. Objectives are shared with students at the outset. Consequently, they enjoy geography and appreciate and rarely abuse the relaxed yet supportive relationship they enjoy with teachers. Whilst for many students, learning is good, a minority, especially in GCSE classes, lack purpose and are reluctant to think and to work independently so that the overall quality and completeness of coursework, despite the best endeavours of teachers through after school extra sessions, is a key factor in depressing both attainment and achievement at GCSE. Current Year 11 classes have their share of youngsters who lack motivation and the skills required for effective independent learning. They struggle to retain knowledge and to draw and to justify conclusions and many lack the capacity or inclination to describe in depth and detail so that oral and written answers are shallow, factors which also contribute to the low standards being achieved in the current GCSE course being followed.
154. Teaching is satisfactory overall, sometimes significantly better. Teachers are alert to the need to strengthen literary skills. A Year 9 class, for example, was encouraged to think about how to describe something and later given a vocabulary list to enhance creative writing. Another Year 9 class was quickly engaged by the opportunity to play a role in a 'public enquiry' considering a large factory development in Biddulph and accepted their roles as members of the local community with enthusiasm, learning as much about being a citizen and the skills of drafting an argument as about the geography of industry. The key which unlocked very good learning here was the clever planning of the lesson and the local context which gave it both pace and relevance and so sustained concentration. That later 'presentations' at the 'enquiry' would be graded against criteria well shared with the students conveyed an understanding of how their own progress could be judged against National Curriculum level descriptors.
155. There was good teaching too in Years 10 and 11. One group used the Internet for information and pictures of the Lynmouth floods, which they put together as a TV News presentation. By involving students in independent research and offering the extra motivation of being a news reporter, previous learning on rivers and flooding was enhanced by a good case study which led to real understanding of cause and effect.
156. Teaching had less impact on learning where the learning was led by the teacher so that knowledge rather than understanding was conveyed. Farming, for one Year 11 class, proved to be a fairly abstract concept and, in the absence of strong visual resources, failed to engage all the students in the group who were then disinclined towards independent work on the topic.
157. Leadership is in experienced but over-stretched hands which binds the team together but he is a temporary custodian with many other responsibilities as an assistant head and some urgency attaches to his release from this responsibility because progress since the previous, very positive, report has been static in terms of GCSE development. The department has been active in trying to promote strong links with feeder schools especially in relation to ongoing assessment, and assessment generally is a strength. Students know where they are, where they should be and how to get there.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The use of varied historical source material.
- The target setting for and assessment of students.
- The high quality of teaching - learning relationships.
- The contribution to students' literacy skills.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT.
- The development of the library facilities.
- The development of independent learning from Year 9.
- More use of local history and experiential learning.

158. By the end of Year 9 students attain in line with the national average. They have a good knowledge of World War I, Nazi Germany and World War II and they have begun to develop a range of skills using literary source materials. They can also review their own work systematically and these skills make a considerable contribution to learning generally. Although the students learn to look for cause and effect in historical texts, there is relatively little evidence of developing skills through media other than the printed word. The students enter with low literacy skills which are limiting factors, but these improve rapidly and the good progress results in appropriate levels of attainment at the end of Year 9. Although their literacy skills progress significantly many of the skills associated with independent learning have not been built into their studies.
159. By the end of Year 11 the standards attained in the GCSE examination are comparable with national average levels. This represents good progress in each year from Year 9. They have a good understanding of the USA (the Depression and The New Deal and 1941-80), Russia 1910-24, the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Their literacy and sourcing skills have been refined and their ability to empathize has been significantly developed. Those who opt to study history in Years 10 and 11 have continued to make good progress over the last four years and are now attaining national average standards. This can be shown, even though the results in 2002 were lower than the national average figures. The work seen from both the previous and current Year 11 students and during the inspection clearly meets national expectations.
160. The students' attitudes are very good. They enjoy the subject and are always keen to be involved in the studies. Throughout the inspection there was a desire to learn with very little passivity. This is true across the ability range and reflects the general ethos of the school. These praiseworthy attitudes result in a considerable amount of work being done. No matter whether it is a general class lesson or a small group assignment, the students participate, proffer reasonable solutions to historical questions, and assist each other in a serious but good humoured manner. This is stimulating for all concerned and is essential to the fine working relationships which exist between the teachers and the students.
161. The quality of teaching is good overall and often very good. The teachers are knowledgeable, skilled and keen to improve their work. Indeed this self-evaluation is a feature of the department. Working as a closely knit team the teachers have a basic policy of the students using printed source materials. This is now being developed and the imaginative 'diary work' of four contrasting characters in Nazi Germany has

promoted historical empathy and good quality extended writing. These diaries have been developed weekly and so gradually sensitizing the students to the values and reasons for the actions of people in Germany during the 1920s and 30s. This typical style of teaching motivates both the teachers and the students. Teachers recognise the value of this form of teaching and are carefully refining it to enhance the effectiveness of the department. Although this is commendable, there is relatively little use of local history, artefacts, gaming and the wide range of source materials and methods which historians use. There is a significant emphasis on teaching students in the sixth form through independent studies but this is not introduced and developed to any marked degree in Years 9 to 11. Teachers consistently evoke positive responses from students and think deeply about the development of their work. The ongoing improvement which has occurred in recent years is a clear result of these changes in teachers' attitudes and methods.

162. The curriculum in Years 9 to 11 is heavily weighted to the study of 20th Century Europe, N. America and Russia. Whilst this provides the GCSE students with a coherent body of knowledge it is rather confined and wider references could profitably be made. The assessment processes generate an accurate awareness of what is required to progress to higher levels. They also enable students to improve their self-assessment skills.
163. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress and benefit from some simplified worksheets and the support of class assistants. The natural style of teaching seen enables the most able to flourish particularly well.
164. The head of department is a 'team player' who draws on the skills of his colleagues with a quiet confidence. He is willing to use others as role models and draw upon their skills where appropriate. The whole department has developed an efficiency and emphasis on pupil-teacher relationships to which the students are keen to respond. A history 'clinic' is held after school to help develop standards and interests but there are only limited opportunities for students to go beyond what is taught. The school library provision for history is unsatisfactory and there is no significant departmental library. There are few opportunities for students to use ICT to access sources.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Quality of teaching and learning overall is good or better.
- Strong and positive management of the department.
- Good quality and appropriate resources.
- Statutory requirements are now met.
- Appropriate courses for all students.

Areas for improvement

- Establish a more effective time allocation for ICT in Years 10 and 11.
- Develop a strategy for improving the monitoring and support of teaching staff.
- Extend the marking procedures to include positive feedback in all work.
- Extend opportunities for students to use individual ideas to apply principles in practical applications.

165. The prior attainment of students on entry to the school is below national average. The National Curriculum teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicated

standards well above the national average, with girls attaining higher standards than boys. Evidence from the inspection, however, indicates that current standards in Year 9 are above average but not as high as indicated in 2002. The reason for this difference is that the teachers' assessments were too generous and the quality of the current work is a more accurate reflection of the standards being attained. The department has introduced more rigorous assessment and prediction procedures which provide a more realistic prediction that standards will be above average.

166. The school has introduced a GNVQ Intermediate course for all Year 9 students based upon on-line material and resources. Students are able to create a wide range of business materials using word-processing and desktop publishing, showing an appreciation of audience needs. They create agendas and minutes for meetings using a range of editing and formatting facilities, as well as using graphics to produce a business card. They do not examine the advantages and limitations of different packages nor consider a range of audiences. They are able to create a basic database with a limited number of fields though not always able to recognise different field types and when to apply them. They respond well to on-line material though have limitations when required to apply basic ICT principles in given applications.
167. The standards attained by students who undertook the GCSE course at the end of Year 11 in 2002 were below the national figures, with the girls attaining higher standards than the boys. This represented unsatisfactory progress. In 2001 the school introduced the GNVQ course for those students who were not taking the GCSE course. The quality of work examined on the inspection indicates that current standards at the end of Year 11 in both the GNVQ and GCSE courses are above the national expectations. This represents satisfactory progress and good achievement.
168. Year 10 students create multimedia presentations accessing the Internet to acquire data and graphics. They edit and format slides, though do not yet include sound. They recognise the need to consider the visual effect of the slides, but do not always ensure this is applied to their own presentations. Year 11 students on the GCSE course use a spreadsheet to create an ICT-based model for the particular financial needs of a small business. They structure the data in an appropriate manner and input formulae, using basic and extended features such as absolute cell referencing. They use the model to make predictions about cash flow and loan repayments. They can explain what they are doing and why the spreadsheet is an appropriate software package for the application. Year 11 students engaged on the GNVQ course create, format and edit website pages. They can access the Internet and transfer data and graphics from one package to another with ease. They show flexibility in using the facilities of web page design software and explain how they manipulate the packages.
169. The quality of teaching and learning overall is good or better, with no lessons less than satisfactory. Teachers plan and structure lessons well and make good use of resources and computer equipment to provide positive demonstrations of lesson topics. They set clear targets which generally challenge the students and ensure that they extend not only their knowledge but also their skills in the use of ICT. Teachers provide individual assistance to all students. They manage the students well and ensure a good working atmosphere. There is regular in-class assessment and a very positive monitoring and tracking system for pupils' progress. There is very good support from learning support assistants who are involved in the creation and monitoring of individual plans in ICT for those students with special educational needs. These students progress well in lessons.
170. The attitudes and behaviour of students are good overall. They concentrate in class and work independently, though willingly assist each other where appropriate. They

generally show enthusiasm for the subject and make the effort to progress. They have a positive attitude to the subject and behave well in class.

171. The leadership and management of the department are very good overall, with a strong positive approach to development. New schemes of work and courses have been introduced appropriate to the needs of the students. The regular monitoring of staff and departmental procedures has ensured development in terms of assessment procedures and students' progress. Action has been taken to redress the differential in performance between the boys and girls and links have been developed with the local middle schools. The head of department has recognised that some students in Years 10 and 11 have more lessons than others, though undertaking the same course and has established strategies to ensure consistency and exchange of information between teachers. The resources are managed well, with a new booking system for the computer rooms and good technician support.
172. The school has made a significant financial investment in ICT in recent years with specific emphasis on the provision for ICT courses. The next stage of the development is to extend the provision for ICT across the curriculum, which at present is unsatisfactory. There are plans to provide computers in English and enhance the software provision in art as well as providing all teachers with laptops. Inspectors observed very good use in art, music and geography and good use of data logging in science, but opportunities to use ICT are missed in the other subjects. There is no curriculum group to plan, manage, deliver and monitor the use of ICT across the curriculum.
173. The progress made since the last inspection is good with financial investment in resources, introduction of appropriate courses to meet statutory requirements and the appointment of a strong and forward looking head of department.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Standards at GCSE level have improved substantially, particularly in German.
- In Year 9, students make very good progress in their second foreign language, French.
- Good leadership has enabled the department to make substantial progress.
- The department makes good use of assessment data to set targets, monitor students' progress and adjust the curriculum.
- The relative performance of boys has improved significantly.

Areas for improvement

- Listening and speaking skills are relatively weak at all levels.
- Work is insufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all students, and in particular higher-attaining students.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT in teaching and learning.

174. In 2002, the proportion of students achieving the expected Level 5 in the National Curriculum teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 was in line with the national average, though well below the figures for the previous two years. Girls performed better than boys, though the difference was less than that found nationally.
175. At GCSE, the proportion of students achieving grades A*-C in German was higher than the national average. Over the last three years, the results have improved markedly, in

spite of the considerable staffing problems the department has experienced. Comparison with the Key Stage 3 results of the same students indicates a performance slightly better than might be expected. Although girls continued to achieve better than boys, the margin has diminished considerably and in 2002 boys had almost as many grades A*/A as girls. Results for the few students taking French, the second modern foreign language, have fluctuated considerably but have been well above average, particularly for girls, who have achieved a good proportion of A*/A grades.

176. Standards in German on entry to the school are below average but, as a result of well-targeted teaching, students quickly consolidate their knowledge of German grammar and are now on course to reach expected standards by the end of the Year 9. Reading skills are sound and students write accurately on a narrow range of topics. Listening and speaking skills are relatively weak. Students lack confidence and can only participate in short, restricted exchanges. Where speaking skills are practised systematically, higher-attaining students in particular make good progress. Standards in Year 11 are sound. Coursework is generally accurate at all levels but the range of structures and tenses and vocabulary used by the higher-attaining students is more restricted than could be expected. Standards of listening and reading are sound; speaking remains the weakest skill. Students are competent in well-practised situations but their ability to speak spontaneously and freely is limited.
177. French is taught as a second language in Year 9 to two groups of high-attaining students. They make very good progress during the year, particularly in grammatical knowledge, and the most able write accurately, with a range of structures and vocabulary, about their families and their homes. Again, speaking is the least developed skill. Standards in Year 11 are below expected levels and have been affected by the staffing problems of the last three years. Knowledge of verb forms, and particularly the past tense, is insecure and written work is inaccurate. Students' ability to converse on the most basic topics is very limited.
178. The quality of teaching is sound overall, in both languages, and some of the teaching was good and very good. The teaching in two lessons was unsatisfactory. Planning is generally detailed and includes a range of activities to practise the different skills. Not enough attention is given to providing a range of tasks to meet the needs of the different abilities within each class, particularly the most able. In some classes the expectations of what students can do is not high enough, and some students do not achieve as highly as they might. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and good use is made of the projection technology to convey meaning without recourse to English. Audio tapes could be used more often and ICT is hardly used at all. Class management is generally good, as are relations between students and teachers. Attitudes are generally positive, but for the most part the work is not challenging or interesting enough to engender real enthusiasm.
179. The curriculum is satisfactory, but students should not be disappplied from German as they enter the school; and the unsatisfactory grouping arrangements in Year 10 result in large classes with too great a range of ability, making it more difficult to meet the needs of the most able in particular. The use of assessment data to set targets, monitor progress and to guide curricular planning is very good. The marking of students' work although regular does not help students to improve and is not sufficiently related to National Curriculum and GCSE criteria.
180. The quality of leadership and management is good. The head of department has a clear vision for the subject and since her appointment has successfully developed and implemented strategies to raise standards. The department is administered efficiently

and documentation and schemes of work are comprehensive and up to date. Teaching and learning are monitored effectively. Accommodation is good but book resources and access to ICT, in particular, are unsatisfactory.

181. The department has made substantial improvement since the last inspection; standards have risen substantially in the last three years, particularly for boys; monitoring has improved; learning objectives are now clearer. Nevertheless, high-attaining students are still not challenged enough in their work and little advance has been made in the use of ICT. For standards to advance further, these two issues remain to be tackled. In addition, lesson planning needs to be improved to cater for the different groups within the classes.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning.
- GCSE results.
- The impact on students' attitudes of productions and extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment to include clear criteria for success in all topics linked to attainment targets levels, and ensuring their comparability.
- A curriculum overview to ensure breadth, balance, world music, historical contexts and music technology by the end of Year 9.

182. Attainment by the end of Year 9 is above the national average for level 5 and above. The proportion of students gaining A* to C grades at GCSE and their average points score is above the national average. Some aspects of music, such as technology are weak on entry, and one consequence of the breadth of topics covered in Year 9 is some lack of depth. Achievement and progress are good in Year 9; they are very good in Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs progress and achieve as well as their peers; some technology-based composition heard from such students in the GCSE groups was as good as any in their group. Some excellent singing was heard from students in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, and there was a good baroque style string and wind quintet. A Year 13 pianist produced a sensitive and high quality performance demonstrating excellence. Instrumental teaching involves a significant proportion of students, and in addition to the remissions scheme, all those taking external examinations receive free lessons. There is an annual production plus significant extra-curricular music involving many students, and this is one factor increasing the involvement of boys in music.

183. Teaching and learning are both good in Year 9; they are very good with Years 10 and 11. The best teaching is characterised by excellent relationships where students are very well known, and consequently feel very secure as learners, and are willing to take musical risks. The teacher's passion, enthusiasm and commitment shine through, and pupils' response is almost a mirror image. Very good planning and preparation is linked to clear target setting, and clear routes to success are defined. Questioning is good, but sometimes students need to be given more time to consider their response. Organisation and management are efficient, and expectations are high; teachers' expertise has a significant impact on learning. Learning was seen by listening and analysis, by skill development, the use of technology, by deduction, from prior

experience, from rehearsal and through ensemble, and through progressive refinement.

184. Students' response is very good in Year 9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11. Students are open and positive. They listen intently and concentrate deeply, and there is a strong sense of positive intent in lessons. The learning environment is very good.
185. The Year 9 curriculum is made up of an extensive series of short topics covering the whole National Curriculum, although coverage is not deep. It is broad and balanced, and includes appropriate historical and worldwide material; technology provision is also appropriate. In order to ensure depth the Years 7 to 9 curriculum needs to be analysed as a whole. Links with the middle schools are good. Assessment is satisfactory, following whole-school principles, and, in order to improve its effectiveness, clear criteria for success should be established for all topics linked to attainment target descriptors and levels to ensure comparability. Leadership and management are good, building effectively on the commitment and enthusiasm of the head of department. Group sizes in Years 10 and 11 are healthy. Significant recent improvements in resources for music technology are already having a positive impact on students' attitudes and achievement.
186. Progress since the last inspection has been good. All issues have been addressed, and are either fully resolved or part of a continuous development process, such as in music technology and the development of assessment.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teaching is good, often very good, so that students learn effectively.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good in the vast majority of lessons.
- Students' achievements in GCSE are very good.
- Procedures for monitoring teaching and the progress that students make are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Students have too few opportunities to evaluate and analyse their own performance and that of others.
- Opportunity for students to work independently.
- The use of ICT.

187. Students who enter the school in Year 9 from feeder middle schools have good individual skills in some activities but general standards are below the expectation. In the activities provided in Year 9 at the school students make good progress. In 2002 assessments made by teachers show that standards for a poor cohort were well below national averages. However, in previous years the standards have been in line with national averages.
188. In the small number of lessons observed during the inspection the attainment of students in Year 9 was at least in line with that expected nationally, representing good progress since their arrival in school. Dance has recently been added to the curriculum and is taught by a very experienced peripatetic dance teacher. As a result all the girls make very good progress and show practical skills which are good when following

routines using new skills. The higher attaining girls display good control in their actions. All the group have made very good progress in a short time and achieve well when composing their own phrases. Boys in Year 9 show good knowledge of the components of fitness and relate them to hockey in circuit training. All students work at least at the standard expected at this age and the higher attaining students show good control and levels of fitness. In basketball, students make good progress in developing good techniques in isolation when shooting to a partner target. However, the standards in small-sided games are satisfactory overall and only the higher attainers shoot with good techniques and control. Students have limited appreciation of tactics or positions, and dribbling and passing skills are basic. Students with special educational needs make good progress and some of them represent school teams.

189. Standards achieved by students in GCSE examinations have been consistently above, and often well above, national averages for several years. In 2002 the percentage of students who gained an A*-C grade was well above the national average. Also, the percentage of students achieving the A* and A grades was well above the national average. All students achieve at least an A*-G grade which is above the national average. Students achieve significantly better in physical education than in the other subjects that they take.
190. In GCSE theory lessons observed during the inspection standards are good, with the majority working at A*-C level. Students make very good progress in their knowledge of intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting motivation in sport and can give examples using appropriate vocabulary. Standards in the small number of core lessons observed in Years 10 and 11 are, generally, satisfactory. In a Year 10 soccer lesson, in which almost half of the group represent the school, the individual skills of the majority when in possession of the ball are good. Their awareness of the positions of team-mates is not so well developed. Students acquire new skills and make good progress in aerobics, trampolining, health-related fitness and basketball and the majority achieve satisfactory standards. The school has recently offered the Junior Sports' Leader Award to students in Year 11 who are making good progress and achieving at the expected level which will allow them to work successfully with partner schools.
191. Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11 all lessons are at least satisfactory with the large majority good or very good. Teachers' good knowledge and very good relationships ensure that students acquire new skills with good techniques and make good progress. Lessons are very well planned with clear objectives and structured progressions so that students are appropriately challenged when teachers intervene to develop activities. Teachers have very good pupil management strategies and students respond by showing very good attitudes and behaviour. Demonstrations are used effectively so that students know the standards expected and gain good knowledge of the technical points being identified. Although much of the teaching is direct, teachers use questions effectively to develop students' knowledge and show respect to students when they answer. However, there is insufficient opportunity for students to evaluate and analyse their own work and that of others. In all lessons teachers give very clear instructions so that students know what they need to do to improve.
192. Teaching in GCSE theory is very good and students are challenged through very good questioning to gain further knowledge and understanding of motivation factors in sport. They gain good understanding of relevant vocabulary and can exemplify their answers from personal experience. In Year 11 students following a course leading to the Junior Sports' Leader Award gain confidence in presenting activities for their fellow students in order to enable them to work effectively with students in partner schools at a later date.

The teacher has very good knowledge and has very high expectations which ensure that the students respond very well to very challenging tasks. In a Year 11 soccer lesson teaching is satisfactory but students are not given sufficient opportunity to develop leadership skills or tactical understanding. In a very good Year 9 dance lesson with a peripatetic teacher students are given very good opportunity to work in pairs or small groups to compose their own phrases. Students in Year 9 circuit training make very good progress because the teacher explains activities very clearly and students gain very good understanding of the relevance of the skills to a particular sport. Teaching in Year 9 basketball is very good and enables students to make very good progress in their technical knowledge and skills in isolation.

193. Throughout the school students display very good attitudes and behaviour in lessons. They are enthusiastic, stay on task and work with very good physical effort. In all games activities they abide by the relevant rules and conventions and show very good sporting attitudes even when they are very competitive. When they are given opportunity to work in pairs or small groups they do so because relationships are very good. They learn well because they listen to instructions and respond well when set tasks.
194. The department is very well led by experienced teachers who have a clear vision for future developments. All teachers are specialists who are committed to the provision of very good curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for all students. Teams and individuals enjoy success in local and regional competitions. Very good schemes of work, which are very supportive to staff, are fully in place and procedures for monitoring the progress of students are very good. The appointment of a very experienced Director of Sport has enabled the school to produce an excellent bid to become a Sports College. The quality of provision was recognised in 2000 when the school received a Sportsmark Award. A dance specialist who works part-time in the school is already having a very good influence on the development of a wider curriculum throughout the school. Facilities are good overall though the fields tend to flood in winter and the sports hall heating is inadequate meaning that students work in very cold conditions in winter. There are good links with local sports clubs including soccer, swimming, cricket and netball and the school has received a Football Charter Mark. ICT and numeracy are not well developed though there is evidence of the use of a digital video camera to provide some opportunity for analysis of performance and use of number operations in health-related activities.
195. Improvements since the last inspection have been good.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The pace of development in the subject.
- The pupil response to the teaching.

Areas for improvement

- Raise standards by the end of Year 9 and in GCSE courses.
- Accommodation.
- Additional staff.
- Use of ICT.

196. Standards at the end of Year 9 are below expectations but they are in line with expectations by the end of Year 11. Standards, however, in both the full GCSE and the short GCSE courses are below national average levels. This is because the subject was only fully re-established in the school in 2000. The first full cohort of students to take the short GCSE course achieved results in 2002 which were below the national average levels. Now, standards are improving and the progress of students is good. This includes both the whole-year groups in Years 9 and 10 who study the short GCSE course and those who opt to take the full GCSE in Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress but little thought has yet been given to whether any special methods and materials would enable them to make better progress.
197. By the end of the short GCSE course the students have a sound understanding of Christianity in particular, and to a lesser extent Judaism and Sikhism. The main aspects of beliefs, worship, festivals, rites of passage, family life and denominational priorities are considered. Major social and world issues such as abortion, euthanasia, prejudice, pacifism and equality of opportunities are all studied in sufficient depth to enable students to undertake assignments with reasonable expectations of achieving a high grade. The students who study the full GCSE course find that the short-course GCSE topics usefully feed into their longer assignments. In Year 11 not all students study religious education as a discrete subject. Instead, it is incorporated into PHSRE and focuses on the religious responses to social issues such as forms of discrimination, needs etc. It was judged during the inspection to just meet statutory requirements. By the end of the course, however, the students had not had the opportunity to meet and discuss ideas with people from representative faiths in society.
198. The attitude of students is consistently good, both between each other and towards the teachers. They seek to attain the goals which are set out each lesson and usually achieve them. This generally cooperative ethos enables a high level of industry to become the norm. When there are class discussions, reasonable answers tend to flow without embarrassment. Similarly, small group work is productive no matter what kind of task it is. Equally impressive were the occasions seen when they settled down individually to do extended writing tasks. In every lesson this pattern of lively co-operative participation was seen.
199. The quality of teaching is good. Planning is good. A noticeable feature is the positive encouragement and support the teacher gives to students, who in turn respond well to this approach. Most of lessons are relatively formal in style because of the limited time which is available to cover the courses. Even so, the teacher manages to bring them alive sufficiently to maintain interest. Worksheets are straightforward and contain core factual material. Teaching is hindered by the lack of a specialist RE room, and basic everyday equipment. This means that wall displays are minimal and the use of authentic artefacts is limited, as is the use of video and other materials. This problem of accommodation when taken with time restrictions has a negative effect on teaching. A good range of teaching methods is used including playwriting and role play, and experimental cooking of Jewish food. Students are prepared well for examinations answers which one might have considered to be beyond the ability of students. There

is insufficient use of external visits to places of interest such as churches, mosques or synagogues.

200. The curriculum does not include the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus because on entry to the school all students begin to study the short GCSE. This may have adverse effects on standards because the material for Year 9 in the Agreed Syllabus provides a good basis for the short GCSE course. Muslim and Hindu are significant religious groupings in our multi-faith society but they are not included in the curriculum.
201. The subject is led effectively. RE does not have a specialist room from which to work and ICT is not used in teaching and learning.

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

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

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

GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	22	4	*	45	*	14	*
Chemistry	4	0	*	75	*	28	*
Biology	12	33	*	92	*	37	*
Physics	8	0	*	75	*	29	*
Technology	5	20	*	100	*	42	*
Business Studies	23	13	*	87	*	32	*
Information Systems	19	36	*	100	*	42	*
Physical Education	10	50	*	90	*	40	*
Geography	18	16	*	83	*	29	*
History	15	20	*	93	*	31	*
Sociology	27	11	*	78	*	22	*
Psychology	23	30	*	74	*	30	*
English Literature	4	75	*	100	*	48	*

GCE A-level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	13	23	*	84	*	5.3 (72)	*
Chemistry	4	0	*	100	*	3.0 (50)	*
Biology	6	16	*	100	*	5.7 (77)	*
Physics	8	25	*	75	*	4.3 (58)	*
Design and Technology	3	0	*	100	*	6.0 (80)	*
Business Studies	4	0	*	100	*	5.5 (72)	*
ICT	9	11	*	100	*	4.0 (60)	*
Physical Education	9	11	*	100	*	4.4 (64)	*
Leisure & Tourism Post 16 VQ	4	n/a	*	n/a	*	9.0	
Health & Social Care	3	n/a	*	n/a	*	8.0	

Art	5	80	*	100	*	8.0(100)	*
Music	3	33	*	100	*		*
Geography	24	16	*	100	*	5.1 (70)	*
History	6	16	*	100	*	4.3 (63)	*
Sociology	12	33	*	92	*	5.7 (75)	*
English Literature	14	21	*	100	*	5.4 (74)	*
General Studies	41	7	*	75	*	3.0 (44)	*

Figures in brackets indicate scores using the newly introduced points scheme.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

In mathematics the focus incorporated both the AS and A level courses.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The target setting process is well understood by staff and students.
- Teachers make good use of oral questions to maintain involvement and develop ideas.
- Staff/student relationships are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Results at A level need to improve.
- The department should increase the retention rate from AS to A-level.

202. There is a developing programme of AS and A-level provision. Current Year 13 students studied Pure Mathematics, Statistics and Decision and Discrete Mathematics when they were in Year 12, and are now building on this with two further modules in Pure Mathematics and one further module in Statistics. Current Year 12 students are studying one module in Pure Mathematics and two in Statistics. There is a small group in Year 12 studying Further Mathematics.

203. At AS-level, results in 2001 were above average in the percentage of students gaining grades A and B and in the average points score, and were well above average for the percentage achieving grades A to E. There was little difference between the performance of boys and girls. These results represent good progress from GCSE. Provisional figures for 2002 indicate that results dropped from the 2001 levels. Students' work seen during the inspection indicates average standards in Year 12, both in Pure Mathematics and Statistics. A small number of students with English as an additional language are studying the AS course. Observations suggest that, with appropriate support from the teacher, these students progress at the same rate as other students.

204. Students are successfully building on their GCSE work in Pure Mathematics by learning new mathematical notation and exploring the basic ideas of calculus. In Statistics, students extend their knowledge of probability to solve problems based on probability distributions and expected values.

205. At A level, the percentage of students gaining grades A or B in 2001 was below the national average, but the percentage gaining A to E grades was close to the national average. Boys achieved better than girls. Provisional results for 2002 show a drop in the percentage gaining grades A or B, but a slight rise in the percentage gaining grades A to E. Standards seen during the inspection indicate that current students are producing work in line with national expectations in all modules. In Year 13, students continue to face new and ever more challenging work. They learn to use trigonometrical identities to simplify expressions, and use new and more sophisticated numerical methods for solving algebraic equations. Students in the Further Mathematics group are at expected levels. These students study additional topics across Pure Mathematics, Statistics and Mechanics. Current students have demonstrated that they can solve vector problems in three dimensions, and are beginning to understand the geometrical properties of complex numbers.
206. Students learn well, and have the key skills that they need to learn effectively. The standard of teaching is good, especially in the quality of oral questioning, which helps to maintain involvement and develop new mathematical ideas. Teachers prepare well, and use their subject knowledge to anticipate likely areas of difficulty. Teachers manage their classes well, leading to a positive working atmosphere where students offer ideas and take an active part in the lesson. In one very good statistics lesson, the students learned effectively because they reviewed prior learning, and then discussed the new work in groups and with the teacher. Teaching was less effective where the teacher provided notes on a topic but provided imprecise descriptions of the new terms involved. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory. In lessons, teachers assess students' understanding by listening to their answers and looking at written work. More formal assessment involves regular end of topic tests, where useful feedback helps the students to learn. One group of students benefited from using a very good diagnostic assessment sheet, involving self-assessment.
207. Students know that staff are frequently available outside lesson times, and feel comfortable asking for help. Attitudes to work are good, and in some groups, very good. Curricular opportunities are satisfactory. Opportunities would be enhanced by offering a choice to students when they embark upon their AS-level studies, since several students would benefit from the chance to study more mechanics. The number of students opting to study AS-level mathematics has grown in recent years. Unfortunately, retention has been disappointing, with only about half of the 2001 AS students continuing to A2-level. The numbers opting for AS-level contains a greater proportion of boys than is usual.
208. Leadership is good. The head of department has an appropriate set of priorities for developing provision, and has changed provision in response to recent results. A particular strength of the department is the computerised records that track students' progress. This system provides a very effective basis for setting targets, which students understand. The student response to this system has been very positive.

Sciences

The focus was on physics, but chemistry and biology were also sampled. In 2002, biology A-level results were an improvement on the 2001 results, with 100 per cent of students achieving A-E grades. In chemistry, 75 per cent of students achieved A-E grades, as compared with 100 per cent in the previous year. The teaching in these lessons varied between sound and good. In an AS chemistry lesson, teaching was sound and relationships good, but some students struggled with titration calculations. In a good A-level biology lesson

the teacher used her specialist knowledge well in discussions with students about the differences between muscle cells, as a follow-up to students' microscopic observations of such cells.

Physics

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Most students are achieving well.
- Quality of assessment is good.
- Relationships are good.
- Management of the subject and use of resources are good.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of students' written response is sometimes not sufficiently accurate and personal study notes are of variable quality.

209. In the 2002 A-level examinations seven out of nine students achieved A-E grades. This was a lower proportion than in 2001, although, on this occasion, only four students were entered. However, about the same proportion of students (one in four) achieved A-B grades. In the 2002 AS examinations a higher proportion of students achieved A-E grades than in 2001.
210. Standards of work seen in lessons were broadly in line with expectations. Work seen in the cosmology option showed good work effort, good personal research, and good levels of mathematical ability emerging. However, the quality of written response to coursework questions is sometimes poorly written and the quality of students' personal study notes is variable. Students' knowledge of electricity, the nature of waves and mechanics is sound overall and in some cases good. The most able students confidently handle mathematical equations, such as de Broglie's, in calculating the wavelength and frequency of radiation. In a Year 13 lesson on capacitance, students showed a good grasp, at this early stage in the topic, of how charge is stored and measured. In Year 12, where students are half-way through their course, they are responding well to their coursework. In a good Year 12 lesson, students offered well considered explanations for the optical effects they had been observing when viewing plastic material and various sugar solutions through polaroid filters. In another sound lesson, some students struggled when trying to identify the clockwise and anti-clockwise moments acting on objects during a discussion related to text-book problems.
211. Teaching, overall, is good but varied from sound to good. In the best lessons teaching is good humoured, very well planned and erudite. Marking and assessment are very strong features.
212. Overall, students learn well. Students' interest is well demonstrated in some of the optional topic work and there are some good examples of data handling, use of the Internet and word processing to support learning.
213. The quality of subject management is good, overall. The quality of learning resources and monitoring of student progress are very good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

There were no focus subjects in this area but two lessons in design and technology were observed in which both teaching and learning were satisfactory. Standards achieved by students are broadly in line with national averages.

BUSINESS

There were no focus subjects in this area and only one business studies lesson was observed. Students' achievement was in line with national averages but their progress was hindered by the limited ICT equipment available within the business studies room.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Quality of teaching and learning is always good or better.
- Strong and positive management of the courses.
- Good quality and appropriate resources.

Areas for improvement

- Continue the development and monitoring and tracking of students' progress.

214. In 2001 standards in the GCE AS level Information Technology were below the national average. The results in 2002 showed considerable improvement. Evidence from the inspection indicates that current standards in Year 12 are above average.
215. Students in Year 12 create a stock control package, using a wide range of facilities in the spreadsheet package Excel. They consider relevant issues and examine the advantages and disadvantages of their solution and justify their decisions. They design the structure of the system and recognise the need to use a number of different sheets creating links between them. They create the spreadsheets, input data and formulae. They use advanced features such as buttons, macros and v-lookup tables. Most have already completed the data input and create wide-ranging testing strategies, recognising the different types of test. All students prepare and give a presentation of an advanced feature of the software package. They demonstrate an extensive knowledge of the topic and make good use of presentation software to enhance their own and others' skills and knowledge.
216. In 2001 the standards in A-level ICT were well above the national average. The results in 2002 showed a considerable drop in attainment. This was due to the introduction of a new course, staffing difficulties and a weak approach to the course work element. Evidence from the inspection, however, suggests that current standards are above national expectations. The staffing has changed and a more positive approach to the monitoring of students' progress has been introduced.
217. Year 13 students are working on their main project. They define a problem and examine the issues with some depth, providing workable solutions. Designs are well written, with clear data and system flowcharts and an appreciation of the need for relationships, which are well structured. In the creation of the actual database, use is made of validation routines, input masks with error messages. There is some limitation in dealing with the problems of different users and students have not fully mastered security protocols. Testing is very thorough with an understanding of the

various types of test required and how they affect the operation of the database. Students have a well developed understanding of the theory aspects of the course with many notes and assignments. They show an understanding of the use of ICT in a number of applications and write lucidly about the principles of ICT and its use in a variety of applications.

218. The quality of teaching and learning overall is good with over half the lessons being very good. Teachers plan and structure lessons well and make good use of resources and computer equipment to provide positive demonstrations of lesson topics. Teachers give clear guidance about examination requirements and monitor students regularly, ensuring each student is on target. Teachers have developed an atmosphere in which students take great interest in their own learning. They have given them confidence to present topics and help each other in a constructive and positive manner. There is good in-class assessment and teachers hold discussions with students on a regular basis.
219. The attitude and behaviour of students are very good overall. They work independently and with concentration, showing an interest in progressing with a very good attitude to the subject. They are also very willing to assist each other and discuss their work effectively with teachers and other students.
220. The leadership and management of the sixth-form courses are very good, with a new positive approach to improving attainment. This new approach is ensuring that students have some responsibility for monitoring their own progress. The head of department has introduced a team structure for teaching and ensured that there is frequent exchange of information between teachers. The positive management of resources and good technician support guarantee that students have every opportunity to extend their knowledge and skills in the use of ICT.
221. The progress made since the last inspection is good. Strategies in relation to the teaching and learning have been instigated to ensure that the attainment of the students is improved.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was leisure and tourism, but physical education was sampled where teaching and learning were good, supported by very good attitudes of the students.

Leisure and tourism

Overall, the quality of provision in leisure and tourism is **good**.

Strengths

- High standards of teaching which lead to good progress and value being added.
- The leadership of and team spirit within the department.
- Growing popularity of, and rising numbers including able students taking, the subjects.

Areas for improvement

- The development of relevant learning skills in Year 12.
- Raising aspirations beyond what is expected to attain the minimum grade.
- More resources to permit the full range of learning opportunities.

222. Leisure and recreation and travel and tourism are part of a five-subject vocational education department. With the changes of Curriculum 2000 the department is developing in both strength and numbers as popularity extends with students able to

mix these courses with traditional A levels. Given there were no vocational courses at the time of the last inspection and small numbers in the five years of their existence some courses and units within them are taught in the same lesson or Year 12 and 13 classes are taught together. There are well thought through links with the PE course as well. This maximises the use of scarce resources and retains viability though the recent growth is making some of these arrangements less necessary. Courses now lead to the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE).

223. Standards in the former Advanced GNVQ course were at or above average since 1998 when each year the majority of students obtained a pass with merit grade, though there were few of them. In the 2002 AVCE examination the sole candidate obtained grade D. There are more male students following each course than female and in the Year 12 AVCE course the students are all male, largely accounted for by the links to the PE course.
224. Students have a broad base of prior attainment with most undertaking the 12-unit course equivalent to two A-level subjects. The work of first-year students indicated some difficulty in making the transition from GCSE and was from the first term only. Their performance in the lessons observed indicated good progress, greater confidence and higher levels of achievement now that they understand more of the consultative style of teaching and greater independence, analysis and data interpretation required in their learning. Second-year students have made good progress and their assignments and portfolios are showing good achievement, with key issues and concepts in the leisure and recreation industries being understood at regional and national levels.
225. Overall, teaching was good with some very good features. This is largely the result of detailed planning, very good subject knowledge, good use of limited resources and strong teamwork. Lessons are carefully crafted, use a variety of techniques to retain interest as well as challenge students to improve. Methods are well matched to students' needs and varying prior attainment so that they develop good learning. Staff motivate students well and get the best out of their lessons for students. The climate within the department for effective learning was a strong feature. Relationships were excellent. Students spoke highly of their teachers and enjoy what they are doing.
226. Assessment is continuous by nature of the courses with assignments being graded as units are completed. Students benefit greatly from the support they get through feedback but steps should now be taken to raise the sights of more of them beyond what is needed to attain the minimum pass grade.
227. Leadership and management are very good through an effective and experienced subject leader who is managing the growth and development of the vocational subjects well. Systems are up to date; schemes of work have been reviewed and show careful planning. Staff work together constructively and share courses according to their specialism. Though facing some difficulties from location and students taking a variety of other subjects now, work experience is arranged from school. A great deal of effort has gone into securing a variety of meaningful experiences in study visits to cover the range of leisure units in either course. Now that there are more students, more resources are needed to enable the full range of learning opportunities to develop.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

There are no focus subjects in this area and only one lesson was observed in health and social care where provision was good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art. Lessons were sampled in music and performing arts where provision is good and teaching is good and some very good.

Art

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

Strengths

- The level of commitment in students is very high.
- The teaching at sixth-form level is good.

Areas for improvement

- The sixth form would make improved progress in a dedicated sixth-form studio.

228. The scope of provision in the sixth form is extensive. Students may opt for the OCR 'unendorsed' general art AS/A-level syllabus, or for a more specialised 'endorsed' course on textiles, graphics or fine art. This range of options allows for widely different creative interests within the art curriculum. Students are accepted onto the course on the basis of their commitment to the subject and a minimum GCSE grade D in art or in specified areas of design and technology. There is provision for students to enter the sixth form without these prior qualifications if they are able to demonstrate a high level of interest and experience in other areas, which the department might consider relevant.
229. Attainment is above average. In the most recent year, students gained 80 per cent grades A-B at A-level. Results in recent years have shown a steady improvement to a point where results compare favourably, though with small numbers, to other subject areas within the school. Students taking AS levels have opted this year to continue to full A-level.
230. The work produced in the sixth form is of good quality. Drawing is strong and project ideas imaginative. A feature is the way in which student plans are drawn up and researched. Written work is of good quality and is supported by well-organised and well-taught essay writing strategies. Students' folders show how work develops progressively and rationally. Work is very well presented.
231. The teaching at sixth-form level is very effective. In all sixth-form lessons seen during the inspection, the teaching was of good quality. Two main features characterise the teaching at this level: the level of teacher subject expertise is high, and the relationships between staff and students are very good.
232. Good learning is promoted by the quality of teaching and by the very positive response of students. Attitudes in class are excellent and students show a capacity for independent working in pursuance of their ideas. A generally mature and purposeful atmosphere prevails in studios during sessions. Students take a positive view of the sixth form. They enjoy their work and appreciate the range of activities available to them.

233. A limitation to progress in the sixth form is the lack of a dedicated sixth-form working area. This means that students are subjected to the inconvenience of putting work away between their frequent visits.

HUMANITIES

The focus subjects were geography and sociology. Lessons in history and psychology were sampled and teaching and learning were at least satisfactory in both, with students achieving standards which approximate to those expected nationally.

Geography

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

Strengths

- The good standards being achieved by students when measured against prior attainment.
- The use of case studies which add realism.
- The quality of assessment.
- The enthusiasm and interest of teachers and students.
- Relationships which are relaxed and yet purposeful and built around a sense of mutual trust.

Areas for improvement

- Subject leadership in terms of appointing a manager who has sufficient time to raise good standards still further.
- Additional texts to support independent research and learning.

234. The standards currently being achieved are good. Geography in the sixth form is a popular option subject and recruits well. A-level results in recent years have been broadly in line with the performance of candidates in similar schools, much as at the time of the previous inspection, but students in 2001 performed significantly better in geography than in the other subjects they had been entered for indicating good progress when compared with prior attainment. The performance of girls, who make up a minority of the entry, was particularly good. Such comparators are not available for the most recent results in 2002 but, at A-level, these appear to reflect a similar trend.
235. All students who embarked on the AS course examined in 2002 completed it. Eighty-three per cent were awarded a grade, two at the highest level, grade A. A high proportion of these students is currently continuing the subject to A2 indicating very good retention which testifies to the high levels of student satisfaction with the provision. Coursework shows some ability to synthesise several strands of subject knowledge so as to make sense of primary data. ICT is well used in its presentation and conclusions are fully evaluated. Students use terminology with reasonable fluency and the most capable have the capacity to quantify when describing.
236. Students enjoy geography and learn well. They readily contribute in lessons. Year 13 students, in particular, are mature and interested, willing to accept considerable responsibility for their own learning. They work at a good pace. Relationships between teachers and students are relaxed and purposeful and there is a sense of mutual trust which emanates from shared experiences of field work. Students have a clear understanding of the level at which they are working and are well informed about personal targets and how to achieve them.

237. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable and their individual interests are well deployed. Teaching is at its best where learning is not wholly led by the teacher. A Year 13 lesson, for example, introduced a new topic by requiring students to divide a world map on the basis of development, a challenging exercise, repaid with productive learning because students were involved, interested and kept on task by the pace at which the lesson progressed. Gains in knowledge were matched by gains in understanding and the teacher drew on and, therefore, reinforced and demonstrated the link between the topic and the demographic transition model and sectors of industry.
238. Case studies are well used. A video of the New Forest was a tool to tease out the various elements needed for the successful management of temperate woodland. It too was a well-planned lesson which digressed briefly into a debate on fox hunting contributing to citizenship, but the key to good learning was the immediacy and imagery of the resource, the skilful way the teacher used it to elicit understanding through question and answer and the good supplementary material which fostered independent understanding and drew the disparate strands of the lesson together. Rio de Janeiro was the starting point for a Year 12 lesson on urban morphology but learning here was compromised because the students were fed rather than challenged and their occasional flippancy belied their limited interest because the case study was not deep enough to give the topic reality.
239. All members of the department contribute to geography in the sixth form and work closely together as a team. The quality of provision previously reported has been maintained. The head of department is a good geographer and a strong leader but, as in the main school, does not have sufficient time to devote to the subject. The school library is a poor resource and, whilst students have access to a departmental library, the range of texts to support wider research and independent learning needs to be expanded.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Students make good progress and achieve well.
- Communication skills are well developed and all students discuss topics with considerable confidence.
- Teaching is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Use of ICT.

240. The A-level results for 2002 included fewer A/B grades than in previous years. The trend over the past four years has been for students to gain higher average points scores in this subject than in their other subjects and for the results to be close to the national average.
241. Standards of work of current students in Year 13 indicate that they are achieving well in relation to the predictions based on their GCSE results. Their files show that many have developed a critical and reflective approach to the modules topics. Suitable progress has been made and the written work reflects increasing analysis and reference to theories in their answers. Students spoke confidently and contributed in class to the discussions on crime.

242. In 2001 AS-level results were below the national average and only two students gained A/Bs. Grades were lower than the national average and were lower than expected. A number of reasons were given to explain this, including the larger number of students taking the subject and that some of these had difficulty in dealing with sociological terms. Improved guidance has been introduced which outlines to intending students the requirements needed to succeed in the subject.
243. Many Year 12 students show an interest for the subject, a sound knowledge base and a developing sociological understanding. This is achieved by detailed consideration of the nature of sociological explanations and different forms of social organisation using examples drawn from the locality. The analysis of the family included detailed coverage of the students' own family trees. This is then used to illustrate different theoretical explanations of the family. In their coverage of education, students commented confidently on the arguments for and against the tripartite system. All students contributed to the discussion, both in response to direct questions from the teacher and also in following up points raised by others.
244. Teaching is very good and students respond with enthusiasm. Each lesson has a clear objective, is well planned using a variety of strategies to engage students while the brisk pace ensures that the content is covered. Students in Year 12; for example, started the lesson with a short quiz which reviewed content of the previous lesson. This was followed by a short, well-structured presentation on the reasons for the emergence of comprehensive education. Students took notes on the relevant points in the handout. Roles were allocated and a short ten minute debate took place. This was concluded with students successfully reviewing the evidence. Each student was engaged with the activity. The Year 13 class followed this model and the variations in the delivery offered students the opportunity to demonstrate their growing knowledge of the subject.
245. Written work covered a variety of tasks from the single sentence arising from a short discussion in class, to extended homework essays and examination trials. Files are well marked with encouraging comments giving advice on what is needed to improve the presentation. Most of the files demonstrated a sound grasp of English but, where necessary, spelling and grammar are corrected. Year 13 files indicated a clear understanding of the sociology of religion, both with regard to the evidence, theoretical analysis as well as containing an introduction to the major religions.
246. Students learn well. They are keen, attentive, work productively and respond with enthusiastic and effective learning to the variety of teaching styles. All students support each other and the good rapport between teacher and student enables all to contribute and recognise that they are active members of a group.
247. While the subject contributes significantly to the development of core skills, citizenship and social and cultural understanding there was only limited evidence that students are encouraged to use ICT to extend their knowledge on specific topics.
248. The subject is well led and managed. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to ensuring students reach their appropriate standards. Effective use is made of associate teachers. They are provided with an interesting induction, but are also encouraged to contribute their knowledge on current developments. The schemes of work reflect the subject requirements and the detailed lesson plans provide extensive guidance to the associate teacher. A careful analysis of an individual student's achievement and progress is in operation and the performance

in each piece of work contributes to the overall target set. Resources and accommodation are suitable for the current size of the groups.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature and English language was sampled. The focus on modern foreign languages was German which only had a small number of students and was only taught in Year 12.

English

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching inspires and challenges students to achieve very well.
- Students take responsibility for their own learning.

Area for improvement

- Teachers should maintain an emphasis on ensuring that the most able students gain the highest grades.

249. In the AS English Literature examination in 2002, all four candidates passed, with three gaining the highest grades. The students' results compare well with their performance in other subjects and represent good progress from GCSE. In the A-level examination in 2002, all fourteen students achieved A-E grades, with three obtaining A or B grades. These results also represent good progress from GCSE. In English Literature, the students achieved well in comparison with their performance in other subjects. The 2002 A-level results were an improvement on those achieved in 2001. In that year, the proportion of students gaining the highest grades was below the national average. At the time of the last inspection, the proportion of students gaining A or B grades matched the national average.
250. The quality of teaching is very good. This is an improvement from the time of the last inspection, when it was sound. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are thus able to explain to the students the historical, social and intellectual background to the literature being studied. They have devised a well-structured course, with a good introductory unit that helps the students to make the transition from GCSE. They plan lessons with a variety of activities to stimulate the students' interest and maintain a lively pace. Teachers are particularly good at involving students in lessons and students respond very well to the expectation that they will contribute to their own learning in a mature way. They enjoy the subject.
251. In their lessons, students achieve very well. They are able to respond with insight to some demanding texts. In a Year 13 lesson, the three students each gave a sustained presentation on an aspect of romantic poetry. They showed a good awareness of the biographical, social and intellectual context of the writers' work and were able to relate these confidently to the language of the poems. In this lesson, the teacher's probing questions helped the students to explain and develop their ideas. In a Year 12 lesson on Marlowe's play, 'Dr. Faustus', the teacher's excellent subject knowledge inspired and challenged the students to develop their understanding of medieval and Renaissance concepts of salvation and damnation. These ideas were then related to the themes and language of the play. The lesson was conducted at a brisk pace and with a clear sense of purpose. Students quickly became absorbed in the topic, showed an understanding of the issues and began to draw parallels between this and other plays, such as

'Macbeth'. In these and other lessons, teachers took care to encourage and support the students so that they developed the confidence to express their ideas and the ability to justify their thinking.

252. The students in Year 13 are able to produce extended pieces of critical writing that show mature insight into literature. They have written impressively about the literature of the First World War, comparing a play ('Journey's End'), a poem ('They') and a novel ('Birdsong'). The higher attaining Year 12 students are also able to write perceptively, for example on the poetry of U. A. Fanthorpe, but others still find it difficult to get below the surface of a text. In their marking of students' essays, teachers explain carefully how the work could be improved and what the students have to do to obtain the highest grade possible.
253. English Language is being taught in Year 12 for the first time. The course is well organised and students' achievements so far are satisfactory. Higher attaining students have completed some good extended written work, for example on theories of language development in children. They write fluently and in a variety of styles. The essays of other students are more superficial. The work of these students also shows some technical weaknesses. Students have a good grasp of specialist terminology, with higher attaining students being able to relate syntax to context and audience. Some students report that they find aspects of the Language course difficult.
254. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The teachers share a commitment to planning for the success of the students.

German

Only small numbers of students take modern foreign languages in the sixth form. As there are currently no students for French in either Year 12 or 13, the inspection concentrated on German, where there are four students in Year 12.

The quality of provision in German is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Positive attitudes are helping students to adjust to the demands of the AS course.
- The good teaching is enabling the students to make good progress.

Areas for improvement

- Listening and speaking skills are relatively weak.
- The teachers need training in the interpretation of assessment criteria for AS and A2 levels.

255. Numbers taking either language are too small for statistical analysis of the results. Over the last three years nine students have taken A-level French; all but one has passed but only one has achieved as high as Grade B, significantly below course expectations. Results in German have not been as good; three of the eight students have failed over the last three years and the highest grade has been C.
256. Students are finding the adjustment to the standards required for AS level difficult to make. Knowledge of German grammar beyond the basic level is slight; a straightforward exercise on relative pronouns caused difficulty for some and word order, cases and verb forms pose more problems than they should. Written work is, however, beginning to improve and essays show evidence of wider reading and the re-use of structures and expressions met in class. The standard reached in the first

assessment was satisfactory for this stage of the course. Students have difficulty in coping with the level of written and aural texts they meet. They do not have the range of vocabulary necessary and their listening skills are not well developed. Without considerable preparation, they are not able to discuss these texts with any fluency. However, their performance in the mock job interviews, which had been well prepared, should give them encouragement. All were competent and the best was of a high standard.

257. The teaching observed was good overall and one lesson was very good. In this lesson, students' achievements were also high. Expectations are high and encourage the students to give of their best. The lessons are well prepared; they have clear objectives, contain a variety of activities and tackle topics which are relevant to the students. Good use is made of the Internet as a source of authentic, up-to-date material. However, students do not have enough opportunities to listen to and analyse aural texts on their own. Similarly, they need more opportunities to develop systematically their reading skills. Students' work is regularly assessed and the detailed comments point the way clearly to further improvement.
258. Students enjoy their German and find it challenging. The gap between the demands of GCSE and AS level has been considerable and they feel that their experiences in Year 11 were not an adequate preparation. They show good study skills and prepare well for their lessons. Their preparation for the mock interviews enabled them to perform a much higher level than would otherwise have been the case. They are keen to participate in discussion but are hampered by a lack of vocabulary and control over structure. They readily seek help when it is required and act on the advice given.
259. The course is shared between the head of department and the other main teacher. Both are good linguists who use German almost exclusively in their teaching. However, this is the first year that the course has been offered and neither teacher has taught it before. The scheme of work is new and is being elaborated in the light of experience. Some form of in-service training is required, particularly to clarify assessment criteria and levels.