

INSPECTION REPORT

CONGLETON HIGH SCHOOL

Congleton

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 132748

Headteacher: Mr Les Jones

Reporting inspector: Mr Graeme Clarke
1547

Dates of inspection: 9th – 13th December 2002

Inspection number: 249749

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: 11 to 18

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Box Lane
Congleton
Cheshire

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr G Eardley

Date of previous inspection: None

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1547	G Clarke	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and students' achievements How well are students taught? How well the school is led and managed What the school should do to improve further?
9921	P Blackshaw	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents? How well does the school care for its students?
19043	D Lewis	Sixth form coordinator	Biology (Sixth form)	
32330	A Behan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (11-16)	
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28178	J Connor	Team Inspector	Modern foreign languages (11-16) Provision for students with special educational needs	
12356	R Dickason	Team inspector	Science (11-16)	
15940	N Godfrey	Team inspector	Art and design	
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12600	L Hesketh	Team inspector	Design and technology	
22906	B Hodgson	Team inspector	Physical education Education inclusion	
31100	G Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics	
12475	S Johnson	Team inspector	Music	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
15576	D Nebesnuick	Team inspector	History Citizenship	
14516	A Skelton	Team inspector	Religious education (11-16)	

20497	V Williams	Team inspector	Geography (11-16) Business studies (Sixth form)	
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	15
The school's results and students' achievements	
Students' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?	21
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?	24
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?	28
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	31
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	32
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	37
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	39
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	45
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	70

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Congleton High is a new mixed comprehensive community school for students aged 11-18 years. The current roll of 1083, 555 boys and 528 girls, including 144 in sixth form, is about average. After a phased amalgamation of schools in the town, 2001-2002 was the first full year of operation when all students in Years 9, 11 and the sixth form were taught in the school and took statutory tests and examinations. The school serves an urban and rural area to the west of Congleton, with some students coming from nearby Staffordshire, and is oversubscribed. Students joining the school in Year 7 have above average attainment. Relatively few students, 22, were admitted during last year and 25 left during the year. The proportion eligible for free school meals is well below average at 4.6 per cent. A below average number of students have special educational needs, including two with statements. A very small number of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Seven speak English as an additional language but none is at early stage of acquisition of English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This new school is providing a satisfactory education for its students. In relation to their attainment when they begin in Year 7, students make satisfactory achievement in Year 9, and then in Years 10 and 11 students' achievement is good. Teaching is good overall. It is satisfactory with many good features in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. The school has set appropriate priorities for improvement. Leadership and management are satisfactory but strategies for putting policies into practice are not sufficiently monitored, shared and understood. Given students' good achievement and well above average results in examinations, the school is giving good value for money.

What the school does well

- Students attain standards well above national averages in GCSE examinations.
- It makes very good provision in music and drama
- There are effective procedures for supporting students' academic development particularly by analysing test and examination results.
- It has set appropriate areas for improvement in the school development plan and established effective procedures for funding development work.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.
- It fosters effective working relationships between students and teachers.

What could be improved

- There is unsatisfactory provision in mathematics, geography and religious education; for numeracy and students' spiritual development.
- Parents have reasonable concerns about the school's working relationships with them.
- The senior management team has yet to obtain a collective responsibility amongst all teachers for achieving the school's aspirations.
- Procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning, and whole school effectiveness, are not sufficiently established.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

This the first inspection of the new school.

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	N/A	B	A	C
A-levels/AS-levels	N/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.

Although candidates in 2001 were notionally on the roll of the new Congleton High School, many were taught in their original schools by different teachers and took the examinations there. Comparisons cannot be fairly made with the results in 2001.

Year 9 students in 2002 made satisfactory progress and achievement in relation to their attainment when they began Year 7, gaining results above national averages in English, mathematics and science. Results in English, mathematics and science are in line with the averages for schools where students had similar prior attainments. In relation to schools with similar socio-economic circumstances, the results in English are below average and well below in mathematics and science. Targets for 2002 were not reached.

GCSE candidates in 2002 attained well above national averages. In relation to their attainment when they entered Year 10 two years ago they have achieved well. English and science results were well above, and mathematics was above national averages. The percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades was above average in comparison with schools where students had similar prior attainments. English and science results were well above and mathematics below their respective averages. Compared to schools with similar socio-economic circumstances, the percentage of 5 or more A*-C grades was below their average. English results were close to average, science was above but mathematics was well below. Average points scores in GCSE are well above national averages and close to the average of similar schools. GCSE results exceeded the targets for 2002.

Standards of work seen in Years 7 to 9 are mostly satisfactory. They are above average in English, science, ICT and music but below average in mathematics and religious education because of unsatisfactory teaching. In Years 10 and 11 standards are well above average in English and science, above average in mathematics art and design, ICT and music but below average in religious education.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Students work hard, are attentive and keen to improve, and respond confidently to good teaching. A good proportion of students take part in, and benefit from, extra curricular activities provided by the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory. Students are responsible and well behaved in classrooms creating a productive atmosphere for learning. Around the school, outside lessons, students often lack basic courtesies and thoughtfulness to others. They are untidy in personal appearance and habits by leaving too much litter in common areas. The number of exclusions has been reduced substantially from those last year.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Relationships between teachers and students are based on respect. This helps to raise students' self-esteem and gives confidence to ask and answer questions. Students work well together in many lessons.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance is average and unauthorised absence is half the national average. Monitoring punctuality requires improvement.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	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.

No lessons were seen in Year 11 because students were taking examinations.

The quality of teaching is good overall. Teaching is of good quality in English and science but unsatisfactory in mathematics and religious education throughout Years 7 to 10. There is good teaching throughout in art and design, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Geography teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Year 10. Design and technology teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers make satisfactory provision for all students, including those with special educational needs, those having English as an additional language and those who are gifted and talented.

Students are helped to learn and make good progress in lessons where teachers use their specialist subject knowledge and understanding of learning well, especially in science, art and design, history, music and physical education. Lessons are planned and taught effectively, especially in science, art and design and music. Teachers manage students' behaviour and learning well, especially in science, history, music and physical education. In turn, students' interest, concentration and effort are the strongest aspects of their learning. Where lessons do not have a sufficient range of suitable activities, boredom sets in and learning suffers, particularly in many mathematics lessons. Students' learning is not supported effectively where there is inadequate use of homework to consolidate class work, of marking to inform their next steps, and of assessment for planning activities. In turn, students' knowledge of how well they are learning has most room for development.

Skills of literacy are taught satisfactorily. Following training and guidance, most teachers are making good progress in enhancing students' use of key words at the start and end of lessons. Nevertheless, reading development requires more sustained and effective attention and a more rigorous approach to writing is indicated. Teachers in very few subjects have given much thought to how best the students' numerical skills can be developed within their own area of the curriculum. Although there are individual examples of good teaching, training on the National Numeracy Strategy has not evoked sufficient response.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory quality and range throughout. Fieldwork in geography for Years 7 to 9, religious education in the sixth form and daily act of collective worship do not meet statutory obligations,
Provision for students with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Additional learning support is effective. These students are fully integrated into lessons where provision is the same as for all other students.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. A very small number of students with English as an additional language are fully integrated into all lessons where provision is the same as for all other students.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall. Personal development is satisfactory. Spiritual development is unsatisfactory because the school is not dealing with inconsistency between subjects. Moral and social development are satisfactory and the range of opportunities to promote cultural development is good. Overall, the coordination is unsatisfactory
How well the school cares for its students	Good. Child protection and health and safety procedures are secure. The pastoral and guidance teams have a clear focus on improving behaviour and attendance to raise the achievement of students. The school is developing good assessment procedures but they are not used consistently across subject departments to plan future work.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Parents' views are unsatisfactory because more than half replying to the questionnaire do not feel that the school works closely with them. Most parents do, however, support the home-school agreement.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory overall. Priorities for development are very appropriate and most staff with management responsibilities carry out their responsibilities satisfactorily. The senior team has a clear vision for improvement but has not yet obtained a collective responsibility amongst all teachers to realise it. Support for newly appointed teachers is inadequate.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors are committed to improving the school, review its work and understand its strengths and weaknesses. Some statutory obligations for the curriculum in geography, religious education and daily collective worship are not yet met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Unsatisfactory. Although examination results are thoroughly analysed, quality of teaching and learning, and the implementation of school policies for the curriculum and assessment are not sufficiently monitored to ensure consistency at this early stage of the schools' development.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Funds available are closely targeted to school development and staff training and spending is effectively monitored. Best value principles are applied well. Accommodation is good. Resources for learning are adequate overall with some shortages of books being addressed. Some middle management posts have been held temporarily for over-long.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are achieving well. • The school has high expectations. • Students are helped become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The standard of behaviour. • Homework that is consistently set and marked. • Information about students' progress. • The school's response to questions and problems. • Working closely with parents. • How well the school is led and managed

A significant minority of parents are concerned about high levels of teachers' absence. Inspectors agree that last year the levels were unusually and unacceptably high. Absence has reduced by almost half over the same period this year with clear improvements in teaching and learning. However, continuing absence requiring supply teaching continue to depress the quality of provision, particularly in mathematics and religious education. Inspectors agree with parents that the students make good progress and that the school has high expectations. Although behaviour generally is good, some unsatisfactory aspects of students' behaviour, courtesy, personal appearance and tidiness, do not reflect developing maturity and responsibility. Inspectors find written reports on students' progress are good, and that meetings for parents have been well attended this year. Inspectors agree that homework is not consistently set and marked. Inspectors find that some aspects of management are good but others require further development and the school will need to work closely with parents to alleviate their concerns.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form at Congleton High School has 143 students and is of average size. A very small number of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few speak English as an additional language and none is at early stage of acquisition. Entry requirements to the sixth form are normally set at 5 or more A*-C grades in GCSE though exceptions can be made in specific instances. A full range of academic courses is taught, and vocational courses in health and social care, art and design, and ICT are taken by about a quarter of the students in Year 12. These courses are increasing in popularity. A few students take GCSE examinations in the sixth form. Retention rates are above average and over three-quarters of students continue into higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Overall provision in the sixth form is satisfactory. Students gain results in AS, A level and vocational examinations which are above the national average. The quality of teaching and learning is good: they are very good in art and design, biology, English, history and physical education. Overall, students make good progress in lessons and achieve well. Taking into account what is available in the rest of the town, the range of courses suits students' needs well. The sixth form is generally well managed, though the school makes inadequate use of form time and assemblies to support students' personal development. The school manages its funds well and the sixth form is cost effective. It currently gives satisfactory value for money.

Strengths

- The school provides good courses in English, biology, art and design, history and physical education.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good.
- Good relationships between staff and students lead to a secure atmosphere in which students learn well.
- The procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are good.

What could be improved

- Students' interest, concentration, and pace of working lead to productive lessons.
- The coordination of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the sixth form is unsatisfactory.
- The school does not make good use of its strategies for monitoring and developing teaching and learning.
- Religious education in the sixth form and the arrangements for a daily act of collective worship do not meet statutory requirements.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good Work seen in lessons is better than is indicated by recent below average examination results. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching. There are still shortcomings in management.
Biology	Good Results in biology are in line with the national average, though some students fail to pass their AS examinations. Teaching is very good, and the department is well managed.
Business studies	Satisfactory Standards are below the national average but students make satisfactory progress in relation to prior attainment. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but there are limitations in independent study, and insufficient use is made of links with business.
ICT	Good Overall improving standards reflect good teaching and resources. Students find the courses interesting, enjoyable and useful.
Art and design	Very good The range of teachers' skills leads to challenging teaching, and very good progress. The department is well led and managed
Design and technology	Satisfactory Strong relationships between students and teachers do not yet lead to high standards of work. Students particularly respect the culture established where their opinions are sought and valued.
Physical education	Very good Very good teaching and relationships lead to very good progress in lessons, and to examination results which are well above average. Leadership and management are very good.
History	Good Standards are at the national average and are improving as a result of teachers' very good subject knowledge. Teaching, leadership and management are good. Book resources are poor.
English language and literature	Very good Students work hard, motivated by very good and enthusiastic teaching. Standards in literature are above average and they are well above average in language. Improved use of precise expression in the students' assignments would raise standards further.

In addition, lessons were sampled in drama, chemistry, physics, psychology, sociology, media studies, music, and French. Teaching in the chemistry lesson was good, and in all the other subjects teaching was very good or excellent. In the Year 12 psychology lesson teaching and use of resources were outstanding, leading to quite exceptional involvement of students and correspondingly high quality learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good The sixth form coordinator has worked quickly to improve the level of guidance offered to students helping them to gain the most from their studies. She has sought their views of the sixth form, introduced a sixth form induction day for Year 12, improved the procedures for tracking students' progress, and improved the arrangements for working with parents. She has a very good understanding of students' needs at this important stage in their education and is determined to give them the best possible support.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good Under the guidance of the sixth form coordinator, there is now a clear educational direction in the sixth form, which reflects the whole school ethos with a commitment to equality of opportunity. There is a commitment to principles of best value, and the sixth form budget is well managed. Within curriculum areas, management is generally good, though efforts to raise attainment have not yet been effective in all subjects, and results in AS and A level examinations do not always reflect students' potential. The opportunities offered by tutor periods and assemblies for personal development are not adequately exploited. The sixth form as a whole is cost effective and gives satisfactory value for money.

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"> • Most students feel that they were well advised, are on appropriate courses and are well taught. • They are encouraged to attend school consistently, are challenged in their studies and work at them in their own time. • They get good feedback on their assessments. • They know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. • Nearly all students feel that the accommodation in the school is suitable. • Staff are friendly and helpful, and other sixth form students behave responsibly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost half of sixth form students feel that they were not well prepared for life in the sixth form. • Nearly four-fifths are sometimes overloaded with assessment, and half feel that they are not well prepared for examinations. • Nearly two-thirds of students feel that there are not enough common meeting spaces. • More than half feel that guidance periods are not sufficiently informative. • More than half of sixth form students feel that they are not treated as responsible young adults.

Inspectors agree with the comments of the sixth form students. They believe that conflicting responses often arise from the much improved management of the sixth form in the current Year, which gives Year 12 students a rather different perspective from that of their colleagues in Year 13. In particular, they judge that the school needs to do more to keep students aware of their progress. Inspectors agree that staff are friendly and helpful, and that they develop relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Students are treated as responsible young adults.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.

Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement “outstanding” in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to “very weak”.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

Strengths

- GCSE candidates achieved well gaining 5 or more A*-C grades, five or more A*-G grades, and an average points score well above the national averages in 2002.
- GCSE results in English language, science, design and technology subjects and English literature were significantly above national averages.
- Standards in work seen are well above average in drama in Years 10 and 11, and above average in music throughout the school.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in Year 9 tests, particularly mathematics, and GCSE A*-C grades in relation to those attained in similar schools.
- Standards in religious education throughout the school
- The systematic development of literacy and numeracy skills in particular.

1. Congleton High School was formed in 2000 but all students in Years 9, 11 and 13 remained in the original three schools where they were taught in classes alongside students allocated to the other new school in the town, and took tests or examinations in 2001. Some lessons were taken by teachers who were on the new Congleton staff and others by teachers from the other schools. Accordingly, it is not feasible to make fair comparisons between the 2001 results and those of 2002.

2. When Year 9 students in 2002 started in Year 7 their attainment in the statutory tests at the end of primary school was above average. At the end of Year 9 in 2002 they gained results above national averages in English, mathematics and science. Throughout Years 7 to 9 the students made satisfactory progress and achievement in relation to their attainment when they started secondary school. Nevertheless, the results did not meet the school's expectations as targets for 2002 were not reached.

3. GCSE candidates attained results well above national averages in 2002. For example, 63 per cent gained 5 or more A*-C grades compared to 50 per cent nationally, and 98 per cent gained five or more A*-G grades compared to 91 per cent nationally. Students' average points score of 40.1 was also well above the national average. Students have made good progress and achieved well in relation to their attainment when they entered Year 10 two years ago.

4. The percentage gaining 5 or more A*-C grades was above average in comparison with schools where students had similar prior attainments at the end of Year 9 in 2000. The proportion gaining 5 or more A*-G grades, and the average points score, were well above average. However, compared to schools with similar socio-economic circumstances, the percentage of 5 or more A*-C grades was below their average but the percentage of 5 or more A*-G grades was above average. The average points score was in line with that of this group of schools. Boys' results were well above the national average and girls' above national average.

5. English language and science A*-C results were well above the average of schools with similar students' prior attainments, however, mathematics results were below their averages. Compared to schools in similar socio-economic contexts, English language results at A*-C were close to average, science above but mathematics results were well

below. The relatively poor results in mathematics compared with those in English and science reflects the inadequacies of leadership and staffing over an extensive period in the subject. Students' attainments at A*-C grades are above national averages in other subjects except business studies. They are significantly better than nationally in design and technology subjects, and English literature.

6. Students' results met targets for 5 or more A*-C grades (63 per cent) and exceeded the targets for average points scores (45.3 compared to 45). The 2003 target of 59 per cent gaining 5 or more A*-C grades is lower than 2002 reflecting a careful analysis, but the average points score target is the same representing a clear challenge to sustain levels of performance. The 2004 targets of 65 per cent gaining 5 or more A*-C grades is a clear increase and challenge for the school.

Standards of work seen during the inspection

7. Students in Years 7 to 11 speak well and listen carefully so that standards of oral work are above average. Standards of written English are mostly above average as a result of good, well structured teaching. Higher attaining students in Years 7 to 9 write very accurately showing how they use vocabulary well and to reflect their understanding of literature. Spelling and punctuation errors affect the standards of lower attaining students. The very best students in Years 10 and 11 write flawlessly. However, a few students make frequent grammatical and spelling errors which lowers their standard of work.

8. Standards in mathematical skills seen in Years 7 to 9 reflect the quality of the teaching students receive. Students' improvement throughout Years 7 to 9 is not as good as it should be and their achievement is unsatisfactory because those who have had several supply teachers, or teaching which is unsatisfactory, have not made satisfactory progress although those who have had good teaching achieve well. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are above those attained nationally.

9. Science standards are above average in years 7 to 9 and well above in Years 10 and 11. By Year 9 higher attaining students' knowledge, skills and understanding are such that they have a good grasp and understanding of science. However, lower attaining students' fundamental knowledge is below average. Year 11 work reflects well above average understanding although some aspects of chemistry are less well understood.

10. Standards of work seen in other subjects in Years 7 to 9, and in Years 10 and 11 are mostly about average, specifically in citizenship, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages and physical education. Standards are well above average in drama in Years 10 and 11, above average in music throughout and in art and design they are about average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11. Standards of work in religious education are below average throughout the main school.

11. Standards of literacy in English are above average in Years 7 to 9 and well above average in Years 10 and 11, and good procedures lead to above average standards in ICT, music and science. However, in other subjects standards are no better than satisfactory reflecting a lack of a systematic approach to the development of literacy skills to enhance learning. Students' numeracy skills are good and allow them to learn effectively in some subjects, for example in science and design and technology. However, their numerical skills are not evident elsewhere in the curriculum because there is no coherent approach to taking opportunities to develop them systematically. In ICT, students attain above average standards in understanding the use of software packages for word processing, spreadsheets and presentation by Year 9, but are insufficiently well versed in the principles of computer-aided control. GCSE or GNVQ students reach standards that are above average but a

significant number of students who do not study ICT to examination level reach only average standards.

12. There are relatively few students with special educational needs at the school. Most are taught in mainstream lessons where, as a result of good information provided to their teachers and effective deployment of learning support assistants, they are effectively helped to make good progress and achieve well. For example, in 2002 almost all students left school with a GCSE qualification.

Sixth form

Strengths

- Overall standards are above average.
- In 2001, students gained better than average examination results at advanced level in physical education, English and art and design.
- About two thirds of A level students gained the highest grades, A or B, in art and design, biology and English language in 2002.
- Most students achieve well in the sixth form, and gain grades which are above their predictions, based on GCSE results.
- Work seen in lessons is better than examination results suggest in mathematics.

Areas for improvement

- Too many students fail examinations mathematics or biology.

13. The majority of students take a range of courses leading to AS examinations at the end of Year 12, and continue with most of them into Year 13, when they take A2 examinations leading to award of an A level grade. In 2001, the latest year for which national comparisons are available, the average points score for all students taking a combination of AS/A level examinations was above the national average in comparison with all maintained schools, and in comparison with all institutions which provide education to students post-16. Advanced level results were particularly good in physical education and in general studies, where nearly half the students gained the highest grades, A or B. Other successes were in ICT and German, where all students gained the highest grades.

14. Also in 2001, many students took AS examinations from Congleton High School, having begun Year 12 as the school opened, in September 2000. The results gained by these students show a much more consistent performance, from generally larger teaching groups. Particularly good results were gained in ICT, art and design and physical education. All candidates passed their examinations in these three subjects, and the numbers gaining the highest grades A and B was well above the national figure. Other subjects gaining above average results were design and technology, business studies, and English language. Subjects in which results were significantly below the national average were mathematics and history.

15. These students went on to take A2 examinations, leading to advanced level awards, in 2002. As in 2001, teaching groups were often small, but there were some notable successes, with two-thirds of the students in biology, art and design and English language, and half of those in mathematics and history, gaining the highest grades A or B.

16. Also in 2002, the current Year 13 took AS examinations at the end of Year 12. Students in most subjects did well, though a significant number failed to gain a pass grade. For example, five of the 32 biology candidates gained grades A or B, but seven failed to gain a grade E, and only half of the students who took AS mathematics or computer studies passed the examination.

17. These examination results show many strengths, especially in view of the considerable staffing difficulties which the school experienced during the last academic year, but they also point to areas where further development is needed.

18. In the classroom, standards in many subjects are higher than is implied by these results. A feature of many lessons, for example in English, biology, and design and technology, is the ability of students to discuss their work, and their subject, with an insight which shows that they have understood the work well. They can sustain a point of view. Good classroom relationships mean that they do so with the confidence that their views will always be respected, by their colleagues and by their teachers. Students have a good appreciation of the standards needed in nearly all subjects, and teachers are at pains to maintain this understanding through constructive marking to national standards. The practice which they have in these skills builds students' confidence, and in turn leads to better learning and still higher standards.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

Strengths

- Good attitudes to school and work are reflected in interest and enjoyment of lessons.
- Students readily participate in extra curricular activities.
- There are good relationships between teachers and students, with sensitivity and respect for each other's feelings.
- Behaviour management systems are used effectively to reduce levels of unacceptable behaviour.

Areas for improvement

- Basic courtesies towards others are often neglected in public areas of the school.
- Students do not take sufficient pride in their appearance and that of the school, for example to reduce litter.
- Students are not as punctual to school and lessons as they could be, and the administration of recording of latecomers is open to abuse.

19. Students' attitudes to school and particularly to their work are good overall. They enjoy coming to school and are keen to do well, recognising the value of education for their future careers. They are interested in their lessons and in the great majority of cases enjoy them. Enjoyment in learning is particularly evident in music, drama, English and science. For instance, in a Year 10 drama lesson students worked well together, sharing ideas confidently to express emotional feelings in response to various stimuli such as fear, and in science students are very attentive and interested in learning about why things happen. Extra curricular activities are very well supported, for example, a high number of students participating made the recent theatrical production of *Grease* an outstanding success.

20. Overall, behaviour is satisfactory. Parents expressed concern in the questionnaire about student behaviour. In lessons this is unfounded. When teaching is good, students behave very well in lessons; for example, where a range of different activities are planned, where the content is interesting and stimulating and where a lively pace doesn't give students the chance to become distracted. An excellent example of this was in a citizenship lesson on human rights, where enthusiastic discussion, student presentation and peer assessment stimulated a lively and productive lesson. In only a small number of less challenging lessons, students rush their work and give a minimal response rather than explore the task in depth.

21. Behaviour around the school is less good than in lessons which reflects an ethos that is not yet fully developed. Many students show a lack of personal pride and basic courtesy for others and for the school. Examples such as doors not held open for others, not standing back to let others pass, untidy personal appearance and an unacceptable amount of litter are evident of a lack of pride in themselves and their school. These attitudes do not represent developing maturity and responsibility and are contrary to the views of many parents. Paradoxically, these attitudes contrast with students' behaviour in lessons where relationships are good. Students listen well to each other and offer spontaneous congratulations on each other's success. In music for instance students share keyboards and computers happily. Some take leadership roles to support less able students and they show sensitivity and respect for each other's feelings in class discussions.

22. Whilst some students acknowledge that some bullying happens, they are confident of the support of their teachers and other staff. The number of temporary and permanent exclusions last year was higher than the school would have liked, although similar to other schools of the same size. So far this school year there have only been two temporary exclusions, which is a significant reduction as a result of the establishment and effective use of behaviour management systems.

23. Many students work hard to raise money for charities, making good use of time to plan, organise and develop the project, for example planning a visit to local older people. The student council, which at present has a low profile, is seen as a way of listening to students ideas, and there is a commitment by staff to encourage it to be more active.

24. Attendance rates at school are satisfactory. They are close to the national average, but with much lower than average absences without an acceptable reason. A significant number of students arrive late and are not always punctual to lessons. The system for recording students who are late is not effective.

Sixth form

Strengths

- Students' attitudes in lessons are very good, and support excellent relationships both with fellow students and with teachers.
- Students come willingly to school, and appreciate the contribution that teachers make to their learning.
- Some students accept their responsibility to the school community, and make a significant contribution to the school.

Areas for improvement

- Students have a casual attitude to the school community, and give an insufficiently positive example to younger students.
- Many students take insufficient initiative in their studies outside lessons, relying instead on their teachers to define their work patterns: such students will be inadequately equipped for life in the community beyond school.
- Students' response to guidance when making choices of careers and higher education varies: some make good use of what the school provides, in conjunction with their own research, but others feel that the school does not do enough to help them.

25. Students' attitudes to the school are much better in lessons than around the school, and are satisfactory overall. On the one hand they recognise the great contribution their teachers make to their progress and success, and speak most positively about the sixth form coordinator who took up her post at the beginning of the term. On the other, they are critical of the school's wider support for them: in choosing courses, in keeping them aware of their

own progress and in terms of careers advice. Their presence in and around the school speaks of a casual approach, in which all the real work takes place in lessons, and contributing to the development of the school is a task for others.

26. For the most part students are keen to come to school, attendance is satisfactory, and they are punctual to lessons. They respond very well to good or very good teaching, investing considerable intellectual, physical or creative effort. They understand the need for homework, and mostly hand in their work on time. A significant number of students say that they have difficulty in completing assignments, and especially coursework, by the due date.

27. Students attend regularly for tutor periods and assemblies, but take the view that time so spent is largely wasted. This is an area of the curriculum which the school needs to develop further, especially to enhance students' appreciation of spiritual and cultural aspects of their lives. Currently, the school does not meet statutory requirements in that religious education is not taught in the sixth form, and there is no daily act of collective worship. Tutor periods could provide an ideal opportunity to meet this requirement and genuinely to enrich students' experience in school.

28. Students have a common room set aside for their sole use, appropriately furnished for relaxation, and playing recorded music. An adjacent room is available for private study: it is bright and airy, but has no specific facilities such as computers or books for sixth form use. The learning resources centre has good ICT facilities and although the stock of books is barely adequate for sixth form use it is being developed. Students who wish to work in school when they do not have lessons generally use the centre. They are often those who are studying a range of demanding courses with a specific goal in mind, such as entry to medical school.

29. Many students feel that after working hard in lessons they are entitled to relax, and spend time chatting amiably in their common room. Discussion with these students reveals that they regard it as their teacher's responsibility to define the amount of work they do, by setting appropriate homework. These students have an inadequate sense of the need to study outside the context of what has been defined in the lesson. Similarly, many students, especially in Year 13, feel that the school does not do enough to guide them in their choices: whether in school, in their university applications, or in choice of career. Although the level of guidance could undoubtedly be improved, and the school has made a very good start in this direction, students could themselves contribute more in this direction.

30. There are several areas in which sixth form students are encouraged to take responsibility, for example as members of the sixth form management committee, by participating in paired reading schemes, or by helping in lessons or out of school activities with younger students. However, with notable exceptions, their sense of responsibility as citizens within the community is underdeveloped, whether for their own learning, for supporting younger students or to the school community. They do not, for example, give a good example to the rest of the school in terms of dress, or in the common courtesies of life such as opening doors. This casual behaviour is in marked contrast to what is seen in lessons, where students have a very responsible attitude to their work, participating in discussions and activities in an adult and responsible way. And on the evening of a school production in the hall, the sense of corporate responsibility for success by the sixth form, and indeed by all students, was impressive.

31. Students in Year 12 speak very highly of the induction day introducing them to the sixth form. However, study skills, and a developing sense of both corporate and personal responsibility are not adequately communicated and reinforced. All levels of management from governors, through the senior and central management and sixth form coordinator need

a concerted and consistent approach to build a sixth form in line with the school's vision and of which the whole community can be proud.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

Strengths

- Teachers have a good command of their subject and understand how students learn.
- Thorough lesson planning with clear objectives are reflected in high expectations and carefully sequenced activities.
- Very good relationships, a good climate for learning and good class management makes students keen to learn.

Areas for improvement

- The consistency of approaches to homework, marking and students' knowledge of their attainment.
- Better use of information from assessing students' work for lesson planning.
- The teaching of numeracy throughout the school is poorly coordinated.
- Use of ICT in all subjects to improve students' skills is under-developed.

32. Overall the quality of teaching is good. There were no lessons seen in Year 11 because of examinations. Seven out of ten lessons were good or better in Years 7 to 9 and eight out of ten in Year 10. Three out of ten lessons were very good or excellent throughout Years 7 to 10. Relatively few unsatisfactory lessons, six, were seen, mostly in mathematics in Years 7 to 9. In turn the quality of students' learning is also good overall, being a little better in Year 10 where it is good or better in almost eight out of ten lessons than in Years 7 to 9 where it is good or better in two out of three lessons.

33. Many features contribute to the most effective teaching. Most teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects which is often coupled with a secure understanding of how students learn. In the better lessons they use their knowledge to plan thoroughly, including clear objectives that reflect high expectations and a range of activities that are carefully sequenced, to engage students' interest and maintain their involvement. For example, in drama, music and in English short, focused tasks and inspirational teaching coupled with very good relationships stimulate learning. Teachers make some activities very relevant by linking the content closely to skills, for example in ICT. Effective organisation, a lively pace, mutual respect and good class management contribute to creating a good climate for learning. In turn, these help build students' confidence and encourage them to participate. Very good interpersonal relationships between students and teachers contribute to successful learning in many subjects leading to collaborative work in pairs or groups that is of high quality and effective in helping students make clear progress. Learning is effective when teachers frequently check understanding, for example through good questioning skills that challenge students, and review progress at the end of the lesson. This helps consolidate learning.

34. Homework is not consistently set because there are wide differences between subjects. Homework is used particularly well in music, and well in English, history and ICT. However, its use in design and technology, geography and religious education is unsatisfactory because it not used sufficiently well to support learning in class.

35. Marking in accordance with the school's policy is also inconsistent. Regular marking together with supportive comments help students awareness of teachers' expectations and their own strengths and weaknesses, for example in design and technology, modern foreign languages and physical education. In some subjects, practice is mixed, but too much

marking is unsatisfactory because it leaves students without enough knowledge of their own standards and how to improve upon them.

36. Approaches to using information from assessing students' work for lesson planning varies widely between subject departments and in turn students do not always make the progress they should. In music the way activities are well matched to the students' prior attainment is a great strength. Conversely, in art and design assessment is used well to track students' attainment but does not bear upon lesson planning. Lessons for mixed ability groups in religious education are not planned to take account of the different abilities in each class.

37. As well as these areas, there are other aspects of teaching which require development. However well lessons are generally planned, there is a lack of variety, in some. The one-hour lesson is a long time for some students who have short concentration spans and are easily distracted. They easily lose the thread of their work and chatter to their friends. Some misbehave and do little work. Where, for example, they spend too long on a single task, as in inadequately planned mathematics lessons, boredom sets in, they lose concentration and learning suffers. On occasions, learning complex principles is thwarted by inappropriate activities such as in science where work to link the chemical reaction with an industrial process was not clear enough. Ineffective management of students is sometimes coupled with other unsatisfactory aspects of teaching, for example, in some citizenship lessons where a lack of pace and challenge reflects a need for appropriate staff training, and in religious education where apathy stems from activities that are boring and lacking in challenge. In turn students are not stimulated to learn and they do not make sufficient progress in developing their understanding.

38. Teaching literacy skills is satisfactory overall with some good practice, particularly to consolidate students' knowledge of technical vocabulary and help them make good use of key words. However, reading and writing development requires more systematic and sustained attention throughout the curriculum. The teaching of numeracy throughout is unsatisfactory because very few subjects have addressed how best to develop students' skills within their own area. There has not been a coherent response to training on the implications of the National Numeracy Strategy. Isolated examples of good teaching exist, but they are mostly within subjects where students have to use numerical skills. The use of ICT to support learning and develop skills further is under-developed across the curriculum because there are insufficient planned opportunities for students to practise and improve ICT skills.

39. The teaching of students with special educational needs is at least satisfactory. In mainstream classes the most effective support provided by teaching assistants stems from joint planning and close liaison between the subject teacher and the teaching assistant. Support is usually sensitive and effective, allowing students access to the same learning opportunities and experiences as others. As a result, students with special educational needs achieve as well possible in comparison with other students in their groups and in relation to their prior attainment. However, the quality of interpretation of individual education plans by subject teachers is variable across the school, leading to inconsistent learning.

Sixth form

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall with more than half of lessons very good or excellent.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge and fostering of good relationships stimulates interest and involvement.
- Practical activities balanced by high levels of reflection and thought lead to very good learning.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough use is made of short-term goals which can give teachers and students an immediate measure of progress.
- Students' progress is not always monitored to national standards.

40. The excellent practice in some curriculum areas is inadequately shared between subjects.

41. Overall the quality of teaching in the sixth form is good. More than half the lessons seen were judged to be very good or excellent, and four in every five were good or better. None of the sixth form lessons seen was judged to be unsatisfactory.

42. Teaching is particularly good in art and design, biology and physical education. Very good or excellent lessons were also seen in drama, physics, psychology, sociology, music and media studies. In these very good lessons, students are invariably interested and involved, and relationships with teachers are good. The dialogue between students and teachers helps students to get right inside the subject. They deepen their understanding and this helps them to learn the subject matter thoroughly. They are not afraid to ask questions, and teachers' good subject knowledge means that their answers are illuminating, both about the particular topic and the more general approach to the subject. Careful planning never inhibits the teachers' ability to respond to changes in direction arising from students' questions or interests.

43. Pace, drive and enthusiasm are nearly always a feature of such lessons. In discussions in sociology or media studies, for example, students do not have time to become passive in their response because they are continually challenged by new ideas and activities. From them, they have to generate ideas and communicate them with the rest of the group. Very good displays in art and design help students to absorb the styles associated with different artists and cultures. Practical activities are frequently a real strength, for example, in physical education.

44. In other subjects, it is the teachers' ability to stimulate a high level of reflection and thought in students which leads to very good learning. This may be in an historical debate to which students' own research and the teacher's subject knowledge, skilful intervention and support all make a major contribution. In this area and many others it is the involvement of students, the ownership they have of their own learning, and relationships based on mutual trust and respect which help students to make good or very good progress.

45. None the less, there are ways in which teachers could make teaching overall more effective, especially in the longer term. There is no doubt that reorganisation of the school and staff absence have been a problem in the past. Many of these problems have now been solved, but some students still have lingering doubts about the commitment of the school as a whole. They point, for example, to the high number of students who have failed to gain an AS pass grade in certain subjects.

46. The school takes these criticisms very seriously. For example, most subjects set regular tests which provide feedback to students on their progress. These tests are, for the most part, rooted in national standards. But students' targets are defined in terms of an examination grade at the end of the course. More short-term goals, defined at the start of each unit, would give students and teachers a much more immediate measure of their progress and achievement and help teachers to respond to students' short term needs more effectively than at present. The lack of long term stability in the curriculum or careful monitoring of progress throughout the course has led to problems being identified too late, and an unsatisfactory outcome at the end of the course. In contrast, very high expectations linked to continuous dialogue between teacher and students in, for example, psychology or history, mean that the teacher can resolve difficulties as soon as they appear.

47. There is much excellent practice within the school, and regular monitoring of teaching and learning could provide a route for sharing more widely the excellent practice seen in some subjects.

48. The sixth form coordinator is acutely aware of these problems, and has already taken steps to address them. However, she will need support from the central management team of the school, both collectively and individually, if she is to realise her ambition to create the best possible sixth form experience for students.

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

Strengths

- The guided choice programme when students move from Year 9 to Year 10.
- Equality of opportunity for students with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs to make choices as for other students.
- An above average proportion of students learn to play musical instruments.
- Good provision is made for careers and work related education.
- There is a very good well-patronised programme of extra-curricular activities.
- Subject links are well-developed with local primary schools

Areas for improvement

- The statutory requirements for National Curriculum geography in Years 7 to 9 and a daily act of corporate worship are not met.
- There is not sufficient time for technology in Years 8 and 9 to balance the introduction of the second foreign language.
- Whole-school planning and arrangements are inadequate for co-ordinating and evaluating students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and specific provision for spiritual development.
- Students do not have sufficient opportunities to develop awareness and appreciation of the contribution made to UK society by other cultures.

49. Overall, the quality and range of the learning opportunities offered by the school is satisfactory. Although the curriculum has some strengths there are also some weaknesses. The statutory requirements of the National Curriculum are not being met in geography in Years 7 to 9, and the requirement for a daily act of corporate worship is not being met. The curriculum has a good level of breadth and balance and is relevant to the students' needs. Students also take drama in Years 7 to 9. All students follow a programme of personal, social and health education but in Years 8 and 9 this is restricted to one lesson per fortnight, which is insufficient. The strategy for teaching literacy in the curriculum is satisfactory but co-ordinated arrangements for numeracy throughout the curriculum are not in place. The time allocated to technology in Years 8 and 9 is below average as a result of the introduction of the

second foreign language after Year 7. However, the school is constrained to some extent by the lack of specialist accommodation which prevents any increase in the time allocated to technology. The curriculum for art and design in Years 10 and 11 is very good; GCSE students choose from four endorsed courses, such as fine arts or sculpture. About ten per cent of students, which is above average, take advantage of opportunities to learn musical instruments.

50. The provision for careers and work related education is good. A well-considered and comprehensive programme exists in Years 9 to 11 and is partly provided through the tutorial guidance periods. The careers and work experience coordinator provides good leadership and ensures, through careful monitoring, that all students have knowledge and understanding of relevant careers opportunities and are well prepared for entering the world of work. The guided choice programme in Year 9, involving students and their parents in deciding the options for Year 10, is especially good. The careers coordinator works very closely in partnership with the local Education Business Plus careers advisers who provide a comprehensive service of very professional guidance and advice through individual or group interviews. All students undertake a very well organised and valuable work experience in the local community in Year 11. The change in provision from two weeks work experience to one week during the present session reduces its value. Students with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs follow the same curriculum and have the same opportunities for choosing optional subjects as other students. On those few occasions where withdrawal is necessary for intensive work, support is usually well matched to the needs of students with special educational needs. This means that they benefit from intensive work in literacy designed to keep them in touch with the main school curriculum. The Literacy Progress Units in use, however, may not be entirely suited to the needs of all students.

51. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good with a wide range of opportunities and contributions from all subject areas. Provision is particularly good in music, drama and physical education. The Learning Resource Centre is effective in supporting learning by providing a homework club, various competitions and book fayres, and organising theatre trips. In addition a students' stationery shop is provided. Opportunities in drama include annual performances, residential courses and organised visits to London. In 2002 forty students visited Verona in Italy. Information from students' interviews indicates that extra curricular activities are popular and students appreciate the efforts of their teachers. The few links with other post-16 institutions are satisfactory. Very good relationships exist with a number of local primary schools. Subject links have been developed in mathematics, English, art and design, drama and physical education. An induction day for Year 6 students from the primary schools is an annual event.

52. Commercial links have been established with the support of the Rotary Club, which provides funding for competitions and special projects. The school is in the process of applying for engineering college status and has established important connections with local industries and further education institutions including Creative, AstraZeneca, Siemens, Macclesfield College, The Technical University in Harburg/Hamburg, The Cisco Academy at Staffordshire University and The Microsoft Academy.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

53. The school's contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is unsatisfactory overall. It has the potential for significant improvement, for example in relation to the way students' conduct themselves in the common areas of the school. In most areas of the curriculum there are occasions when students engage in activities which make a valuable contribution. However these are usually unplanned and not evaluated and therefore their effectiveness is not fully realised.

54. The provision for students' spiritual development is unsatisfactory. During the inspection it was not possible to observe any acts of collective worship because of internal school examinations. However under normal circumstances students attend only one assembly each week. The recently introduced *Thought for the Week* which provides a focus for form-based reflection is not yet sufficiently widely or consistently used. Religious education provides little opportunity for students to reflect or to develop their appreciation of the non-material element of human beings or to develop a sense of identity, self-worth, meaning and purpose. In contrast there are opportunities for students to reflect in other subjects, for example their sense of awe and wonder are developed in some science, geography and music lessons.

55. The school's provision for moral development is satisfactory. There is a well-publicised code of conduct backed up by a home/school agreement and staff are consistent in their expectations of good behaviour. Good work and positive behaviour are rewarded through the STAR system and poor behaviour dealt with effectively. The regular form time with tutors at the start of the day is not always used effectively to promote high standards. An example where a subject effectively develops both skills and moral awareness was observed in modern foreign languages. Students practised their use of the positive and negative forms by comparing what they have for breakfast with the situation in Ethiopia. That there remains room for improvement is demonstrated in the manner in which students conduct themselves in the corridors. They are not badly behaved but show little genuine consideration and courtesy to each other.

56. The provision for social development is satisfactory. Most subjects offer opportunities for students to work collaboratively in research and decision making but there are few opportunities for students to develop social skills through residential and other visits away from school. Newly developed outside quadrangles offer pleasant social spaces which students can use in good weather. Recently Year 10 students have followed a course in responsible parenting. School and year councils are not prominent nor are they seen to be effective by students. There is a small group of younger students undergoing training as student librarians. However, the recent introduction of citizenship into the curriculum is beginning to improve this situation by developing students' understanding of their role in the community.

57. The school makes good provision for students' cultural development although more needs to be done to raise their awareness and appreciation of the contribution made to UK society by other cultures. Students experience literature, poetry and music from their own and other cultures and in geography, history and religious education learn about other cultures and faiths. There is an annual Languages Day and the school library involves local authors and poets in World Book Day. There is a multicultural performance planned in drama next term. The school participates in an exchange arrangement with a school in Germany. Modern foreign languages students are specifically introduced to French, German and Spanish language and ways of life. An area still to be developed is that of providing students with more first hand cultural experiences through visits to art galleries, museums and places of geographical and historic importance.

Sixth form

Strengths

- A good range of AS and A level courses is offered, together with a well-chosen range of advanced and intermediate vocational courses.
- The school canvasses students' views about the curriculum and does its best to meet their requests.
- There are good opportunities for enrichment, both in subject areas and more generally.

Areas for improvement

- The school does not always make sure that students and their parents are kept informed when courses may need to be withdrawn because of low take-up.
- The school does not do enough to foster the development of key skills in all subjects.
- The use of form time is unsatisfactory because there is no daily opportunity for reflection: nor is enough done to foster spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The statutory obligation to teach religious education is not met.

58. Overall the quality and range of opportunities in the sixth form offered by the school are good. Most students, about three-quarters in 2002, progressed into higher education. The overall curriculum plan is designed to support students with a good range of AS and A level courses which cover all the main curriculum areas. Some students need a range of courses with a vocational emphasis and the school seeks to fulfil their needs, though the range of such courses is more limited. To accommodate their wishes, AVCE courses are offered. The school is also aware of courses available elsewhere in the locality and actively seeks to place students on courses which fully meet their needs, whether at Congleton High School or elsewhere.

59. In addition, the school is still actively canvassing the views of students about the courses on offer, and on other matters relating to their education, so that strategic planning for the sixth form can be as well-informed as possible. This willingness to take the wishes of students into account is a strength. However, both students and parents need to be kept informed when the range of courses on offer is being finalised. In designing the timetable, the school has fully supported the ideals of *Curriculum 2000*. Most students in Year 12 take courses which lead to a range of AS qualifications which cross the traditional divisions in the curriculum, providing a broad and balanced course. The timetable is flexible enough to support these students well.

60. Students also have the opportunity to develop their key skills in courses in communication or information technology. In addition, individual curriculum areas incorporate the teaching of key skills into lessons, for example by the integration of the use of ICT into the subject, or by the specific development of communication skills. Most students word-process at least some of their work. In some lessons, for example in history, they work in pairs or groups to prepare talks or presentations. Some of these involve using presentation software such as *PowerPoint*. Although many of these opportunities are good, the school does not coordinate the development of key skills across subjects sufficiently strongly: this is an area for development.

61. In addition to their examination subjects, students attend tutor periods each morning and afternoon, and regular sixth form assemblies. Form periods provide an informal opportunity for tutors to meet with students and report back to them on both academic and administrative matters. A 'thought for the day' is offered to students in the morning tutor period, but there is little or no opportunity for reflection. Students see this time as having no clear purpose beyond giving the school accurate information about who is on the premises, and for the most part spend it talking amongst themselves. The school needs to consider how form time could be used more productively, especially in giving students a significant opportunity to reflect upon matters of relevance in their lives, to grow as human beings, and to become prepared for life in the world at large. The statutory requirements for provision in religious education are not met. The sixth form coordinator is aware of the limitations of both tutor periods and assemblies and is working with her colleagues to draw up a development plan appropriate to her students' needs. It is intended that in future, the overall plan will include the teaching of religious education in the sixth form.

62. A good range of extra-curricular activities is on offer, mainly in sport and the performing arts. There is also a good range of activities, such as visits to theatres or art galleries, which are linked to specific courses. The sixth form induction day in 2002 was both a success and enjoyable, and there are plans to extend it to a weekend in 2003. Activities are well supported, though not all students participate in them. Surprisingly, there is little enthusiasm amongst the sixth form for introducing additional extra curricular activities.

63. The provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is unsatisfactory overall but there are areas of considerable strength. There is no provision for religious education and little opportunity to participate in acts of collective worship or reflection. There are opportunities for students to consider the moral issues connected with their AS and A2 level courses especially in science subjects, geography, physical education and elements of modern foreign languages. Students do not exercise any posts of major responsibility in the school although some help younger students to develop their reading and others help in classes. Although there is a sixth form council known as the management group it appears to lack effectiveness and has difficulty in involving students in its deliberations. However students play a leading role in the staging and presentation of major school drama and music productions. Some gain their community sports leadership awards and help in local schools. There are more opportunities for sixth form students to widen their cultural horizons through visits to art galleries, concerts and theatres including a back-stage visit to London theatres and a performance tour to Italy. Drama students present regular studio productions which are open to the public and those studying physical education gain an appreciation of the links between various cultures and their attitudes to sport.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Strengths

- Secure child protection procedures provide a sound basis for ensuring a high level of alertness.
- Comprehensive guidance and personal, health, social and citizenship programmes make a good contribution to the students' personal development.
- Systems and procedures for promoting good behaviour and eliminating oppressive behaviour are beginning to be very effective.
- Assessment procedures are good with information recorded and analysed thoroughly.
- Procedures for informing form tutors weekly about absence, behaviour and work are very effective so that difficulties and rewards can be discussed with students.

Areas for improvement

- School-wide consistency of:
 - relating students' academic achievement and personal development to support planning;
 - individual target setting within each subject and the involvement of students in their own target setting;
 - the use of assessment information to inform curriculum planning.
- The effectiveness of procedures for checking students who are late.

64. Provision for students' welfare is good. A clear child-protection policy, based on protection, prevention and support, along with in-service training and written guidance for all teachers provides a sound basis for ensuring a high level of alertness and knowledge to support the welfare of students. Health and safety monitoring and records are now efficiently kept up-to-date. Fire practice procedures are effective and efficient.

65. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance and punctuality are satisfactory with very effective strategies in place to identify any student whose attendance level is a cause for concern. The school identifies patterns of absence, but three days is too long

before contacting parents to find out why their child is not in school. Procedures for checking lateness are not monitored for effectiveness. In turn, the process is abused because many students fail to comply.

66. The transfer and induction programme for Year 7 students helps them settle well into their new school. The comprehensive guidance and personal, health, social and citizenship programme contributes to students' personal development, but its implementation has yet to be evaluated. Students have a wide variety of opportunities to contribute to school life, for example through the school council, paired reading, sport, drama, and music, and as librarians.

67. Procedures for promoting good behaviour and eliminating oppressive behaviour are beginning to be very effective. Disaffection is identified early and the number of students facing exclusion has been reduced. The Staged Allocation of Rewards and Sanctions (STARS) system enables a useful joint approach between parents, tutors and subject teachers to support students in addressing issues that have a direct impact on learning. A positive spin-off from this is the support and encouragement from other students given to their classmates. The STARS system is also effectively used to monitor achievement and is highly valued, particularly by younger students. However, the approach is relatively new and is not yet consistently applied throughout the school to support academic and personal development.

68. Assessment procedures are good. Information from statutory tests and a wide range of other sources are recorded and analysed thoroughly. A well managed computerised system contains very well organised and detailed records of students' attainments which are recorded as National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades included in reports to parents. However, target setting procedures and students' knowledge of their subject targets, based on subject coordinators' use of the information, are variable. Overall the use of sharply focused target setting within some subjects is underdeveloped because many students do not clearly know what their targets are. The school does not check that all students are informed of their targets and have an opportunity to discuss them with teachers although plans for doing this are now in place.

69. Good use is made of assessment information to support setting arrangements, for example in English. However, its use in curriculum planning is inconsistent. In some subjects, where mixed ability classes are taught, the approach varies, from good as in music and ICT, to poor as in religious education.

70. Monitoring students' academic and personal development is satisfactory. Form tutors and guidance coordinators work closely to develop individual records of achievement and personal development. At present this is not developed consistently across the school so links between academic achievement and personal development are not sufficiently in place to support planning. However, the tutorial system fosters some students' development well. For example, in Year 11, students who are doing less well than expected are identified by the monitoring process and are offered extra help. In turn, they feel well supported by their teachers.

Sixth form

Assessment

Strengths

- Procedures for monitoring and assessing students' progress at the end of each unit are good.
- Most teachers have a good knowledge of national standards at AS and A level.
- Marking and advice to students in biology, English, physical education and history are of high quality.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of advice to students in mathematics.
- The use of targets and monitoring of progress across all subjects are not coordinated so that students get the most benefit from them.

71. Procedures for monitoring and assessing students' progress are good. They are closely linked to the requirements of examinations, for example, in the AVCE course in ICT there is a well-organised portfolio of evidence, in physical education excellent use is made of examination criteria and students are provided with very good support. Assessment is good in biology and marking in English, physical education and history provides good advice to students. However, this good practice does not extend to all subjects. In mathematics work is not assessed frequently enough to examination standards and students are not given enough advice about how to improve.

72. A system developed at the University of Durham is used to define targets in the form of examination grades. Form tutors distribute this information to students and arrange individual reviews of progress with them. The school keeps very full records of students' earlier test and examination results, copies are provided for form tutors and are used to provide counselling for students about entry to the sixth form and their choice of courses. At present a record of marks awarded in subjects is not kept.

73. Progress reports are provided for parents after mock examinations and parents are informed if progress is either good or a cause for concern. Attendance and punctuality are monitored carefully and form tutors provide advice when necessary. The schools' systems provide good advice and support for students but they are not yet used consistently in all subjects.

Advice, support and guidance

Strengths

- The school has put into place new and appropriate procedures for guiding students in their subject choices. These are popular with students.
- The school gives good support to students at the beginning of the sixth form, and during their time in Years 12 and 13.
- Staff have a good knowledge of local colleges, which helps them to give impartial advice to students.
- Good use is made of assessment and tracking data in the sixth form.

Areas for improvement

- The specific subject advice given to students on entry to the sixth form is sometimes limited.
- Advice to students, both on subject choices and on study skills, needs to be more effectively coordinated.

- The school does not make sufficient use of tutor periods and assemblies to provide a time for reflection, develop a sense of community or support personal development.

74. About three-quarters of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form. This proportion is above average. The entry requirements are typical, at five grades A* – C in GCSE for those who wish to study the normal four subjects to AS level, with the intention of continuing with three to advanced level. In addition, students are normally expected to have gained at least GCSE grade C in the subjects they wish to study, unless there are special circumstances. Those who leave the school at the end of Year 11 often go to local colleges where a much wider range of vocational courses is available. Advice in school is freely given, based on good local knowledge, and always in the best interests of the student.

75. Students themselves, and particularly those in Year 13, are critical of the advice provided by the school, saying that they have to rely on teachers whom they see as ‘friends’. However, the current Year 12 freely acknowledge the much better coordination of the transition to the sixth form at every stage including the advice offered to students. Within curriculum areas, advice given to students is generally good, though in some areas staffing difficulties have caused problems of continuity. A good series of leaflets describe clearly what students should expect in each curriculum area. Many of the criticisms of the school appear to have arisen from poor coordination across departments, a problem which the school is keen to address. Currently, except in individual instances, the use of the tutor period is under-developed. The school should consider how this time could be used more effectively to develop students’ skills and relationships. The use of the *thought for the day* fails to provide an appropriate opportunity for reflection.

76. A significant number of students fail to perform as well in the sixth form as expected from their GCSE results. The school, and the sixth form staff in particular, need to consider how such students can best be supported, either in making appropriate choices on entry to the sixth form, or during the courses they have chosen.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

Strengths

- The information in the prospectus and newsletters is of very good quality and well-presented.
- Improvements made to the annual reports on students’ progress make them easy to read and understand with clear explanations of grades.
- A very successful parent teacher association makes a significant contribution to the work of the school.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of communication and working partnerships with parents is inconsistent.
- Many parents who work find the arrangements for timing and reporting at annual parents’ meetings inconvenient.
- The commitment between parents and school to monitor homework, using the dialogue available in students’ planners, is variable.

77. Parents’ views of the school are unsatisfactory in several important areas. The response from parents, both from the pre-inspection meeting and the parents’ questionnaire, show that significant numbers are critical about various aspects of the school. The main expressions of concern are around behaviour, homework, adequate information on their child’s progress, the response of the school to problems, the lack of close working with parents and concern about how the school is being managed. Parents are particularly satisfied with the progress their children make at school and the way they are supported to

become mature and responsible adults. They also feel the school has high expectations of their children and feel their children like coming to school.

78. Although there is much good information for parents, during the very disruptive amalgamation period, parents' fears were not addressed well, indicating the lack of good communication and close working partnership with parents. Parents were particularly and rightly worried about the sickness rate of teachers, and the consequent impact on the quality and consistency of learning for their children of the high number of supply teachers needed. The school employed the best teachers available but this did not alleviate parents' concerns. Although many parents are now happy with the education the school provides, the expressions of concern, by what inspectors feel is a significant minority of parents, represent an important number of people who do not feel the school has an effective communication system. The school is to review the way it keeps in touch with parents and canvas the views of parents on which elements of practice need to improve. The presentation and quality of other information such as the prospectus and the newsletter are very good. They provide much helpful information to keep parents in touch with every day events at school. Parents clearly enjoy reading the termly newsletter.

79. The annual report for parents on their child's progress has been improved over the last year. It is easy to read and understand with clear explanations of grades in the covering letter. Space for parents' comment provides an appropriate opportunity for dialogue between school and home. An interim progress report on Year 11 students following their mock GCSE exams gives valuable help in focusing students' effort and parental support before final examinations. In the light of parent comments in the questionnaire and pre inspection meeting the school is reviewing the arrangement of annual parents' meetings for reporting progress to address the concerns of many that a 4.30 pm start with a relatively early finish is particularly difficult.

80. Parents are encouraged to support their children by monitoring their homework. Inspectors agree with parents in their belief that homework is inconsistent in quality and quantity. However, parents do have the opportunity to sign and comment about homework noted in the students' planners provided by the school, and can contribute to improvement in a partnership approach between parents and school.

81. There are good examples of how parents make a significant contribution to improving achievement and progress of individual students. For instance, they are encouraged to be involved in the Individual Education Planning procedures for students with special educational needs, and they are also importantly involved in ensuring the success of behaviour monitoring through the STAR system. The school keeps parents informed about their children to share success in the award system by letter or phone.

82. A very successful parent teacher association makes a significant contribution to the work of the school both financially and by acting as ambassadors for the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Strengths

- The governors are committed to improve the school and have a good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses.
- The senior management has a clear vision for the school's future with very appropriate priorities for development.
- There are rigorous procedures for financial management and monitoring.

Areas for improvement

- The senior management team has yet to obtain a collective responsibility with all teachers for achieving their aspirations.
- Arrangements are not yet fully in place for effectively monitoring the curriculum and teaching, and evaluating performance to foster improvement.
- The relatively high number of management posts held temporarily, and inadequate induction and on-going support for teachers new in the school, limits effective development work.

83. Leadership and management are satisfactory with some clear strengths. The head and deputy head teachers together form a coherent senior team with a clear vision for the future direction of the school. They have been resolute in establishing the new school in face of local opposition to re-organisation, and show a very strong commitment to improvement. They are determined in their aspiration to lead a school in which the middle management operates with a high degree of autonomy and professional integrity. However, at this early time in the school's development the senior team has not yet established an effective corporate and consistent approach to realising their intentions.

84. The pool of expertise in the middle management is inadequate because half of subject coordinator posts are held temporarily. This is a high proportion. Although some are necessary to cover the long term absence of staff, and some remain vacant because suitably qualified and experienced teachers were unavailable; other vacancies have been held for up to a year with no clear reason or recruitment in hand. Middle managers are very conscientious and work hard to carry out their role, but the extent of managerial skills and expertise at this vital level in the school is not as high as it should be. The outcome is one of inconsistency in putting policy into practice and of uncertainty leading to reduced commitment to whole-school improvement. The need now is for the governing body and senior management to ensure that this situation is resolved with urgency.

85. The school has established a comprehensive development plan that embraces well-derived priorities for attention. Subject departmental development plans are linked appropriately to the school's priorities. All plans are carefully costed with funds allocated fairly and spending closely monitored. The financial arrangements for implementing the development plan are effective and efficient. The planning framework would benefit from clearly identifying at the outset expected outcomes and success criteria to inform monitoring, review and evaluation of progress.

86. The school analyses test and examination results thoroughly in conjunction with the University of Durham. The process provides useful information which has been included in the first review of progress in each subject area. However, procedures for the evaluation of performance are still unsatisfactory because the school has yet to establish a systematic approach to check the quality of teaching and learning, and the implementation of school policies for the curriculum and assessment, throughout the year. In turn, there are inconsistent approaches in subject areas, for example to planning and teaching, to marking, to the use of assessment and to the use of homework. Without a programme of lesson observations and scrutiny of students' work, the senior management team and subject coordinators are missing opportunities to pick up disparities at an early stage and to refocus attention upon improvement.

87. The governors are keen to promote the development and interests of the school. Experienced governors are actively involved in the work of the governing body and take an effective role in strategic management and decision-making in both meetings of the full body and through the work of sub-committees. The governors have shown a high level of commitment which has been important in helping create a foundation on which to raise the

school after reorganisation was completed just over a year ago. Overall, governors fulfil their responsibilities satisfactorily but they do not yet meet some statutory obligations for the curriculum. In particular, the school is not making appropriate arrangements for students in Years 7 to 9 to learn from fieldwork in geography, for religious education in the sixth form and for a daily collective worship for all students.

88. Governors receive regular reports from the head teacher and senior staff on aspects of their work. In turn they are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, for example about attainment in different subject areas. They have a very good understanding of how a thorough analysis of attainment, attendance and financial information is related to aspects of the school development plan. However, governors have only a limited first hand knowledge of the evidence for improvement. In particular there is a need for governors to see more of the work of the school for themselves, and to link this through a structured approach in their meetings that will enhance judgements of the evidence for progress. In this way the governing body should usefully extend its knowledge of the quality and standards of work and increase confidence in its opinions.

89. Leadership and management of provision for students with special educational needs are satisfactory. The special educational needs coordinator is a relatively recent though temporary appointment and has made a good start in getting to grips with the requirements of the role. Students' needs are properly assessed. Documentation on students is up-to-date and annual reviews are being carried out according to statutory requirements, with parents being involved as far as possible. Other agencies such as educational psychologists are involved as appropriate. A link group has been established with representatives from each of the curriculum areas. This group provides a forum for the exchange of information and the sharing of good practice. The development plan for special educational needs identifies appropriate priorities, but lacks success criteria; and timescales could be better defined.

90. There is a satisfactory match of teachers' knowledge and expertise to suit the demands of the curriculum. It is particularly good in art and design, drama and music and good in science, ICT and modern foreign languages. Support assistants are well deployed across a variety of subject areas to help students with special educational needs. Suitable induction programmes to support newly qualified teachers and those new to the school are needed to help achieve consistency in the schools' policies and procedures. New strategies are in place for continuing the professional development of staff. They are suitably linked to the development plan or the performance management of teachers. However, performance management arrangements are not secured because they have been affected by recent changes of team leaders.

91. The quality of accommodation is mostly good, with recently refurbished rooms available to teach specialist areas of the curriculum. However, facilities for design and technology are unsuitable for systems and control. The learning resources, library and careers library area is a very good facility with its combination of personal computers for individual work and spaces for reading which are very well used. Resources are at least satisfactory in all areas of the curriculum except for inadequacies in geography, history and design and technology. The learning resource centre has too few books for the size of the school although there is clear commitment in the development plan to increase and improve provision.

92. The strategic use of resources is good. The budget the school receives is in line with national averages for 11-18 comprehensive schools because a significant proportion of income is received and compulsorily allocated to salary protection following reorganisation. Accordingly, the real income per student which the school had at its disposal last year was £2570. Funds available are closely targeted to school development and to support staff

training. Careful monitoring has enabled the school to keep a close eye on spending so that now income slightly exceeds expenditure, with a small contingency fund, compared to the situation in the last financial year when the budget was overspent. Best value principles are applied well. Good value is obtained in the purchase of supplies and services. The school compares itself with similar schools and is determined to improve in comparison with them. Recent consultations with sixth form students have identified areas for action that deserve to be addressed.

93. In relation to students' attainment when they join the school, and the satisfactory to good progress that they make in achieving well above national average attainment in GCSE examinations, the average level of funding received and the prudent management of financial resources to keep within the means available, the school is giving good value for money.

Sixth form

Strengths

- The sixth form is well led and managed.
- Principles of best value are applied well, and the sixth form is cost effective and offers satisfactory value for money

Areas for improvement

- The governing body fulfils its responsibilities, except that the statutory requirements for religious education in the sixth form are not met, and there is no daily act of collective worship.
- Monitoring of the work of the sixth form is as yet under-developed.

94. The coordinator for the sixth form had been in post for only a few months at the time of the inspection and it is evident that she and her assistant had made considerable progress in developing the work of the school in this area. There is now a clear educational direction to the work of the sixth form, which has been incorporated into a very good development plan in consultation with the senior management team. Raising the self-esteem of students in the sixth form, and improving their study skills so that they make better progress are at the centre of this development.

95. The sixth form coordinator has a good understanding of the wishes of sixth form students whilst drawing clear lines, for example in the matter of appropriate dress. She is sensitive to current curriculum trends, and has supported the provision of popular courses such as psychology and sociology. Extension of the vocational areas of the curriculum is actively being investigated. She acknowledges that local colleges may provide a more appropriate environment for some students and her advice always has their best interests at heart. The governors are fully supportive of the work of the sixth form, though they are in breach of the requirement to provide religious education in the sixth form.

96. Students in Year 12 are especially grateful for the support that she gave them on entry to the sixth form and for the study skills day set up to help them through the transition from Year 11. A new day-to-day system has been set up for tracking students' progress through their chosen courses, and the sixth form coordinator is at the centre of procedures for reporting to students and to their parents.

97. Teachers in the sixth form are all experts in their subjects. However, following the reorganisation of the school and a number of unrelated instances of long term illness, management within curriculum areas has been patchy. Several curriculum leaders are on temporary contracts. This includes those in the key areas of mathematics and science and the school rightly regards recruitment of suitable curriculum leaders as a matter of priority.

98. Following reorganisation, when the local education authority permitted the school to overspend, the budget for the sixth form is now closely in line with that of the rest of the school. The sixth form does not, therefore, receive any subsidy from the rest of the school, nor are funds allocated for the sixth form used elsewhere. However, the circumstances of the school as a whole mean that it has very limited access to special grants and further developments will have to be tested carefully for cost effectiveness.

99. Principles of best value are being applied well. However, the high level of staff absence during the preceding financial year meant that funds had to be diverted to providing supply cover which was not always effective and a number of other costs, for example reprographics, were higher than they should have been. Students come into the sixth form with a wide range of prior attainment, and some find sixth form work difficult. Support for such students is often good, but is not always good enough to prevent students from failing their examinations. Thus, many students do very well, but the poor performance of others brings down overall levels of achievement across subjects. Despite strenuous efforts by the school, teacher absence and building work undoubtedly affected students' education during the last academic year and the sixth form as a whole gives satisfactory, rather than good, value for money.

Resources

100. The sixth form area is separate from the rest of the school and provides opportunity both for relaxation and private study. The sixth form coordinator has her office adjacent to the common room so that she can remain sensitive to the needs of students. The provision of computer technology in the private study area is planned, and students also have access to facilities in the learning resource centre and in computers where these are not needed for class teaching.

101. In subject areas, resources are generally adequate though not generous and in some areas the lack of a permanent curriculum manager has meant, for example, that purchase of books for students has not always been well coordinated. This aspect, however, also has a bearing on students' attitudes to school. There is only a poorly developed culture of reading around the subject outside lessons. For much of the time, despite sixth form students having about 20 per cent of their time 'free', the private study area is unused, whilst students sit in the common room chatting and listening to music.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

102. The school should consider ways of improving:

- (1) Provision in mathematics, geography and religious education, by improving:
 - staffing difficulties in mathematics and religious education;
 - the quality of teaching;
 - the support available for curriculum leaders.(Paragraphs: 5, 8, 84, 118, 123, 126, 153, 157, 158, 189-193, 195)
- (2) The development of numeracy in the curriculum, by:
 - establishing policy and practice to implement the National Numeracy Strategy, as appropriate within all subjects;
 - building upon training and coordinate provision so that students' numerical skills are developed throughout.(Paragraphs: 11, 38, 128)
- (3) The provision and management of students' spiritual development, by:
 - meeting requirements for collective worship;
 - establishing and coordinating planned activities which realise students' personal development;
 - evaluating the effectiveness of the provision.(Paragraphs: 49, 53, 54, 70, 87)
- (4) Working relationships with parents by ensuring full communication and close partnership with parents so that they are frequently and well informed about improvements and developments that relate to their concerns.
(Paragraphs: 77-79)
- (5) The corporate responsibility between the senior management team with all teachers for achieving the school's aspirations, by:
 - making expectations and outcomes clear;
 - providing support for developing expertise and skills of implementation;
 - working together in gauging success for review and evaluation of progress.(Paragraphs: 83, 84, 86)
- (6) Procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning, and whole school effectiveness, which are not sufficiently established,
 - for governors, by:
 - seeing more of the work of the school for themselves,
 - developing a more systematic approach in meetings for considering evidence for progress;
 - for senior and middle management, by:
 - establishing a systematic approach to checking the quality of teaching and learning and the implementation of curriculum and assessment policies throughout the year,
 - identifying inconsistencies and refocusing attention upon improvement.(Paragraphs: 68, 85, 86, 88, 90, 145, 152, 162, 176, 225, 232)

Sixth form

- (1) The school should work to improve students' interest, concentration, productivity and pace of working by developing study skills further, both in general and in the context of individual subjects; and by building on the very good practice which makes such an important contribution to learning in many curriculum areas. In some areas, the use of enrichment activities may make a significant contribution to students' motivation.
(Paragraphs: 1, 31, 46, 60, 62, 71, 94)
- (2) The school should promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural values in the sixth form more effectively. It should provide more and better opportunities for reflection in the sixth form to promote a sense of what is important, and how sensitivity to the feelings and values of others can enrich all our lives. At the same time, the school should work to raise the profile of the sixth form, giving students good opportunities to take on significant responsibility within the school, to take a pride in what they are doing, and to gain the respect of the rest of the school.
(Paragraphs: 25, 30, 61, 63, 75)
- (3) The school should undertake to produce a system for monitoring and developing the work of staff in the sixth form more consistently across curriculum areas. Efforts should be made to improve the opportunities for all staff to share good practice, so that the achievements of the best teachers are made more widely available, and to ensure the best possible use is made of professional development opportunities.
(Paragraphs: 86, 97)
- (4) The school should ensure that the provision of religious education to all sixth form students meets statutory requirements and that opportunities for reflection are built in to the school day.
(Paragraphs: 61, 87, 95)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	115
	Sixth form	39
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	6	25	52	25	6	1	0
Percentage	5	22	45	22	5	1	0
Sixth form							
Number	6	15	10	8	0	0	0
Percentage	15	38	26	21	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	939	144
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	50	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	2	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	45	0

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	7

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	22

Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving
--

25

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.7
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
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	95	86	181

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	64	68	71
	Girls	77	69	68
	Total	141	137	139
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (83)	76 (77)	77 (79)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (40)	49 (51)	40 (40)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	63	73	71
	Girls	75	77	71
	Total	138	150	142
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (83)	83 (81)	79 (78)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	29 (46)	48 (48)	42 (44)
	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
	202	80	90	170

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	50	77	79
	Girls	57	89	90
	Total	107	166	169
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	63 (55)	98 (96)	99 (100)
	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 student	School	44.8
	National	39.8

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	32	43	75
	Average point score per candidate	17.8	17.3	17.5
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	32	41	73	0	2	2
	Average point score per candidate	17.8	18	17.9	N/A	3	3
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	N/A	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of students**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1047	57	3
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	23	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 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	61.84
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.8

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	396

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.5
Key Stage 4	24

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	3 292 183
Total expenditure	3 213 002
Expenditure per student	3 031
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	79 181

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	19.9
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	80.8

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	4.6
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1083
Number of questionnaires returned	225

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	27	55	12	4	2
My child is making good progress in school.	29	56	8	2	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	40	19	10	12
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	12	48	28	9	3
The teaching is good.	14	56	17	2	12
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	10	36	35	17	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	28	44	17	7	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	31	52	9	1	6
The school works closely with parents.	8	34	33	20	5
The school is well led and managed.	9	36	22	18	14
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	13	63	15	4	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	20	52	11	4	13

Other issues raised by parents

A significantly large minority of parents are unhappy with the way the new school has established itself and are critical of its management. They feel they have not been kept sufficiently informed during its development. Many concerns cluster into dissatisfaction with:

- extensive staff absence and high levels of supply teaching to cover absence.
- communication to individuals;
- homework that is inconsistently set or marked;
- opportunities to discuss their child's progress at parents' meetings;
- students' lack of respect for premises, especially the amount of litter;
- uniform policy, particularly the style and untidy way students wear it;
- availability of soap and paper in toilets;
- subject choices offered in Year 10 or the sixth form that are not realised.

**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 for English is **good**.

Strengths

- Well above average results in the GCSE 2002 examinations, representing good achievement.
- Good teaching from the specialist staff.
- The students behave well and have positive attitudes towards English.
- Good monitoring of achievement.
- The department is very well led and the teachers share a commitment to improving standards.

Areas for improvement

- In Years 7-9 a sharper focus on securing technical accuracy in writing and some features of assessment to support learning.

103. When the students enter the school their standards in English are above average. Good teaching and learning help them achieve well and gain well above average standards by the end of Year 11, although higher expectations could be made of the students' literacy skills in other subjects. The provision for English is good, characterised by strong leadership and a shared team commitment to succeed. However, the lack of a full complement of specialist English teachers hinders the rate of progress of some students.

104. Results in the 2002 end of Year 9 national tests were above average, although below average for students from similar backgrounds. However, overall achievement was satisfactory in relation to the students' standards at the end of their final year in primary school. Commendably, boys are attaining at about the same level as girls. Even so, the students did not reach the school target for attaining Level 6 or higher: a lack of continuity in teaching undermined the progress of some potentially above average students.

105. Results in the 2002 English GCSE examination were well above average. The boys' results were significantly better than those of boys nationally. Results were broadly average when compared to students from similar backgrounds but the proportion gaining grades A*-C was significantly higher than would have been expected given these students' end of Year 9 results. Achievement was therefore good. It was also very good in literature where the proportion at grade C or better was significantly above average, despite a significantly higher rate of entry in comparison with most schools. Boys' standards were again significantly better than boys nationally. These impressive results illustrate the subject's strong leadership and team work. They were a direct consequence of teachers using assessment well to identify students needing additional help and then providing that help effectively.

106. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards in Year 9 are above average, representing satisfactory achievement. Overall standards of speaking and listening are securely above average. About eight out of ten students write and read at average levels or better. They write very accurately, use effective and engaging vocabulary and show they clearly understand the conventions of different texts that they have studied. However, a small minority make errors in the consistent use of capital letters, in spelling and in punctuation,

which undermines their standards. These insecurities reveal the gaps in specialist teaching experienced by these students. A further small group is below average because they make too many errors with paragraph structure and punctuation.

107. In Year 11 standards are well above average: approximately seven out of ten students are on course to achieve the higher grades. Achievement is good. The very best write technically flawless English. Their response to literature is detailed and analytical, for example evaluating graphically the impact of personification and contrast in Hughes' poetry. Middle attaining students have a secure knowledge and understanding of the different texts they study, for example they show clearly how Shakespeare creates tension in *Romeo and Juliet*. Some students in the middle attaining band require more consistent accuracy to reach average or above average standards. A few students are consistently below average because they make frequent errors, for example with the tenses of verbs.

108. Students with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily during Years 7 to 9 and well in 10 and 11. The department enters more students for both GCSE examinations than most schools do and the pass rate at A*-G is above average. The small number of students from minority ethnic groups also progresses at the same rate as others. The deliberate focus on improving boys' standards in Years 10 and 11 helps boys to achieve well.

109. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good and occasionally very good or excellent. Specialist teachers bring real strengths to the department. Because these teachers know their subject well, Year 10 and 11 students are well prepared for the examinations and also develop important skills of analytical and explanatory essay writing about a wide range of texts. High expectations, good planning, inspirational and enthusing teaching, very good relationships and a range of stimulating learning methods result in busy lessons that motivate and enthuse the students. In lessons students of all abilities behave well. Year 10 students made excellent progress in deepening their understanding of poems from other cultures because of their teacher's use of short, focused tasks that were clearly linked to learning objectives. Learning was effective because the teacher frequently checked understanding. In another Year 10 lesson the teacher clearly challenged the students' thinking and this led to perceptive comments: one boy speculated that the rhythm of a poem changed from harsh to soft, depending on the poet's attitudes to different environments. Other strengths include the frequency of homework and good marking. Teachers are also embedding a more explicit approach to teaching and learning with good effect. Year 9 middle attaining students secured above average standards in descriptive writing as a direct result of their teacher's very good demonstration of how to improve the impact of their writing.

110. Some aspects are less effective. The lessons had a strong sense of purpose when teachers shared learning objectives at the start, but this was lessened when teachers did not constantly link objectives to the tasks the students were doing. In Years 7 to 9 the students do not have a secure enough knowledge of their own standards and how to improve because neither the preparation nor review of work made enough references to the criteria of different levels of attainment. Some students have overtaken their original level targets but new ones have not been set. The insecure grasp of some basic skills revealed in the work of some Year 9 middle attainers reflects a need for a more specific programme on these skills throughout Years 7 to 9 delivered by specialist staff.

111. Other important factors include the very good leadership of the department and the strong shared sense of trying to improve among the team. As a result, teachers are rewriting schemes of work to reflect the principles of the National Literacy Strategy. There is a strong focus on the improvement of teaching and learning with teachers carrying out observations of each other's lessons as a basis for feedback and their own development.

The contribution of other subjects to students' literacy

112. Procedures for the development of literacy skills are satisfactory. In English procedures are good. They are also good in science, music and ICT. The school has a policy to guide teachers and has arranged whole school training. The literacy coordinator clearly understands what needs to be done to improve provision but has little time to ensure effective monitoring of progress. There is a small voluntary literacy group but not all subjects or the learning resources coordinator are represented. Some departments – science, English – liaise effectively with the learning resources coordinator but this is not fully established across all subjects.

113. Most subjects are making good progress in enhancing the students' use of key words. Good practice was seen at the start and end of lessons in ICT, music, science, design and technology, geography, physical education, and modern foreign languages. Some effective work was observed in religious education but spellings in books were not corrected sufficiently. In ICT students consolidate vocabulary by evaluating the work of others.

114. The development of reading is mixed. In science lower attaining Year 9 students understood the topic of "Burning" better as a result of well chosen reading materials and related tasks. Music adopts a systematic approach including Internet research to enhance study skills. In ICT some highlighting of text helps to develop the students' critical reading skills. Overall, the systematic development of reading skills requires more sustained and effective attention.

115. The development of writing is also mixed. Some helpful writing frames were used in Year 7 and 8 geography. In art and design, homework often requires a written outcome. Despite the use of some useful techniques in history such as starter sentences, writing frames and storyboards they are not used on a systematic basis. Elsewhere a more rigorous approach is required. In design and technology there are many writing opportunities but little guidance and support; in modern foreign languages a limited range of genres; and in religious education writing is not developed and supported enough.

Drama

116. Drama is a strength of the school. In the 2002 GCSE examination 75 per cent achieved grades A*-C. No lessons were seen in Years 7 to 9 because of the timetable structure but standards in the two Year 10 groups are well above average. Students explored the themes of the lessons in depth. They worked effectively in pairs, group and individually. They showed a very secure knowledge of drama techniques to maximize the impact of their work. They worked with great enthusiasm and confidence. This positive situation emanates from very good and excellent teaching. The teachers have very high expectations with respect to the quality and quantity of work. The teachers' specialist knowledge is an outstanding strength, reflected in the range of engaging warm up activities that ensured the students were ready for the challenges of the lesson. The carefully stepped approach to exploring sensitive themes such as adoption resulted in the students empathising strongly and realising that empathy in performance. The subject benefits from excellent accommodation and equipment and the teachers use these facilities very effectively to establish an ambience that also lifts the performance of the students. Drama is increasing in popularity with more than twenty five per cent of the current Year 10 taking the subject. This reflects the very good foundations laid in the core drama lessons in Years 7

to 9. The department makes an outstanding contribution to the extra-curricular life of the school with many performances throughout the year. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The students respond positively to the enthusing and inspiring example of their teachers.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Standards are above the national average.
- Students behave well and work hard.
- Some teaching in Years 7 to 10 is good or very good.

Areas for improvement

- The failure to recruit appropriately qualified teachers has caused severe problems.
- Teaching in about a third of lessons overall is unsatisfactory.
- The arrangements for departmental leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

117. Just three weeks after the start of the autumn term in 2001 two teachers in senior positions within the department were absent with long-term sickness. Both have now retired but no permanent replacements have, as yet, been appointed. This has affected adversely provision in mathematics. In particular the learning of students in classes who have not had the benefit of full time permanent teachers has suffered.

118. Taken as a whole the achievement of students who are in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory. This is a composite of good achievement by those who have benefited from consistently good teaching and unsatisfactory long-term progress by those who have had a succession of different teachers and those who are currently receiving teaching which is less than satisfactory. When they join the school the students' skills and understanding in mathematics are above the national average. Results in the national tests for Year 9 in 2002 were above the national average for all schools but well below those for students in similar schools. Girls perform better than boys.

119. Up to Year 9 students' mathematical skills show improvement, which reflects the quality of the teaching they receive, but overall improvement is not as good as it should be. For example, in a well taught Year 9 lesson on equivalent fractions, it was clear that half of the class taught by an effective member of the permanent staff last year were secure in their understanding of vulgar, decimal fractions and percentages, but the others, taught by a series of supply teachers were much less so. The work of higher attaining students in Year 9 showed that many are capable of obtaining Level 7 in the National Curriculum examinations at the end of this academic year. They can determine the terms of a quadratic expression, handle algebraic brackets correctly. Middle attainers are above average, attaining at Level 6, for example in their use of Pythagoras' theorem, other work on area and circumference and algebra. Lower attaining students have a good grasp of place value in number work and can collect and handle data competently in investigations. Numeracy standards are above average compared with national levels.

120. GCSE results in 2002 were in line with national averages for students attaining between A*-C and substantially above for those obtaining a grade at any level but show below average improvement for the students from their results in national tests two years earlier. Mathematics results at GCSE are not as good as those for other subjects in the school. Boys' have performed better than girls in each of the last two years.

121. The standard of students' work seen in Years 10 and 11 is above the national average. Just under three students in five are on course for the higher grades of A*-C at GCSE. Higher attainers have a good understanding of data handling, draw and interpret graphs well and have good algebraic skills. Middle attainers do well at statistics and in algebra can use balancing to solve linear equations. Almost all students are at a level sufficient to gain a GCSE grade. Those who find mathematics most difficult can construct tally charts and use them to draw charts or graphs, they can interpret pictograms, but they do not always label or give a title to their diagrams. Their basic arithmetic is usually secure. They can, for instance, do simple percentages. Sometimes, however, fundamental weaknesses of understanding show, for example where half of a quarter is given as 2.25.

122. Students with special educational needs progress in line with their peers. No students having English as an additional language were observed during the inspection.

123. Although in most of the lessons the teaching is good or very good there are too many lessons in which the teaching is not good enough. In the best lessons the students enjoy their work and are taken along at a good pace. The teacher makes sure that the students are involved in a variety of activities and know from the outset what they will be learning in the lesson. As a result, students work hard and learn well to make clear gains in their mathematical skills and understanding. In almost one lesson in three, however, lesson planning is inadequate so that either the teacher spends too much time talking or the students are involved for too long on a single activity and become bored. In turn, students do not learn sufficiently well or develop standards of knowledge and understanding commensurate with their ability. Although some teachers mark and comment fully on how work might be improved, the use of assessment and marking to levelled grades is underdeveloped as is the use of sharply focused target setting. Too many students are not sufficiently aware of what precisely they need to do to improve. Overall therefore teaching, and students' learning, is unsatisfactory.

124. The impact of the national literacy strategy is to be seen in word lists on the walls in classrooms, but are not always used as effectively as they might be. Overall literacy standards are good. The students write well and answer questions with confidence in class. There is, however, no concerted attempt by the teachers to improve spelling and grammar. ICT use is incorporated into the schemes of work and examples of students using spreadsheets and word-processing were evident in exercise books.

125. Students' behaviour in lessons is good. In the majority of lessons the students' attitudes to their work and their behaviour are good or very good. Unsatisfactory attitudes or behaviour stem directly from dull or unsatisfactory teaching. Relationships in the classroom are, for the most part, good although a history of inconsistent teaching means that it takes time for even very good supply teachers to establish an ethos in which the students are comfortable and can do their best work.

126. New schemes of work do not indicate precisely the content and when it should be taught. Because teachers' absence is more common than is usual, this is a serious shortcoming especially for temporary teachers. The acting head of the department has been very hard working in very difficult circumstances but, even with good support from senior management, the department lacks cohesion with some members not taking a fair share of the burden of administration and curriculum development. Arrangements for managing and leading the department are unsatisfactory although there are plans in place to improve the position with a new temporary appointment from January 2003.

The contribution of other subjects to students' numeracy

127. Students at Congleton High School have good numerical skills. In design and technology, students are helped develop and use measuring and weighing skills effectively and they can apply spatial ideas when drawing in two and three dimensions. In science Year 11 students apply earlier learning to solve equations related to work, force and energy well. All have skills enough to enable them to learn in all areas of the curriculum. Isolated examples of good teaching of numerical skills were seen in lessons other than mathematics during the inspection. In physical education a lesson in gymnastics gave rise to the importance of forming an equilateral triangle of head and hands to establish stability. In art and design the students are encouraged to look at volume and area and to scale objects up and down. In ICT, good use is made of spreadsheets for analysis where in Year 9 students use graphs effectively.

128. Very few departments have given much thought to how best the students' numerical skills can be developed within their own area of the curriculum. All staff have been in receipt of a half a day of training from the local education authority on the National Numeracy Strategy. As yet, however, this has not provoked much response. Few departments have a stated policy for the teaching of numeracy, neither are opportunities for enhancing the students' thinking in numerical terms commonly identified. In general, as in geography, history and in religious education, opportunities for raising awareness and skill levels have not been identified and pass unnoticed.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- In half of lessons seen teaching is very good or excellent.
- Monitoring students' work and setting targets for them is done well.
- Results in GCSE examinations improved greatly in 2002.

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough computers in laboratories and ICT is not used often enough in lessons.
- Students' literacy skills are not sufficiently well developed in all lessons.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to learn to investigate ideas in science.

129. Students' attainments are above average in Year 9 tests and well above average in GCSE examinations. In 2002 the GCSE results, especially for boys, improved greatly.

130. In tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 results were above the national average, however, when compared with similar schools they were well below average. In 2002 girls did very much better than boys. Results in science are very similar to the English and mathematics results. In 2002, when compared with their above average test results in Year 6, students' results were also above average showing that they made satisfactory achievement through Years 7 to 9.

131. GCSE examination results improved greatly in 2002, they were well above the national average and also well above average when compared with similar schools. Boys' results improved a lot and were a little better than those of girls. When compared with above average attainment when they began Year 10, their well above average results in GCSE show that students made good progress in science and achieved well in the examination.

132. Standards of students' work are above average in Years 7 to 9. For example, in Year 7 students have a very good understanding of the relative movements of the Earth, sun and the moon and by Year 9 their calculations about the force of gravity and planets are done very well. In biology their understanding of the adaptations of leaves and about acid rain is well above average although low attainers knowledge of basic anatomy is below average. and. Attainment is well above average in Years 10 and 11, for example in understanding patterns of inheritance, making calculations about speed time and acceleration and using graphs about chemical reactions. However, some aspects of chemistry, such as the effects of catalysts are well below average. Boys and girls do equally well and standards of literacy and numeracy are good.

133. Teaching throughout Years 7 to 11 is good and students' learning and achievement is above average. Progress made in lessons is better than that shown by test results in Year 9 because staff absence is much less than it was and good teachers have been recruited to join a good team of science teachers. The best teaching in half the lessons seen is excellent or very good, most is good and none is unsatisfactory. In the best lessons relationships are very good, students are encouraged, their self-esteem is raised and as a result they are often very enthusiastic and hard working. Teachers ask demanding questions that require explanations. Students learn very well, for example about the movement of the sun, moon and Earth in Year 7, and about chemical reactions in Year 10 that leads to a very good understanding of chemical equations. The pace of lessons is fast and teachers' management of the students is very good. Planning and knowledge of the subject are very good, explanations are done carefully and demonstrations are used well to ensure that students' know exactly what to do and have the confidence to succeed with the practical tasks that they are given. Lessons are interesting and students behave well and want to learn. For example, in a challenging lesson about leg power, students, including a number with special educational needs, made excellent progress.

134. In some lessons students made less progress because for parts of the lesson the teacher did not ensure that all students were listening and following the lesson. In another lesson about an industrial process the link between the process and the chemical reaction that takes place during it was not made clear enough. In some lessons scientific terms are explained carefully and a dictionary is available so that students learn to spell correctly but at other times development of students' literacy skills is needed by identifying and explaining key words. Occasionally the teaching methods used do not interest and motivate students and they behave less well, talking and failing to listen. In some lessons more effective use of praise is needed to provide students with the confidence to ask and answer questions. Few lessons provide students with opportunities to learn the skills of investigation that provide opportunities for independent learning.

135. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. At their best they are very enthusiastic and very interested in learning because some very good teaching fosters these attitudes. They work hard and carry out practical tasks carefully and safely; in these lessons instructions are listened to and followed carefully. When students are praised and encouraged they are willing to try to answer difficult questions. Some students, more often boys, are easily distracted, they are satisfied by completing tasks without achieving understanding and they talk about irrelevant things.

136. The management of the department is good. GCSE examination results have been improved. Very good records of students' marks and progress are used to set targets for students, which individuals helpfully discuss with a science teacher. Students' work is monitored and marked regularly and those who are not doing well enough are identified. In turn, support in after-school or lunchtime sessions is offered and parents are informed if progress is not good enough. New plans for lessons provide teachers with very good advice

about teaching methods. However, they need to ensure that students' literacy skills are developed consistently and that opportunities for students to learn to investigate are included more often. Although textbooks and equipment are adequate, there are not enough computers in the science department. Accordingly, ICT is not used often enough and students miss the opportunities for independent learning and research that this equipment provides.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- The relationships between the teachers and the students are very good and promote a very effective learning environment in lessons.
- The management of the subject is effective. It promotes high expectations and provides very good opportunities for all students.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and as a consequence achievement is also good.

Areas for improvement

- There is not sufficient challenge for the higher attaining students in Years 7 to 9.
- There are not enough opportunities to improve students' knowledge and understanding of art in society from the experience of outside visits and the influence of artists in residence.

137. By the end of Years 9 levels of attainment are average. Students are making good progress and are achieving well as a result of the quality of teaching, which is at least good and often very good. In 2002, attainment in the higher grades A*-C improved in all art and design subjects particularly in graphic design and three-dimensional design. Results are above the national average. Over the previous two years attainment of boys by the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations has been below expectations when compared to the attainment of girls. Work seen during the inspection indicates that the situation is improving and that standards generally continue to improve.

138. As a direct consequence of being given a wide variety of creative experiences, a majority of students show an interest in their work and are achieving considerable success. Students produce some interesting work in Years 7 to 9. Year 7 students are developing an appreciation of shape, texture and colour and in Year 8 they gain skills and understanding of pattern design in a variety of materials. A majority of Year 9 students draw and paint with a reasonable degree of confidence and have experience of print making, ceramics and some three-dimensional construction. They increase their knowledge and understanding about significant artists and cultures such as Andy Goldsworthy, Salvador Dali and artisans of the San Blas Islands. Overall, students achieve well and those with special educational needs also achieve well. Higher attaining students in Years 7 to 11 would benefit from greater challenges. Throughout all year groups the majority of students are reasonably articulate when discussing their work and many are capable of understanding and using technical language. However, the majority of students' research skills are under-developed and require further improvements to enhance their learning.

139. The quality of teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Year 10. The best lessons are challenging and well planned in order to provide all students with opportunities to progress. Classroom organisation and management are very effective. The relationship between the teachers and students is very good providing a pleasant atmosphere in lessons. Throughout all year groups, the attitude of the students in lessons is good and often very

good and has a positive influence on the progress being made. A majority of students are more than willing to share materials and ideas and assist in the distribution and collection of equipment. Teaching makes regular references to the work of significant artists and cultures and successfully raises students' creative appreciation and awareness. Homework assignments are set at regular intervals and influence the work being done in lessons. Students are willing to discuss their work and a significant proportion show pride in their achievements which is a reflection of the quality of teaching and learning. Assessment is effective in tracking student attainment but could be more influential on future curriculum development and lesson planning. Assessment includes a certain amount of student self-assessment and therefore when questioned a majority of the students are aware of teachers' expectations and their own strengths and weaknesses. Students in Years 10 and 11 are given target grades for attainment and are capable of discussing their progress. The marking of work is reinforced by supportive comments from teachers. Students with special educational needs are given individual learning targets, which are reviewed regularly by the teachers within the department. All classrooms within the department and certain public areas around the school contain good displays of work, providing an opportunity for students to appreciate the standards of work being produced. In many lessons teaching also effectively establishes connections to the school literacy strategy. Discussions are an integral part of all lessons affording students the opportunity to develop and defend opinions and become more articulate. Students are encouraged to read as part of their research into artists and cultures.

140. The management of the department is good, promoting high standards in lessons and giving clear direction. The teachers work as an effective team. The quality of teaching is monitored and all teachers have individual development objectives. The subject meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Accommodation is very good and provides a positive influence on the attitudes of the students and therefore influences the quality of learning. Resources are sufficient for need and used effectively. The quality of the education provided lacks the benefit of sufficient access to computer based art applications and the enrichment of artists in residence working with the students.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Revisions to the curriculum provide new teaching opportunities in Years 7 and 10.
- Leadership is enthusiastic and innovative.
- There is wide-ranging teacher support and enthusiasm.
- Students' reactions to the subject are positive.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is not yet being monitored adequately.
- There is not sufficient staff training and development for teaching the subject.
- An assessment strategy to support progression in the learning is not yet in place.
- The curriculum and teaching arrangements for Years 8 and 9 are not satisfactory.

141. As this is a new subject, there are no available measures for assessing standards, other than to assume that the overall standards achieved will be comparable with other subjects. Therefore standards are a little above the national average at the end of Year 9. Students have satisfactory knowledge and understanding of becoming informed citizens through the study of the human rights, crime, animal rights and leisure and sport in the local community modules. The subject is taught in the tutor groups and there are opportunities for

all students to contribute appropriately in active group work, paired work and through presentational activities. There is a regular timetabled opportunity in Year 7 for working in an ICT room. There is good evidence in their work of students researching the citizenship issues. Currently the achievement of the full range of students is satisfactory.

142. Given the absence of assessment data, it is to be assumed that students should reach similar standards by the end of Year 11. The Year 10 students are studying the short GCSE course in citizenship and have studied prejudice and discrimination, refugees and health and safety topics. The lessons are delivered through an additional lesson each fortnight. Currently a team of three teachers effectively lead this initiative and students make satisfactory achievement as a result of teachers' enthusiasm for the subject. There are opportunities for all students including those who are gifted and talented, those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language to make satisfactory achievement throughout these years. There are no significant differences in achievement of boys and girls at this stage.

143. Overall the quality of teaching is good although there is a wide range from excellent to unsatisfactory. Most teachers are enthusiastic about the new initiative and they work from clear lesson objectives that are shared with students. In the best lessons students are challenged and encouraged to reflect upon their own experiences of human rights and bullying and to develop their understanding through effective *PowerPoint* presentations. In the less successful lessons, classroom management is inadequate and students are not challenged sufficiently either through the level of work or by the work pace. As a result progress is unsatisfactory. This wide range of different learning outcomes needs to be improved through systematic staff training because currently only the coordinator has been fully trained for the initiative. There is also a need for a planned monitoring of the teaching and learning processes to ensure that the excellent practice is widely disseminated through the team of teachers and that students' widely different learning experiences are brought up to the level of the best lessons.

144. A subject audit has been carried out and good contributions are made in some subjects, for example in a Year 8 ICT lesson students made effective use of the Internet to research evidence about animal welfare. Art and design, science and history have also identified in their schemes of work where they are able to contribute to the citizenship curriculum. In a Year 10 class students worked enthusiastically developing a safety code using ICT and their learning is developed by good teacher support that promotes ideas and encourages an evaluation of the material that students are using. Teachers work hard to ensure that the citizenship themes are thoroughly explored and they give good opportunities for students to reflect and respond. The good relationships show that the introduction of the subject this term has been a success.

145. A citizenship coordinator was appointed in May 2002 and she has provided energetic and innovative leadership. Comprehensive schemes of work have been written with accompanying lesson plans and a good range of learning resources has been rapidly built up. As a result of this effective leadership, the introduction of citizenship has gone well. However, currently there is no system for assessing the effectiveness of the courses nor is there a planned review and evaluation cycle. The coordinator recognises the need to develop these procedures to support the future development of the subject. One period a fortnight has been introduced in Years 7 and 10 to teach citizenship, however, in Years 8 and 9 a single period is currently shared with personal, social and health education and this may be inadequate for both areas to be covered effectively. Citizenship is still a developing initiative; the school has made an effective start in the introduction of the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Student-teacher relationships in the classroom are good.
- Results in GCSE textiles are above average.
- The new manager is having a positive effect on the working practices of the department.
- There is good support for students with special educational needs.
- Teachers are skilled in providing interaction and challenge for students.

Areas for improvement

- Continue the development of assessment procedures for both National Curriculum and GCSE. Ensure they provide students with the information they need to improve their work.
- The provision for and the teaching of ICT, including CAD/CAM, are insufficient.
- The accommodation for the teaching of systems and control does not meet the needs of the current course and has a negative effect on standards.
- Monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching are not established.

146. Students enter the school with average standards in design and technology. Teachers' assessment at the end of Year 9 in 2002 showed the number of students achieving level 5 and above to be well above the national average, which represents very good achievement. The first set of GCSE results in 2002 for the new school show attainment to be below average in all subjects except textiles and food, which were above average.

147. The standards of work seen in Years 7, 8 and 9 are average. Students reach similar standards across all aspects of their work apart from systems and control where standards are below average. All students have a good level of subject-based vocabulary and are developing clear understanding of the materials they are using. They are confident in using tools and machines safely and have a sound knowledge when selecting the appropriate equipment in practical lessons. Students are becoming more secure in the design process due to a common approach now being adopted by all teachers. Design work is particularly strong in textiles where, for example, careful planning and the use of accurate templates are effective in bag construction in Year 7.

148. Year 10 standards are average in graphics and food. Students reach higher standards in textiles where their work shows good imaginative ideas, very good design layout and effective use of media developed into quality garments. Although work seen in resistant materials is below average, students are making satisfactory progress in understanding the use of a specification, and have recently completed a practical project using aluminium with good workmanship and a high quality accurate finish. Students are making decisions about the appropriateness of their designs in small group discussions which support low attaining students particularly well and helps them to become more confident in describing their choices during feedback sessions. Work seen in systems and control is below average because of inadequate staffing and resources. Students' literacy skills are effectively enhanced with writing frames, especially in textiles, and good use made of word walls in most workspaces. Guides are particularly helpful to enable students understand procedures in their work, for example soldering in electronics. Throughout all year groups there is little evidence of the use of ICT to support learning. In consequence, students have very little understanding and skills for using computerised equipment to design and manufacture items of work.

149. Teaching shows some variation between teachers but overall is satisfactory throughout Years 7 to 10. Some very good lessons were seen and opportunities should be taken to share this good practice. All teachers have good subject knowledge that is generally well communicated. Key words are promoted in many ways including display, word walls in learning resources, discussions and individual support. Students are well managed and lessons timed effectively in most cases. Good relationships exist between teachers and students and this produces a good environment in which most students feel secure 'to have a go'. In very good lessons, teachers have precise learning objectives and the activities are well co-ordinated to make learning both relevant and challenging. Students demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm for learning and this is at its best when they are given responsibility and show initiative. Where teaching is less effective, activities do not match the full range of students' needs and pace drops.

150. Individual support for students is a common strength of all teachers. Students with learning difficulties are supported well. Work is marked using the school assessment policy. However, most students in Years 7 to 9 do not know their current National Curriculum level and what they need to do to improve their work. Some students in Years 10 and 11 are also unaware of their target grades for GCSE.

151. The subject area is well led and managed at present by a highly competent acting coordinator who has been in post since September. During the last year the staffing has been difficult due to the absence of the subject and assistant coordinators. Although supply cover has been available, ensuring consistency and quality has been difficult. The acting coordinator has, in the short time since appointment recognised shortfalls in the Year 7 to 9 curriculum, realised that assessment practice in the subject is not yet appropriate and managed to bring some order to the financial management of the area. The department is now beginning to work as a cohesive team with complimentary skills. Health and Safety documentation is in place and comprehensive measures are taken to ensure a safe working environment exists. Good use is made of display to enrich the learning environment and this is used effectively to inspire creativity in textiles. Technician support is effective but insufficient, placing unnecessary pressure on staff.

152. However, there is still much to do. The department is successful in developing extra curricular opportunities for students but their literacy, numeracy, ICT skills and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are inadequate at present. The department is developing written targets for all students. The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department is unsatisfactory and at present no handbook for guidance exists. The accommodation is in need of refurbishment in most areas and the room used for systems and control is unsatisfactory for the teaching of modern technologies. In many lessons resources are generally aimed at the middle ability but gifted and talented students in particular are not stretched due to the lack of appropriate learning resources.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Teachers are committed, caring and supportive of students.
- Good relationships exist between students and with their teachers.
- Attractive wall displays, particularly of students' work, provide an effective classroom environment.

Areas for Improvement

- Standards of work, including in the GCSE examinations, are not high enough.
- Opportunities for fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 are inadequate.
- There are shortfalls in teaching and learning resources.
- The curriculum does not provide enough opportunities for local map work, practice in graphical presentation or the planning and implementation of a coherent programme of ICT.
- Records of students' attainment and progress are not up-to-date.

153. Standards of work are close to the national average at the end of Year 9. Students' achievement over Years 7 to 9, in relation to broadly average standards at entry in Year 7, is satisfactory. In some classes achievement is unsatisfactory. By the end of Year 9 students have a generally sound grounding in geographical skills. Map work is good but there is very limited practice in the presentation and analysis of statistical data graphically. Knowledge of location is satisfactory overall except for low attainers where it is less secure. Students of all attainment levels have an inadequate understanding of spatial patterns. Higher attainers show good levels of understanding but they are not challenged to develop higher levels of skills in their work. Lower attainers are limited by literacy skills and work although appropriate to their level is often not manageable within the time available. Students with special educational needs do not receive sufficient specialist support. Their learning is satisfactory rather than good.

154. Standards of work at the end of Year 11 are close to the national average. Achievement of most students over Years 10 and 11 is broadly satisfactory. However, some students underachieve due to low aspiration and poor motivation. Progress in some Year 10 classes is limited with a considerable amount of incomplete work evident during the work analyses. Best individual GCSE project work based on fieldwork is very good. However, the work of some students who find deadlines difficult to meet needs to be more rigorously monitored as many currently underachieve.

155. Recent GCSE examination results grades A*-C and the highest A*-A grades have been below the national average. The proportion of students achieving a grade has been broadly in line with the national position. The subject is much less popular as a GCSE option than it is nationally. When compared with other GCSE subjects within the school, geography results have been below the average.

156. Students' attitude to learning is usually good. Many work conscientiously and are attentive but in lessons where management and control is unsatisfactory some students are easily distracted from the focus of learning. Students' behaviour is generally good and sometimes very good but at times unsatisfactory. On these occasions the flow of learning is interrupted, time is wasted and students underachieve. Relationships are mostly good both between students and with their teachers.

157. Teaching overall is satisfactory. Although there was some good and very good teaching observed, there was also some unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers work hard, are caring and supportive of students within their charge. Most lessons are well planned, have good structure and are well focused but their aims need to identify the knowledge, understanding and skills students learn during the lesson more precisely. When teaching is practical in form and visual aids clarify the aims, the quality of learning is noticeably better. Lessons lose pace, focus and productivity and learning opportunities are seriously reduced when classroom management and control is weak. This is the main reason for the unsatisfactory teaching and learning that occurs. Learning overall is satisfactory. It is most effective when there is good dialogue between teacher and students that extends students knowledge and there is greater understanding of the topic taught. However, there is insufficient use of local Ordnance Survey maps and examples, practical activities and group work planned in lessons. There is also insufficient use of visual materials such as film, video extracts, maps, atlases, diagrams etc in teaching and inadequate visual consolidation of learning on the board. There is no fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 so the course does not meet statutory requirements. These deficiencies need immediate action. There has been no application of ICT to the programme of study partly due to difficulties of access to computers and this too needs action. There is good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development built into the subject curriculum.

158. The subject coordinator has been in post for too short a time to judge the leadership and management of the department effectively. Priority rightly has been given to curriculum planning and particular the writing of schemes of work so that there is a consistency of approach and delivery across the department. An immediate need, however, is the establishing of a common assessment policy that regularly records and monitors student attainment and progress over time. The lack of stability in staffing has been a significant factor contributing to the recent lower than average standards of work but with replacement there is now stability. Two new appointments, including a newly qualified teacher, need much more professional development and support from within and outside the school in order to teach the subject fully effectively. Colourful and attractive wall displays, including students' work, contribute to an active and effective learning environment.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Teachers have good knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject.
- Positive students' attitudes contribute to good relationships.
- Classroom management is good.
- The department is well managed.

Areas for improvement

- There is no planned monitoring teaching and learning.
- Assessment procedures are inadequate.
- In lessons, objectives are not sufficiently shared and plenary sessions are not effective.
- The level of book resources is too low.
- Strategies for raising boys' achievement in GCSE are ineffective.

159. The standards at the end of Year 9 in the work seen were above average and matched the students' entry levels in Year 7. This represents satisfactory achievement through the first three years. The teachers' assessments in 2002 were above average and were confirmed by the level of work seen during the inspection. Overall, given the level

achieved at the end of Year 9, the achievement of students at the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. The standard of the current Year 11 confirms that this level of achievement has been maintained. In 2002 the gap between boys' and girls' attainments became significant with 79 per cent of girls and 33 per cent of boys achieving A* to C grades. Attention needs to be given to identifying new strategies for improving boys' attainment. Those who are gifted and talented, those with learning difficulties or those with English as an additional language, make progress as well as the other boys and girls.

160. By the end of Year 9 students have developed a broad range of historical skills, including the ability to empathise with different situations, the understanding of chronology and interpretation of primary and secondary evidence. For example, Year 9 students are able to evaluate the impact of various industrial entrepreneurs in the eighteenth century and are able to extract the relevant evidence from a range of source material. Students have good opportunities to make oral contributions in lessons. Key words and phrases are systematically reinforced by effective board work but not regularly added to a glossary. There are good opportunities for ICT within the curriculum, for example in Year 7 project work and for independent research. In Years 10 and 11 students are able to effectively interpret historical texts and to draw reliable conclusions. There are limited opportunities for students to use numeracy although students have a good understanding of chronology. For example, a Year 10 class analysed climate and population graphs to help their grasp of the use and development of medicine. Students show their commitment to history by listening carefully to each other, in working well in pairs and in making good links between different influences in the mediaeval period. They feel secure in their learning and as a result their understanding develops well.

161. The quality of teaching is good with some very good features overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic historians. They respect and like the students and this encourages a positive learning environment; overall the management of lessons and hence learning are good. Most students work with concentration and show enjoyment for the subject. In the best lessons the learning objectives are shared with the students and reviewed at the end of the lesson. There is a clear teaching method and progression of the learning. However, this is not common practice throughout the department and it needs to be developed. Students are encouraged to be independent learners but this development cannot be as widespread as the department would like because there is a great shortage of books, particularly for Years 8 and 9. This deficiency needs to be remedied as soon as possible. Common end of module assessments have recently been introduced but have yet to work through the department. Target-setting for improving students' learning has not yet been introduced, so that students presently have a varied understanding of their progress.

162. The present temporary head of department has been in post for three months and she inherited a department where two of the four teachers are temporary. There were no up to date schemes of work, no development plan and no handbook. She has made substantial improvements in a short time with new schemes of work, and a handbook and development plan in draft. Good support has been given to the part-time staff and a classroom environment has been established where students are able to learn well. The department is currently well led and there is a good understanding of the areas for development. Local history is built into the Year 9 syllabus but there are currently limited plans to develop fieldwork activities. All teachers, apart from the head of department, have been observed teaching this term. However, there is no planned programme of monitoring the teaching and learning in the department. Such a programme needs to be put into effect so that the good practices that exist in the best lessons are effectively disseminated throughout the history team and help to support the improving standards that are now evident.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teachers plan and prepare well for lessons in Years 7 to 9 and for the examination courses in Years 10 and 11.
- Students are enthusiastic and work hard in lessons.
- Clear leadership and management is given by the newly appointed temporary subject coordinator.
- Technical help is good.
- Accommodation is good and students have good access to high quality equipment.

Areas for improvement

- Use of assessment in Years 7 to 9 to set individual student targets for improvement is weak.
- Students are not given enough opportunity to gain experience of using computer aided control.
- The provision of ICT in all subject areas is not sufficient for students to build on their ICT skills.

163. Students enter the school with a wide range of levels of skill in using ICT but, overall, their attainment at the beginning of Year 7 is average. At the end of Year 9 their standards in ICT are above average. They are doing well in Years 7 to 9 and so their achievement by the end of Year 9 is good. Higher attaining students in Year 11, who study ICT at GCSE, reach standards that are above average and make good progress. Lower attaining students make satisfactory progress because their attainment is below national expectations. Therefore progress in Years 10 and 11 overall is satisfactory. A significant number of students do not study ICT to examination level and receive only their minimum entitlement. In 2002 GCSE results were broadly in line with national standards. There was no significant difference between the results of boys and girls.

164. In work seen during the inspection, standards in ICT at the end of Year 9 are above those expected. Students access their own files, use the Internet to research topics and use animated presentations to display findings. They demonstrate a high level of skill in designing and producing web pages, for example in one Year 8 lesson where students produced a web site about 'Animal Welfare'. In Year 9 most students can use software packages competently for word processing, using spreadsheets, and adding images. Higher attaining students have clear understanding of a target audience and the need for appropriate presentation. Lower attaining students display good technical skills but do not document their work thoroughly. However, by the end of Year 9, most students have weaknesses in understanding the principles of computer-aided control, of moving robots and of data logging.

165. Standards in ICT at the end of Year 11, for those students studying GCSE, are above national averages. Students studying GNVQ in Year 10, and GCSE ICT in Year 11 show enhanced skill in accessing and using information, word processing, and use of databases and spreadsheets. They are developing their knowledge of the moral and social implications of using ICT. The majority of these students are working above the level expected for their age. In Year 11 higher attainers have well organised files and show a good understanding of the subject. Lower attaining students produce printouts that require good technical skills but these students do not keep their files in logical order, analysis is weak and they do not annotate their work to explain how they arrived at solutions.

166. Students' attitudes towards the subject are good. They are interested and enthusiastic. In question and answer sessions they respond well. They stay focused on tasks and can work independently when given the opportunity. They cooperate well when working in groups and help each other if they encounter difficulties. Students are well behaved in lessons and respond positively to teachers with whom they have very good relationships.

167. The quality of teaching and learning is overall good. Teachers generally have good knowledge and understanding of the subject. The introductions to lessons are generally successful, especially when they are linked to the main theme of the lesson and the pace is fast, but in some lessons, where lessons begin with computer based-quizzes some students are slow to access the work and time is wasted. The support provided by teachers for individual students who are finding things difficult, is good in all lessons. They are given individual support and encouragement and where necessary are provided with work, on the same theme as the other students, but adapted for their particular needs. Similarly higher attaining students are provided with additional materials which challenge their learning. The department makes good use of homework.

168. When teaching is good, lessons are well planned and contain a variety of learning activities. These things ensure that students see effective demonstrations, learn what they should, use good quality equipment and are helped to make progress in lessons. Students respond with enthusiasm and produce good work. In these cases relationships are very good and students collaborate well with one another. For example in a Year 7 lesson, where students were producing an animated presentation about bullying, a variety of learning activities was provided leading to very good learning. In particular, evaluation in pairs was sensitive and constructive. This provided one another with valuable feedback. In addition, it helped them practice speaking and listening skills. Where teaching and learning are broadly satisfactory, there are some weaknesses, planning does not take account of students' interests, the work fails to motivate all of the students, there is a lack of variety and pace, and teacher domination of learning limits individual work so that some students become restless and concentration is lost.

169. Satisfactory procedures are in place for assessing ICT capability throughout Years 7 to 9 and in Year 10 and 11 examination classes. Teachers give good feedback to students in lessons. However, the effectiveness of marking ranges from some which encourages students, some where not enough detail is given and some where work is left unmarked. Examination groups are set targets based on their previous attainment but students in Years 7 to 9 do not know the level at which they are working.

170. Leadership and management of ICT are good. The newly appointed temporary subject coordinator provides clear leadership and a commitment to improve standards. Staff and resources are well deployed, and non-specialist staff, who make a significant contribution to the teaching of the subject, receive good support from the subject leader. There is good support from two technicians. Accommodation and resources are good. New schemes of work incorporate the national requirements for literacy but do not on numeracy.

The contribution of other subjects to students' ICT skills

171. Most departments do not fulfil their responsibilities to provide opportunities for students in all year groups to build on to their ICT skills, although most make some provision, for example they enable students to word process work and use CD ROMs and the Internet for research. Over half the students in Years 10 and 11 do not have structured ICT lessons, hence their only experience is gained through use of ICT in other subjects. A recent audit of ICT in Year 10 and 11 subjects indicates that these students receive only a minimum entitlement, but this is ad hoc and not properly co-ordinated. Monitoring of cross-curricular

ICT is weak. No subject department is using the recommended guidelines or awarding students a level of attainment in ICT.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Good teaching which promotes good learning and leads to above average standards.
- A strong mutually supportive team spirit among the staff.
- Good relationships between teachers and students which foster a good atmosphere for learning.
- Attractive accommodation in which display is used well to support learning and create an atmosphere of the target language countries.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the quality of feedback to students through marking so that they know what levels they are working at and how to move up to the next level.
- Develop a portfolio of exemplar work which illustrates National Curriculum levels so that staff have a greater shared understanding of them.

172. By the end of Year 9 in 2002 results of teachers' assessments in modern languages were above national averages. Standards of work seen during the inspection, however, were average in French which represents satisfactory achievement given that students started to study the subject in Year 7. Standards in Spanish and German were also average, but as students do not begin to study a second foreign language until Year 8, this represents good achievement in these languages. Students can understand longer texts and dialogues, but too few students produce extended responses in speaking and writing with references to past and future events. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students in relation to their prior attainment. There is some inconsistency across the subject area in the way in which teachers interpret and award National Curriculum levels, which explains why results appear to be higher than standards of work seen might indicate.

173. By the end of Year 11 in 2002 results were broadly in line with national averages in French. Girls performed worse than girls nationally, and boys performed better, which goes against the national trend. This was because teachers used performance data to identify boys who were in danger of underachieving, and mentored them towards better performance. Overall this represents satisfactory achievement. Standards of work seen during the inspection confirm this picture. Students can speak and write with reasonable accuracy using simple sentence constructions. Results in German were well above national averages, although this has to be seen in the light of a small number of entries. Girls performed better than boys, and better than girls nationally. Again standards of work seen during the inspection confirm this picture, with more students producing extended complex writing in German than in other languages. In comparison with standards at the end of Year 9 this represents good achievement. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students in relation to their prior attainment.

174. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. One lesson in six was very good, one in two was good, and one in three were satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In the good and very good lessons teachers have clear learning objectives which they share with students; they present language energetically, using a variety of methods to help students understand, for example visual presentation, soft toys and objects of reference. Teachers use the foreign language almost exclusively for classroom routines as well as practice and give opportunities for students to interact with each other as well as the teacher.

Lessons are conducted at pace and there is a wide variety of activity which keeps students engaged and motivated, helped by sensitive use of correction to move students forward and by thoroughly reviewing and consolidating learning at the end of the lesson. As a result, in these lessons students work hard, make intellectual effort and their learning progresses at a good rate. Marking of students' work is regular and supportive, but is not linked to National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9, nor to GCSE grade criteria in Years 10 and 11. This makes it more difficult for students to know exactly what level they are working at and how to improve.

175. The curriculum meets statutory requirements across the school. The provision for two languages in Years 8 and 9 is a strength of the curriculum. Through display and visits abroad the department makes a good contribution to students' cultural development. There are no formally planned contributions to students' spiritual development, but teachers sometimes take opportunities, for example in a Year 10 Spanish lesson the teacher used a video clip of famine in Africa to draw comparisons in Spanish with students' daily routine at home. The students were visibly moved by the images, and this made the use of the Spanish language have a more profound effect upon them.

176. The quality of leadership and management provided by the curriculum coordinator is very good. She gives a very good model of classroom practice; she supports staff and monitors the quality of teaching as much as she can, and plans development and in-service training accordingly. She has created a good team from widely differing sources in a short space of time. Although the development plan for modern languages correctly identifies priorities, it lacks success criteria and some timescales are vague. There is a good team spirit in the subject area, a shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed. However, the management structure of the subject area is holding back the pace of development. The curriculum coordinator and several other members of staff have responsibilities which fall outside the scope of modern languages. This makes it difficult for anyone in the subject area to have a clear focus on developing systems and strategies which will ultimately result in raising standards still further. There are very restricted possibilities for delegation as a result of this arrangement, which means that much of the development work falls to the curriculum coordinator. As a direct consequence there are issues of workload which limit the extent and effectiveness of support and monitoring and ultimately the ability to deliver sustained improvement.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The attitudes and behaviour of the student in lessons and extra-curricular work are very good.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.
- The accommodation is of excellent quality.

Areas for improvement

- The extent of monitoring instrumental teaching.
- ICT resources within the department.

177. In 2002 eighty per cent of students entered for music gained grades A*-C, however the number of student entered was too small for any valid comparisons to be made with

national figures. Taking account of the students' attainment and experience in music on entry to the school, which is average, the students achieve well in attaining above average standards by the end of Year 9. Currently there is no GCSE music group in Year 11 and at the time of the inspection it was comparatively early in the course for the Year 10 students. However in the limited amount of work seen, standards of attainment of the current group are average and represent satisfactory achievement.

178. Standards of work are good in Years 7 to 9. Students play well in ensembles, holding their parts securely and keeping together with a good sense of rhythm. The quality of singing is above average, reflecting the emphasis placed on it by the department. Classes sing with good tone and are able to hold independent parts. The students understand the structure of chords and show good familiarity with musical notation; however there is still some over-reliance on the use of letter names when reading staff notation. Percussion instruments and keyboards are controlled effectively although the use of systematic fingering techniques is limited, particularly when playing chords. When composing the students create interesting textures with sensitivity. There is good progression in melodic writing over the three years and by Year 9 students produce well-structured melodies. They listen perceptively to music and identify instruments well; they use and understand technical vocabulary. In Year 10 performance standards are good; building on their experiences in the earlier years the students hold independent parts with a good sense of rhythm and show a good sense of pitch during vocal work. Staff notation is well used and understood, enabling them to write down their melodies, which are generally well structured although rather too heavily based around chord patterns. When listening to music they show sensitivity and perception and identify such compositional devices as chromaticism and syncopation. ICT is used well for presentation but is little used to help with composition. There are no students with special needs in the Year 10 group, but in Years 7 to 9 they make good progress and achieve well. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls, and students of differing ethnicity make equal progress.

179. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Year 10. Almost three quarters of the lessons seen were very good, the remainder were good. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. The many strengths in teaching and learning generally apply to all year groups; however the planning is not quite so well thought out in Year 10 and this leads to less productive working. The pace of learning could be faster if the briefing for practical activities was more precise. The class teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding and these are well used to illustrate their explanations and demonstrate performance techniques. The instrumental teachers have very good specialist skills, which are similarly used, resulting in good instrumental teaching and learning. Lessons are well planned and a strength is the good variety and balance of activities within each lesson. Resources are well used and there is effective use of paired and group work, which encourages good independent learning and acquisition of skills. The management of students is very good and reflects the good relationships between the teachers and students. A high level of individual attention helps students with special needs to make good progress and the teaching ensures that they are well integrated into all activities. A great strength of the teaching is the way it is well matched to the students' prior attainment. The activities are designed to allow students to work at appropriate levels so that both high and low attaining groups can make good progress. A good example of this took place in a Year 7 lesson where the whole class took part in a performance of Pachelbel's Canon. Five parts were provided of varying difficulty and the whole combined into a very effective performance giving all class members the satisfaction of contributing well.

180. The department contributes well to the teaching of literacy through a focus on students' use of technical vocabulary in descriptive writing when evaluating music they listened to, and creative writing, such as when writing lyrics for a song. Homework is well

used. It is systematic and leads to good acquisition of knowledge, particularly through the use of ICT and the Internet.

181. Attitudes to the subject are very good. They show in the above average take-up for instrumental tuition and GCSE, and also in the very good support for the range of extra-curricular activities provided by the department. In lessons the students take their work seriously and want to do well. As a result of this and very good teaching their behaviour is very good. They can be trusted to work independently without direct supervision during group work. Relationships are good; they collaborate well, sharing keyboards and computers happily. Some students take leadership roles and they generally show sensitivity and respect for each other's feelings. For example, they listen courteously and applaud each other's performances.

182. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department is energetic and enthusiastic and has a clear vision of what he wants the department to achieve. This is reflected in the priorities in the development plan and the effective action that has been taken to achieve them. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is very good in respect of the full-time staff, with both formal and informal monitoring taking place regularly; however instrumental teaching is only monitored informally and this is not sufficient. The department has excellent accommodation. It is newly purpose built with spacious main rooms and a good number of small rooms for instrumental teaching and group work. The quality of the resources for learning is generally good although the department does require more computers so that the use of ICT for composition work is not restricted.

183. Very good progress has been made since the school was established and the music department is a strength of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Classes are well managed.
- The relationships between teachers and students are good.
- Students are interested and positive towards physical education.

Areas for improvement

- Curriculum documentation does not have enough detail to show progression.
- National Curriculum levels and criteria are not easy for students to understand.
- ICT is not sufficiently used in teaching.

184. Teachers' assessments of Year 9 students in 2002 indicate that students' attainment is above average. Students' results in Year 11 were above national average in GCSE in 2002.

185. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average, although they vary depending on the activity and the length of time students have experienced it. In Year 7 soccer students are able to dribble the ball with some control and some higher attaining students can use a range of turns in competitive games. Students understand basic rules, and techniques such as how to take throw-ins. In gymnastics in Year 8 students are able to perform short sequences individually and also in paired work, but as yet they lack quality in

their performances because this is their first unit of work in gymnastics. Standards in girls' badminton in this year are above expected levels with students showing consistency in their strokes, although do not always hit sufficient length in high clear shots. Year 9 netball students have a good understanding of footwork and can catch the ball on the move and comply with the rules. Students make good progress in lessons as they increase their knowledge and performance skills, and improve and build on existing skills. There is good achievement in Years 7, 8 and 9 where students develop skills in new sports such as hockey and badminton, which they have not experienced in their primary schools.

186. In Year 10, basketball students understand man-to-man defence but do not always use this effectively in games. However, some higher attaining students in the group have good dribbling and shooting skills. Standards in GCSE practical activities are average. In badminton students have a range of strokes, can use both forehand and backhand serve, although in competitive situations they do not always select the most appropriate shots. In hockey students have satisfactory standards of play, but few make use of reverse stick dribble. In GCSE theory work in Years 10 and 11 students have a satisfactory understanding of skeletal and muscular systems, reasons for and factors affecting participation in sport. Higher attaining students have well organised files, with clear notes and diagrams whilst lower attaining students' work is less well structured, making revision harder. There is satisfactory achievement by students in Years 10 and 11 at this early stage, with students having average standards in both practical activities and in GCSE course work. The numbers of students in GCSE practical activities are higher than is normal which limits progress because it restricts the amount of activity time particularly in badminton, and also reduces the amount of contact time with teachers.

187. Teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which helps them to give clear explanations and demonstrations to students, helping them learn new skills and improve existing ones. Lessons are generally well planned with appropriate practices for students of different attainment levels. Students are given opportunities to have some independence as they take charge of their own warm up at the start of lessons. This is particularly well done in GCSE hockey where students working in small groups lead each other. In GCSE theory, well-selected video material helps students learn about hooliganism in sport. Marking of students GCSE work is effectively done, and provides students with guidance of how to improve their work and gain better marks. Classes are always very well managed and students behave well. The very good relationships between teachers and students, and between students themselves, are major factors in successful lessons. Students are enthusiastic about the subject and work hard at tasks set, which contributes to their learning. However, little use is made of National Curriculum levels in teaching to help set students' targets. Teachers make effective arrangements for students with special educational needs, and who need specific help with GCSE work.

188. There is good management of the department and a shared vision to provide good experiences in physical education for all students. The difficult staffing situation over the last year has been well managed, and good use of coaches have helped support a range of extra-curricular activities. Curriculum documentation could be improved to make planning for progression more effective, and criteria to make assessment of National Curriculum levels easier. The accommodation for the subject is good, although changing rooms in the main school are in poor condition, and there is no department office. Although the department produce good quality information and worksheets for students, there is no computer equipment in the department to enhance students' learning and ICT skills.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- All students study religious education and have adequate time.
- A GCSE short course examination has been introduced for all students.
- Students' attitudes to the subject and behaviour are satisfactory.

Areas for improvement

- Results in the most recent GCSE examination taken by the majority of students are well below the national average.
- Teaching does not stimulate students' interest, and expectations of the quality of students' work are not high enough.
- Marking does not give students knowledge of their own standards nor advice as to how they can improve.
- The leadership of the subject fails to achieve a shared commitment to improving standards.

189. The standard of students work in Year 9 is below average whilst that of students in Year 11 is average. Their achievement in Years 7 to 9, and Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory because it fails to capture students' interest and consequently they are gaining only a superficial knowledge of the subject. A high level of staff absence has also affected its effectiveness. Despite this the majority of students behave in a satisfactory manner and students come to lessons prepared to learn. The leadership of the subject is failing to give clear educational direction and is unsuccessful in achieving a shared commitment to improving standards.

190. In Year 9 the standard of students' work seen is below the average expected in the locally Agreed Syllabus. Most can describe with reasonable accuracy the external features of Christianity and some world religions and can suggest some ways in which religious belief can affect the way people dress, worship and observe festivals, and celebrate important events in life. They have less appreciation of the meaning and excitement of religious faith for believers or the way that belief affects people's moral and ethical decisions. For example, they know that Muslims face Mecca when praying but have no appreciation of how this demonstrates the unity of Islam. Although, in conversation, they show considerable interest in religious ideas they are only just beginning to realise how faith can affect their own system of beliefs and values. Girls' written work is better presented than boys' but in many lessons boys are more willing and able to contribute perceptive ideas orally.

191. In 2002 the results in the full course GCSE examination for a small group of girls were below the national average. Most pupils in the year were entered for the short course examination and the results were well below the national average with girls out-performing boys. In Year 11 the standard of the work had to be judged by reading the contents of students' files due to internal school examinations. It is of average standard and shows a good coverage of the syllabus. Students have considered the nature of God and studied the different ways in which people respond to their idea of God. They can offer a range of opinions about major personal and global moral issues and relate Christian teaching to them, for example the teaching of various denominations on divorce and abortion. The standard of their responses is mainly superficial and there is little evidence of genuine understanding and none of the ability to evaluate what they learn and to offer reasoned opinions about topics.

192. Students' achievement throughout the school is unsatisfactory compared with earlier standards. Their attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Progress in individual lessons is insufficient because teachers do not challenge students or demand work that really extends them. Consequently there is insufficient difference between the amount and quality of work of the highest attainers and that of lower attaining students and those with

special educational needs. In some lessons those who have learning difficulties produce virtually no written work and appear to take no part in the lesson. The high level of staff absence has also adversely affected students' achievement in the last two years.

193. The quality of teaching and learning in both key stages is unsatisfactory even though teachers are experienced, have a satisfactory grasp of the subject, their class management is satisfactory and students behave compliantly. It is because lesson planning concentrates on what students will do rather than what they will learn and understand. Consequently, lesson time is often filled rather than used effectively. Homework is not set consistently. Planning does not recognise the need to provide teaching and learning materials closely matched to the needs of students of varying attainments in the mixed ability classes. Therefore neither students of high attainment nor those lower attainment and those with special educational needs are making the progress of which they are capable. In lessons seen the teacher rarely managed to stimulate students' interest and involvement. Initially, students are willing to learn and to take part in activities but quickly become bored and apathetic. Few answer questions and when written work is set their responses are brief and superficial. No examples of extended and imaginative writing were seen during the inspection. Questioning is largely factual and does not challenge students to reflect on what they are learning nor to deepen their understanding. There is a very limited range of teaching strategies but where well chosen video inputs are used students watch with interest and are much more prepared to be involved. However, this readiness is not used to advantage by teachers. Because teaching is largely teacher centred and there are few opportunities for students to engage in individual research or collaborative learning they are not developing these skills. Marking of students' work is poor. It gives students neither indication of the standard of their work nor any advice as to how they can improve it. Apart from exhibiting some key words in classroom displays and encouraging students to read aloud teaching makes no contribution to students' basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Misspellings of important subject words go uncorrected. Teaching makes no use of available ICT facilities. The subject makes a satisfactory contribution to students' moral and cultural development but the absence of opportunities for response and reflection means that it does not fulfil its important curricular function in spiritual development.

194. Despite the unstimulating teaching, the majority of students are well behaved. For much of the time they give the appearance of being bored but do not disrupt lessons. A minority is prepared to be actively involved in oral work and most are prepared to complete written tasks at a minimal level. Some students with special educational needs try really hard to produce high quality work despite lack of provision, but others simply give up, chat to their neighbours and doodle on their paper.

195. The management of the subject is satisfactory and there is a good stock of learning materials including religious artefacts and video material. Its aims are relevant to its stage of development recognising, for instance, the need for improvement in the way that students' work is assessed. However the leadership is unsatisfactory because it is not giving clear educational direction and has not achieved a shared commitment among staff to the way in which standards can be improved. There is no system within the department for checking standards across the subject nor for the professional development of staff.

196. Since the school was opened the subject has introduced a GCSE course for all students but improvement of standards has been adversely affected by the high level of staff absence and by ineffective leadership.

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

In the inspection, 9 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	22	59	70	14	31	1.4	2.2
Biology	22	68	83	36	34	2.5	2.6
Design and technology	4	100	82	0	25	2.8	2.3
Business studies	10	100	86	10	27	2.6	2.4
Information and communication technology	9	100	78	33	20	2.9	2.0
Physical education	7	100	86	57	24	4.0	2.3
Art and design	8	100	84	50	41	3.4	2.8
History	9	89	93	44	42	2.6	3.0
English language	13	92	93	54	36	3.2	2.9
English literature	12	100	93	17	36	2.8	2.9

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	18	83	87	17	43	4.0	5.8
Biology	28	86	88	21	34	4.6	5.5
Design and technology	5	100	91	40	30	6.0	5.4
Business studies	14	71	92	43	32	4.6	5.5
Information and communication technology	2	100	86	100	23	9.0	4.6
Physical education	17	94	92	47	25	6.7	5.1
Art and design	13	100	96	31	46	5.7	6.6
History	7	100	88	29	35	4.9	5.5
English language	15	80	91	20	30	4.0	5.3
English literature	15	100	95	40	37	5.6	5.9

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics and biology, but lessons in chemistry and physics were also sampled. Examination results in both physics and chemistry are similar to the national average. In a very good physics lesson on current electricity, the teacher linked theory and practical very well to improve students' skills in solving problems. Standards seen in the lesson were above average and students made good progress. In the practical chemistry lesson on rates of reaction, good relationships and clear explanations led to good learning. However, discussions with students and evidence from their notebooks suggested that not all students appreciate the standards expected in advanced examinations.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Classroom teaching is very good.
- Standards are improving.
- Students' views are positive.

Areas for improvement

- Too many students failed their AS examinations in 2002.
- Not enough is done to ensure that teachers within the department approach the teaching of the subject consistently.
- Assessment and testing are not linked closely enough to examination standards.

197. The school offers courses in pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and decision mathematics. These lead to Advanced Supplementary and Advanced Level GCE.

198. Lessons in pure mathematics and mechanics were seen in Year 12 and Year 13. No statistics or decision mathematics lessons were observed. Samples of the students' work were scrutinised. Students were invited to discuss their views of the courses offered and the teaching they were receiving.

199. The school was opened in 2000. Advanced level results in mathematics in 2001 were below the national average, and compared unfavourably with the students' results in other subjects. These students were, however, taught by teachers from several schools in the town. None still teaches at Congleton High. Fewer students were entered for A2 in 2002 and results overall were better. This is in spite of a decision to allow two students who had failed at AS level mathematics to continue to Year 13. One of these was, in fact, successful in obtaining an E grade pass.

200. There were no specific entry requirements for the AS level course in either 2000 or 2001. Students with less than a grade B on the higher paper for GCSE found the work very difficult because they lacked the necessary algebraic skills to cope with more advanced work. Many failed to gain a grade because the school did not foresee the problem soon enough to provide suitable remedial courses. The position is now improved. Students who are not up to the standard receive better advice and, therefore, do not start upon work which is currently beyond their compass. Teachers are more aware of the problems students face in terms of how quickly they have to work under examination conditions and how much practice is required to prepare them for this pressure.

201. The standard of work seen in lessons and in students' folders is therefore better than that suggested by recent examination results. Achievement is now good. In Year 13, students' attainment is above national average. Their work in mechanics is secure, and in pure mathematics they have a sound grasp of calculus with good integration of logarithmic, trigonometric and exponential functions. They tackle integration by substitution well. They have more difficulty, however, when ideas have to be put together to solve more complicated problems.

202. In Year 12, standards are in line with those nationally. All students have made a good start in decision mathematics. They know what an algorithm is and can perform the various sorts – bubble, quick, binary. They understand the graph theory associated with networks. In pure mathematics, higher attaining students are strong throughout. Overall standards in algebra are above average, and students understand surds, indices, factor and remainder theorems well.

203. However, even the highest attainers make the odd slip, such as choosing an approach to a question before looking at it properly. Lower attainers sometimes make errors with basic algebra, for example when expanding simple expressions, or by using the formula to solve quadratic equations which are far more easily and elegantly dealt with by factorising. Almost all have, as yet, spent insufficient time or effort memorising basic facts.

204. The prolonged absence and premature retirement of the former head of mathematics left substantial challenges to be faced. The schemes of work for the new mathematics specifications, introduced for 2000, had not been written. There was no teacher suitably qualified to teach mechanics. Complete and effective schemes of work are now in place for almost all courses. Teaching overall is good and classroom teaching very good especially when provided by the more experienced teachers in the department. All lessons are carefully prepared and well presented providing the right level of pace and challenge. Students feel very well supported by their teachers. They feel free to approach them when they are in difficulty and the teachers give freely of their time outside lessons.

205. The management of the sixth form still has shortcomings, however. To date, improvement has come about because the teachers are committed and skilful. Individual teachers have written their own schemes of work for the topics and areas they are personally covering. Standards are maintained by informal meetings and minimal checks or balances. There is no mechanism for planning improvements. In short, systems work well because the teachers are competent and effective. There are obvious risks inherent in working this way.

206. Experienced teachers have worked out that they are not assessing work frequently enough to examination standards or explaining to the students what they need to do to achieve higher examination grades. These thoughts have not been shared with the less experienced teachers. Although the administration is entrusted to a careful and effective teacher there is no designated head of sixth form mathematics. Hence team performance is strong but leadership is weak. Nevertheless the most important matters are being dealt with. Overall, the students are getting a good deal.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is good.

Strengths

- High quality teaching and working relationships result in very good learning.
- Regular assessment to national standards helps students to understand what is needed to achieve the best results and to secure good progress.
- A well organised course inspires students' curiosity and enthusiasm, leading to good learning.

Areas for improvement

- The advice offered to students when joining the course, and the support given to those who find the subject difficult should be improved so that all students experience success.
- Staffing difficulties which have seriously affected the ability of the school to provide for students' needs in the past are not yet fully resolved.
- Arrangements for using computers in day-to-day sixth form biology teaching are inadequate.
- Students' study skills should be further improved, especially in terms of taking notes.

207. When students join the sixth form, their experience and attainments in biology are slightly below average. Although some have achieved the highest grades in GCSE, more have attained grade C than is normal. The number of students who gained the highest grades, A and B, in the 2001 AS examination was in line with the national average, but almost a third of candidates failed to pass so that results overall were below average. Almost half the group dropped the subject at the end of Year 12, and the A level results in 2002 for those who continued were much better, with 61 per cent gaining grades A or B. The lowest grade awarded was D.

208. The number of students choosing to study biology in Year 12 has increased considerably since the school was opened two years ago, and in 2002 thirty-two took the AS examination. As in 2001, seven failed to gain at least a pass grade, though six gained the highest grades A and B.

209. Overall achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Many students make good or very good progress and achieve or exceed their predicted grades, but other results are disappointing. The school needs to consider as a matter of urgency how it can best advise and support those who join the course with low GCSE grades, or for whom biology is their only science.

210. Students' work seen in lessons is better than is indicated by these examination results and shows that they have quickly assimilated A level standards. Biological drawings are a strength. The strengths in both teaching and achievement were well illustrated in a practical lesson with Year 13 in which students prepared slides of the growing tips of onion shoots, identified the stages in mitosis on their prepared slides and produced biological drawings to add to their notes. The quality of the teacher's explanation and his enthusiasm inspired students to invest a high level of intellectual and practical effort into the task. The thrill of discovery when they found what they were looking for was considerable. All these factors combined to produce a lesson in which excellent learning took place, both in terms of the specific task being undertaken but also in terms of the broader understanding of what is important to biologists.

211. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. Teachers' subject knowledge and experience make a major contribution to the quality of learning, because the teacher is able to understand where students are coming from, to anticipate their difficulties and to explain ideas with a disarming simplicity that supports excellent understanding. In addition, teachers of A level biology are genuinely enthusiastic about their subject and share with their students in the excitement of discovery. These qualities support the most able students particularly well, by helping them to make the most of their lessons. Still more could be achieved, however, by making more use of independent learning activities at a high level. At present, teachers help those in difficulty individually and informally, often outside lessons. The support they give is very good, and much appreciated. But the experience of the two years since the school opened suggests that these students need more focused teaching which is specifically directed at their needs, to raise attainment and reduce the number of failure grades. The limitations in the learning by these students over the long term mean that although teaching lesson-by-lesson is very good, learning overall is only good.

212. It is true that there were considerable and insuperable problems in staffing and resourcing this area of the curriculum in the last academic year, with several laboratories out of use and teachers on long-term sick leave. The current Year 13 feel that they have suffered considerably as a result. Although these problems are largely solved, there is still no permanent head of department, and work sometimes has to be set for classes during lessons because of staff absence. Management of this situation is good, but not all students react responsibly to it and the school needs to address the situation robustly if all students are to reach their full potential.

213. Under the guidance of the acting head of science, good schemes of work make a significant contribution to the quality of students' learning, helping them to made good progress. A good understanding of the standards associated with the subject specifications for AS and A level are communicated well to other teachers. Routine administration is effective and data collected from tests and more formal examinations are well used. Despite the difficulties detailed above, overall leadership and management in the department are good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of the inspection was on design and technology.

Design and technology

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is satisfactory

Strengths

- Individual support and quality of interaction lead to good relationships between students and staff and a sense of security.
- Staff expertise in design and technology helps teachers to support students in developing their designs.
- Lesson planning provides a good focus and supports good learning.

Areas for improvement

- Target-setting procedures do not give students enough guidance about what they have to do in order to improve.
- The assessment of students' work is not linked closely enough to national standards.
- The use of ICT to support students' coursework is insufficiently developed.

214. Attainment in the 2001 AS and A level examinations was below average, though with small numbers of students, statistical comparisons should be treated with caution. Serious staffing difficulties over the last year, including long-term absence of key staff, are now largely resolved but the impact of this is not yet showing through. In 2002, only one student was entered and achieved A level Systems and Control. Four students were entered for design and technology at AS level. All passed but none at the higher level. Two students continued their studies into Year 13.

215. Students in Years 12 and 13 are normally taught as one group. Although this group works productively, discussions tend to be dominated by the Year 13 students. Year 12 students respond well to the different learning styles that both teachers provide, and are particularly pleased in having their opinions sought and valued. When students discussed their work on chair evaluation, for example, they showed a developing understanding of purpose and function when meeting the needs of people in their designs.

216. Year 13 students are working hard to improve the quality of early folder work. They are particularly strong during discussions but as yet lack the clarity of thought and depth of understanding to construct higher level analysis and synthesis. Focused teaching related to their final project is now beginning to help them to develop these skills. Teaching is becoming increasingly effective in identifying the areas in which students must improve, and good quality interaction is beginning to have a significant effect on achievement and learning. Folder work shows coherence in the design process, and aspects related to environmental and moral issues within manufacturing are particularly strong.

217. Students are given ample opportunities to develop communication skills. Teachers plan effectively to challenge all students within lessons, both informally and in whole group discussions. Most respond positively to this aspect of their work and show confidence. Good subject knowledge and general design understanding are developing. ICT skills are less secure with text and digital images the main focus within folders. Training in the use of ProDESKTOP software is being delivered but students are still at a low level of competence and confidence in its use. Computer-aided manufacture is as yet not being used.

218. Teaching is satisfactory. Relationships with students are good and students feel secure in being able to express their thoughts without ridicule. This confidence is crucial to helping students to learn independently and, although these skills are not yet well established, students are very positive about the approach being taken. Teachers expect a high level of technical language but at present students' terminology of Product Design is slow to develop. Students now have targets for the public examinations they will sit in June 2003 and work is regularly marked. However, they remain unaware of the areas they need to improve in the short and longer term to achieve their full potential. Teachers have high levels of expertise and use their skills well in the development of students' work. Experience in teaching the examination syllabus is less secure and there is still a need to continue with the recent training programme to ensure both teachers and students are fully prepared for the forthcoming examinations. Students are making progress in addressing the shortfall in their skills, knowledge and understanding. More formal teaching on occasions would maximise and speed up the learning of key concepts. The teaching of ICT skills is limited due to the continuing problems in running the ProDESKTOP software on the current server.

219. Management of sixth form work is satisfactory. The acting coordinator has a clear understanding of the need to be more accurate in assessing the needs and abilities of students in order to meet their full potential at both AS and A level. She has clearly identified that teachers require further training in the delivery of examination courses as a first step in

improving standards. A broader range of modern materials should be available to help students to respond to the challenges set by teachers in school, and society in general.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on business studies at advanced level.

Business studies

Overall the quality of provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers foster good student attitudes, interest and satisfaction with the course.
- Good relationships between students and teachers, result in productive learning.
- Sound, and sometimes good, teaching leads to good progress in relation to achievement in GCSE.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are not high enough.
- There is no fully equipped specialist base for sixth form studies.
- Students need more help in developing their study skills, and in making the best use of opportunities for independent learning.
- Teaching would benefit from using a wider range of teaching methods including more visual aids and case studies.
- Not enough use is made of local business links, and work-related learning.

220. The A level business studies course in Year 13 was inspected. There was no recruitment to the AS level course in 2002 which shows a declining profile for the subject, that is regrettable given national trends. Recent GCE A level average points scores have been below the national average as has the proportion of students achieving the higher grades, A and B. However, detailed comparisons with national figures are unreliable because of the small number of students. In 2001-2, the AS level course was taken by eighteen students of whom sixteen achieved a pass grade. Four of them attained the higher grades. Most students performed at least in line with expectations based on GCSE grades. Some exceeded expectation. The retention rate varies but in 2002 was better than the national average. Overall, achievement is satisfactory.

221. The standard of work seen in lessons is close to the national average, although a few students are working at lower levels. Achievement in relation to prior learning is satisfactory as many students start the course with slightly below average GCSE results. Motivation and quality of application varies, and students would benefit from an induction study skills course tailored to the needs of the subject. Topics taught are covered in very great detail. Students have good knowledge, but their understanding of theoretical concepts is often less secure. Course materials used are usually good, but students do not always make the best use of them, especially when asked to select material and apply it. Course units need to be more structured with an introduction and summary at the beginning and end of each unit so that students are clearer of what has been accomplished. Critical analysis is being progressively and well developed throughout the course. Students' best work shows good planning, sound judgements and analyses. However, few make links between the topics they have studied.

222. ICT is less well developed than in most business courses, partly because students do not have access to computers during lessons. This limits their ability to learn independently, and to gain confidence in their understanding.

223. Most students have a good attitude to their work, show real interest, and work conscientiously. Some, with limited background in the subject, persevere well to understand quite challenging concepts at the beginning of the Year 12 course. A few, less well motivated, students fail to prepare themselves well for lessons and assignments. However, the relaxed classroom relationships usually lead to very good, productive learning because students are not afraid to ask questions when they do not fully understand new work. Students enjoy the course, are very satisfied with it, and appreciate the commitment given by staff.

224. Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory and some good teaching was seen. In lessons, the teachers' good subject knowledge underpins presentation and discussion and lends clarity to the explanations provided. Work is well planned, with clear aims that are shared with students, but teachers should focus them more precisely on the knowledge, understanding and skills that will be learned during the lesson. The knowledge base of lessons is strong, but more case studies and examples within students' experience are needed to extend their understanding. Students are given opportunities to contribute to discussion and develop their ideas but they do not always respond well. They do not take enough responsibility for their own learning and rely too heavily on their teachers. Much teaching is didactic in form and, whilst sound in quality, it lacks variety. More visual material and a greater range of approaches are needed including the use of business links and work-related learning. The Year 12 Industry Day was a valuable source of enrichment for students.

225. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The department should produce a more detailed development plan that identifies the focus and priorities for the subject and supports more detailed course planning. Whilst assessment is generally satisfactory, teachers need to monitor students' coursework assignments more carefully in relation to performance targets. Accommodation is unsatisfactory as sixth form teaching is scattered across the school. The learning environment is unattractive with no storage space and limited teaching and learning aids. There are not enough textbooks. However, the lack of readily available ICT facilities for students for independent study and a fully equipped dedicated base for sixth form work is the greatest limitation as it adversely affects standards. Staff have a commitment to improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Students enjoy the subject and have a clear understanding of how they are going to use it when they have left school.
- There are many examples of work which is of a high standard.
- The number of students choosing the subject is increasing.
- An interactive A level programme designed by the coordinator is of a high standard.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of assignments are occasionally lowered by the lack of attention to detail by individual students.
- Some homework assignments do not reflect the rigour that advanced courses demand.
- Teaching is not monitored regularly.

226. Over the last two years the school has offered AVCE, AS and A2 courses in ICT. Some students study key skills ICT up to level 2.

227. The number of students taking A level or AVCE examinations in 2002 was small, making national comparisons inappropriate. However, all were successful, and several gained high grades. In 2002 all students passed their A2 modules. AS results, however, were less impressive with only a 50 per cent pass rate. This AS group included some students who had chosen an inappropriate course. Staff illness also disrupted the teaching in this curriculum area.

228. Students are allowed entry to the above courses with a minimum of five GCSEs at grade C. This may not be a sufficiently rigorous basis for entering students into AS/A2 courses. Overall, taking into account their GCSE results, students' achievement is satisfactory. Attainment of boys is seen to be higher than that of girls, but the courses have not been running long enough to say that a significant pattern is emerging.

229. In lessons, students' work is above average, and their achievement is good. Their portfolios and views about their courses support this. Students are confident about their understanding of relational databases. They are quick to pick up the processes in project management and tackle well the task of constructing a personal specification for a team leader, including both organisational and personal qualities. Standards of assignments are sometimes lowered by a lack of attention to detail. Students are keen to use their newly acquired skills and knowledge on a real life problem. They are pleased to have chosen ICT, and hope to use it in university courses such as information management and software engineering.

230. Overall, teaching is good, with some very good lessons. The teachers are very knowledgeable and have business experience upon which to draw. In a lesson on project management, the teacher asked very detailed questions to which students responded well. Students communicated using a wide range of ICT and business terminology in a perceptive and mature manner. The teachers' expectations are high and are normally met. Students

learn project planning procedures well and are challenged to visualise a business scenario into which their project might be embedded.

231. Homework answers show that students have researched a great deal about a required topic. However, some homework assignments do not reflect the rigour that AS/A2 courses demand. This is because many students have little prior knowledge of ICT. In order to save time in Year 12, an induction course in Year 11 might provide an effective remedy.

232. The acting coordinator of ICT leads the curriculum area well. He is very knowledgeable, is effective in his post, and has built good relationships both with students and with other teachers. He has supported an extended curriculum and is successfully raising standards. He has created a successful interactive learning program. The accommodation available is good, as are the resources. At present, there is no formal monitoring of teaching. This is an important point for development.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on physical education.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching, and relationships between teachers and students lead to very good learning.
- Students' have very positive attitudes towards physical education, which make them want to learn.
- Students gain good results in AS and A level examinations.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use is made of ICT in teaching.
- The absence of a dedicated area for teaching the subject and lack of immediate access to computers limits the opportunities students have for independent learning.

233. The results gained by students in AS and A2 courses are good, and above those seen in similar schools. All students passed their examinations in 2002. In AS, 70 per cent of the students achieved the higher grades, A or B, and 40 per cent gained these grades in A2.

234. The standards of work seen during the inspection indicate that students taking the AS and A2 courses are working at levels which are above the national average. In AS, students have a good understanding of more advanced anatomy and physiology, particularly relating to muscular and skeletal systems. Using this knowledge they can explain the basic biomechanics of movement. Students understand development of sporting activities, from mob games to rational recreation and the codification of games as rules were formulated. They know what is meant by *Corinthian spirit*, and the moral issues of fair play. As part of their coursework, students are in the early stages of planning personal exercise programmes.

235. Students make very good progress throughout the course as they increase their knowledge and understanding, and build on their GCSE work. Their very good achievement is evident in the quality and depth of their work in lessons and in their folders. Students taking

the A2 course achieve particularly well as they make use of their knowledge gained from their AS course work in the previous year.

236. In A2, students are studying role models, participation by ethnic minorities, and issues about racism in sport. They show maturity in their thinking and are able to come to well reasoned conclusions about these and other issues, giving examples of elite sportsmen and women.

237. Teaching is very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and give very clear explanations. These qualities help students to make significant progress in their understanding of the subject. Preparation and planning are extremely good and, coupled with the very good relationships between teachers and students, lead to very good learning. Lessons are relaxed but purposeful, and the tasks set really challenge students to think about issues. Students' work is accurately marked, making use of examination mark schemes. Marking is annotated so that students are given clear indications of how to improve.

238. Teachers have very good understanding of examination requirements and students' GCSE performance. They set realistic targets. They have a good variety of teaching styles, which maintain high levels of interest and motivation through to the end of two hour lessons. Students enjoy their AS/A2 lessons and value the course for its contribution to their career aspirations, for example in physiotherapy or sports science.

239. The subject is well led and managed. The curriculum is well planned and meets the requirements of the subject specification. Students are able to take part in recreational activities, and there are some interschool fixtures in soccer and hockey. Although the accommodation for practical aspects of the subject is good, there is no dedicated theory room, and the lack of computer equipment restricts opportunities for research and independent learning.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subjects were the focus of inspection in this curriculum area, but one lesson in AVCE health and social care was seen during the week. Teaching is very good. This is due to a very good balance of questioning and personal knowledge used very effectively to challenge students' understanding. Very good relationships and motivation lead to a secure environment where students can develop their thinking both verbally and in written form.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on art and design, but lessons were also sampled in drama, music and media studies. In a very good drama lesson, the students achieved well above average standards on the role of the chorus in Greek drama. The teaching was very good and enthusiastic: the students' response intelligent and imaginative, creating very strong audience impact. In media studies, very good, inspiring teaching involved students fully, challenging them to develop their critical skills and to articulate their opinions. In a very good music lesson, an excellent variety of activities using examples from the 17th to 20th century supported very good learning by highly committed students.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Teachers work as an extremely effective team, offering complementary skills that bring benefits to the quality of learning.
- The quality of leadership and management of the subject provides clear vision and the promotion of high expectations, which have a positive effect on students' achievement
- The attitude of students is very good, and contributes to their very good progress.

Areas for improvement

- There are limited opportunities for students to visit galleries: they would benefit from the introduction of artists in residence
- The use of art-related computer software to enhance learning is under-developed.

240. Art and design is offered to GCE AS and A-Level and to AVCE: double and single award.

241. The relatively small number of students in 2002 at GCE A Level and AVCE make accurate statistical analysis impossible. However they did well in both A Level and AVCE: all students passed the examination, and almost two-thirds gained the highest grades A and B. Standards have improved from 2001. The quality of work seen demonstrates that standards are continuing to improve and numbers of students are also rising. Achievement overall is good.

242. Students can solve problems and show good levels of independent learning as a result of very effective teaching. Their research skills are good to excellent and some sketchbooks are very impressive in the quality of the work being produced. Students are articulate and identify the stages in the development of their work. They have well-developed drawing and painting skills and appreciate scale, perspective and the work of significant artists and cultures.

243. Students in a Year 12 GCE AS level group develop individual work based on the use of a wide range of media and techniques, gaining in both expertise and appreciation. A joint group of AVCE students from Years 12 and 13 engage in a variety of activities. Year 12 students use a range of printing techniques. They improve their skills and understanding by experimenting with colour and technique. Year 13 students develop work based upon visual communication techniques, extending their research skills and investigating the work of a number of significant artists. Students use computers mainly for research using the internet, rather than creatively. Their creative work would benefit from more use of art-related software.

244. Teaching is very good. Lessons challenge students, and good planning gives them the opportunity to progress. Classes are very well organised and managed. Teachers know their subject very well, and share the teaching of the groups of students. The students respond well to the opportunities afforded to them. The relationships between the teachers and the students are often excellent, providing a pleasant atmosphere in lessons. Well-designed programmes of study provide a wide range of creative opportunities. They have a positive influence on the quality of learning and the progress made. All classrooms within the department contain very good displays relating to the work of significant artists and cultures. These help students to learn and appreciate the wider aspects of art and design education. Assessment is effective in recording students' attainment and progress and should be used more to influence future curriculum development and lesson planning. Work is assessed

periodically, usually on completion of a unit. Students are given individual advice on their progress. The quality of learning would be enhanced by the provision of outside visits and the opportunity to work with artists in residence.

245. The quality of leadership and management is very good. There is clear vision and very effective planning which promotes high standards in teaching. The teachers are well-qualified offering complementary skills and high levels of effective support to the students. Teachers meet regularly to discuss the achievements of the students and to plan appropriate course material. Accommodation is very good and has a positive influence on students' attitudes and the quality of learning.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on history, but lessons in sociology and psychology were seen, and work in geography was sampled. In a Year 12 sociology lesson about theories of the family, teaching was very good. Very clear explanations, highly interactive teaching, and challenging questioning stimulated students to invest a high level of effort and make very good progress. Students clearly respected their teacher; they were well motivated and very willing to offer tentative explanations of demanding ideas. Similar qualities characterised the Year 12 psychology lesson seen in which outstanding teaching motivated students very well, so that they answered very demanding questions with real insight.

In 2002 at both AS and A level four students took the examinations in geography. All passed with one achieving the higher grades. Standards of work in Year 13 are typical, but are better in Year 12. Critical analysis is good but students do not use case studies sufficiently to illustrate theory.

History

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

Strengths

- Students do well in relation to their GCSE grades in AS examinations.
- Teachers' knowledge and expertise helps them to plan activities which inspire students and help them to do their best.
- The department is well led and managed.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent, leading to very productive lessons.
- Students' research skills and independent learning are very good.

Areas for improvement

- More rigorous target-setting should be used to further students' progress and raise A level standards.
- The range of book resources should be increased to provide opportunities for wider reading.

246. Results in the 2001 A level examinations were in line with the national average. However, given the prior attainment of the students, this represented unsatisfactory achievement. In 2001 eight students sat the AS examination, no students achieved A or B grades but all gained a pass grade, A to E. In 2002 the A level standards and achievement were comparable to those of 2001 overall. However, more students reached the higher grades, with almost half gaining the higher grades, A or B. Nearly all passed the examination.

247. In the 2002 AS examinations, all passed with nearly half achieving the two top grades. As seven of the nine candidates reached or exceeded the level expected of them, this represents good achievement. Most students progress from Year 12 to Year 13 and numbers taking up the subject are constant. Written work and levels of understanding are above average, particularly in Year 12, and this suggests that the improvement seen in the 2002 AS examination is continuing. Year 12 students show a high level of maturity and insight in debating the relative merits of the different political parties in Germany in 1923, and Year 13 show strong skills in researching the Internet for material for their coursework presentations. They also demonstrate very good insight into the different forms of Fascist propaganda in Italy and careful preparation for PowerPoint presentations. Overall, students' achievement is good.

248. Teaching is now very good with some excellent features. Teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge and are strong and enthusiastic historians. As a result of these skills they are able to stimulate a high level of reflection and thought amongst the students who learn very well as a result. A highly effective historical debate was successful because of the very thorough research by the Year 12 students and because of the highly skilful intervention and support by the teacher. Teachers produce very good booklets which support students well, giving them confidence in their opinions and in their approach to learning. However, the range of history books available within the department is inadequate to enable them to read widely in the subject. Targets for improvement, particularly to reach the higher grades, need to be sharper and clearer. Currently all coursework is word-processed but not all essays are. This is a practice to be encouraged as it allows for further review and refinement of the arguments. Relationships between the students and the teachers are excellent and they underpin the recent improvements that have taken place. The students achieve well because of the very positive learning environment that has been established.

249. The head of department took up her post in September on a temporary contract and has made several improvements since then; as a result leadership and management of this curriculum area are good. The schemes of work for the new AS and A level courses have been revised, improved and strengthened and the students have bought new textbooks. Long term planning is good and the new specifications are under review. The two specialist teaching rooms are adequate but not fully supportive of sixth form study and discussion. Access to ICT is good and supports the research methodology of the students.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English language and literature. In addition, one lesson in each of French and Spanish was sampled. In both lessons students made good progress as a result of good teaching that promoted good learning.

English

The quality of provision in English is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are well above average in language and above average in literature.
- Teaching is very good.
- The students are very positive in their attitudes and have the highest possible opinions of the support and teaching they receive.
- Day to day marking is very good.
- The leadership and organisation of the course are very good, showing very strong teamwork and aspiration on the part of the teachers.

Areas for improvement

- There should be more focus on some aspects of the students' writing, such as the use of terminology, links between language and meaning, and a more precise writing style.

250. In the 2001 AS examinations, standards were above average in language and average in literature. In the 2002 AS language examination the proportion gaining grades A or B (nearly half) was similar to 2001. In literature the proportion gaining grades A or B improved to almost a third. All candidates in both subjects passed their examinations. In the 2002 A2 language examination all candidates passed, and two-thirds gained A or B grades. In literature all passed with nearly a third gaining grades A or B.

251. An analysis of the students' previous results suggests that achievement was good in the 2002 A2 language and literature examinations and in the 2002 AS language examination. It was satisfactory in the 2002 AS literature examination, reflecting some lack of continuity in teaching personnel during Year 12.

252. In work seen during the inspection the standards in the current Year 13 English language group are well above average and the students are achieving well in relation to their above average standards at the start of the course. In the current Year 13 literature group, standards are above average: good achievement given the group's average GCSE results.

253. English language students display a very secure knowledge and understanding of linguistic concepts, for example when analysing the potential impact of children's texts on a child's language acquisition. Their recall and usage of the subject's terminology are outstanding. They quickly observe the impact of tense changes, transitive and intransitive verb, the classification of semantic fields and examples of phonemic/graphemic correspondence. However, some students do not consistently demonstrate this secure application of linguistic terms in their written work. This prevents them achieving the very highest standards and some above average students achieving well above average standards. Some students also require more precision in the written style of their commentaries so as to avoid vague expressions such as 'fairly formal linguistically speaking'.

254. Similar comments about a relative lack of precision of expression apply to students in the Year 13 literature group. During an introductory lesson on Blake, the students displayed very impressive, secure knowledge of the texts they had only recently encountered. They

were particularly strong in relating contemporary historical events to Blake's themes. However, some do not do full justice to their potential in their written work, because they do not explicitly link the impact of an author's language to his/her intention and to our response. One student addressed this very powerfully when she conveyed and exemplified Shakespeare's 'metaphors and imagery to convey abhorrence and disgust' in an essay on *The Merchant of Venice*, but this was an exception. The students' thematic knowledge is good, as is their overall essay organisation.

255. Students in Year 12 have settled well and are making good progress in literature and language. A Year 12 literature lesson typified how effectively the teachers enhance the students' broader learning skills. Students made successful presentations in groups, using ICT packages on the historical backdrop to the literature of the First World War. Independent research is a primary feature of both courses, using books, journals and websites.

256. The students' attitudes are very positive. Their folders are well organised, they work hard and engage strongly in lessons. This confirms their highly positive views of the courses and their teachers. They revel in the opportunities for lively debate and discussion. They enjoy the high expectations made of them and speak with a passionate enthusiasm about the texts they have studied and those they have read voluntarily outside their studies.

257. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' own enthusiasm and love of their subject is quickly transmitted to students. Their specialist knowledge is a considerable strength and is reflected in the overall progress made by students in the production of extended assignments and their knowledge of texts and themes. Students are also kept well-informed about their strengths and targets by very full written comments. Each group includes a range of attainments and the well-structured opportunities for independent research enable the teachers to provide focused individual support. This was clearly evident when the students researched websites for information on Blake: the teacher's questions and suggestions varied subtly but relevantly depending on the abilities of the students she was advising. Teachers are embedding the use of the assessment objectives for different units of the course. Students find this helpful, but the criteria have not been made more accessible. More could be done to make the objectives explicit and to use them more frequently. Refining students' writing skills through better modelling and exemplification is a further development area which would help them to do justice to their knowledge and understanding.

258. The organisation of the provision is very good. Teachers collaborate well to produce rigorous schemes of work. Relationships between the teachers and students are excellent, resulting in lively, engaging lessons. The teachers monitor progress towards targets but this could have a more effective impact on students' goals and aspirations by establishing targets right from the start of the course. Both subjects are increasingly popular with large groups in Year 12, and most students successfully complete their course.