

INSPECTION REPORT

JOSEPH SWAN SCHOOL

Gateshead

LEA area: Gateshead

Unique reference number: 131048

Headteacher: Mrs J. Day

Reporting inspector: Mr B. Jones

18462

Dates of inspection: 9th – 13th September 2002

Inspection number: 249757

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:	Saltwell Road South Gateshead Tyne and Wear
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Pringle
Date of previous inspection:	May 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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18462	B Jones	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well are students taught? How well the school is led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9132	J Godfrey	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
1340	D Wigley	Team inspector	Music (Key Stages 3 & 4)	
22531	D Burbidge	Team inspector	Science Educational inclusion	
22695	R Cardinal	Team inspector	Business education (sixth form) Provision for students with special educational needs	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
1547	G Clarke	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (sixth form)	
12356	R Dickason	Team inspector	Biology (sixth form)	
11508	C Griffin	Team inspector	English	
20287	D Harris	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages (Key Stages 3 & 4)	
12985	S Jeffray	Team inspector	Physical education (Key Stages 3 & 4)	
22458	G McGinn	Team inspector	History	
31688	B McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design	
15678	J Radford	Team inspector	Religious education (Key Stages 3 & 4) Provision for students with English as an additional language	
2079	T Slack	Team inspector	Design and technology	
13623	J Waddington	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (Key Stages 3 & 4)	
30978	E White	Team inspector	Geography	
8341	W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Joseph Swan school is a larger than average mixed school in Gateshead with 1272 students on roll. There are 705 boys and 567 girls. The school has an average number in the sixth form. Students are drawn predominantly from the locality and the school is oversubscribed. The attainment of students on entry covers a wide range, but overall is well below average. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is 25 per cent, which is above average. Around three per cent of students are from ethnic minority families and eleven students have English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs, including students with statements, is above average. The school was granted specialist technology status in 2001 and is the designated school for disabled students.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school. The leadership and management of the headteacher, senior staff and the governors are good. The teaching is good and students in Years 7 to 9 achieve well from a level of attainment on entry that is well below average. The achievement of students in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. The school is well organised. Students develop positive attitudes towards their studies and they behave well. The school provides good value for money and the sixth form provision is cost effective.

What the school does well

- In Years 7 to 9 students make good progress and achieve well from levels of attainment that are well below average on entering the school. Students achieve particularly well in mathematics and science.
- The quality of teaching is good and leads to good learning.
- Very good leadership by the head teacher ensures a clear direction to the school's work in line with the school's aims.
- The good curriculum in Years 10 and 11 meets the needs of all students.
- There are very good systems in place to monitor students' progress and provide realistic and challenging targets.
- Good provision for students' personal and social development successfully promotes positive relationships and good behaviour.
- Excellent links with local schools, colleges and universities are used effectively to widen opportunities for students.

What could be improved

- The provision for religious education is unsatisfactory.
- Standards in modern languages in Years 10 and 11.
- The overall effectiveness of the school's links with parents and the quality of information about students' progress given to parents.
- The effective use of the library to support learning.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has shown good improvement since the previous inspection in May 1997. The trend in National Curriculum test results is above the national trend. In 2001, results in GCSE examinations were much higher than predicted when these students entered Year 7. The trend in GCSE results is broadly in line with the national trend. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. The school has responded effectively to the issues in the previous report. Attendance levels have risen and rates of exclusion have fallen. The school

has improved its development planning and has good capacity and commitment to improve further.

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
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	E	D	E	C
A-levels/AS-levels	N/A	N/A	D	

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

In the 2001 National Curriculum tests for Year 9 students, results were below average overall. Compared with similar schools, results were well above average. The average points score was average in mathematics and science and below average in English. The results represent good achievement for these students particularly in mathematics and science. The trend in results over time is above the national trend. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, results were well below the national average, but in line with the average for similar schools. The trend in results reflects the national trend. This group of students achieved well in relation to their starting points in Year 7. Targets were set for students in Year 9 and Year 11 that were realistic and challenging and were mainly achieved.

Standards in the work seen are average overall in Year 9. Students achieve very well in mathematics and science. Achievement is good in most other subjects. Students underachieve in religious education and the higher attainers do not achieve the standards they should in French. This group of students has clearly benefited from the early introduction into the school of the Key Stage 3 strategy, which has improved teaching and learning. In Year 11 standards are below average overall. This reflects satisfactory achievement from their standards on entering the school. The reason their achievement is not yet good is because students in Years 10 and 11 have experienced some disruption in the teaching they received over the past two years and, at this very early stage in the school year, have some catching up to do. Students achieve well in mathematics and science, and in information and communication technology (ICT), music and physical education. Students underachieve in religious education as do the higher attainers in modern languages. Standards in literacy and numeracy are broadly average. Students with special educational needs achieve well. Students identified as gifted and talented make good progress and students with English as an additional language achieve standards in common with their peers. There are no significant differences in the levels of achievement between boys and girls. GCE A-level results were below average overall. Students' achievement on these courses was satisfactory.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. The learning atmosphere in lessons is good as a result
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Students know right from wrong and behave well in and out of lessons. One permanent exclusion last year, which is well below average.
Personal development and relationships	Provision for students' personal development is good and relationships with each other and with their teachers are good.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and the learning that results are good in all subjects except ICT, modern languages and religious education and in English in Years 10 and 11, where they are satisfactory. There is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching, primarily by temporary staff. There is a significant amount of very good teaching and some excellent teaching was seen. This is an improvement since the last inspection and has led to improved levels of achievement among students. Overall, the teaching of literacy skills and numeracy skills is satisfactory, but the lack of a whole school approach to teaching numeracy is resulting in an unsatisfactory contribution from some subjects. The teaching of ICT is satisfactory, but needs to be managed more effectively. The impact of this good teaching is seen most clearly in the good levels of achievement by students in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is satisfactory, but recent staffing problems have left this group with some catching up to do in a number of subjects.

Teachers provide good role models and show commitment to the work they undertake. The quality of teachers' planning is good. Teachers have a good level of knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Class management techniques of teachers are good and they use the time in the lessons effectively to ensure good learning takes place. Teachers' expectations of students are kept appropriately high. This not only applies to students' behaviour and level of effort, but to the quality of their work. Teachers mainly use question and answer techniques well and the use of assessment is an improving area in the school, but needs to inform students more closely about how they can improve their work in order to reach targets set and so improve their learning. There are still some inconsistencies in the setting of homework and the frequency and depth of teachers' marking. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good. Gifted and talented students are taught well in most subjects and learn effectively and achieve well. These students need a greater challenge in modern languages, however. Students with English as an additional language receive good teaching and achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11, in common with their peers.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. It is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. In Years 10 and 11 it gives good opportunities for all students.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. These students achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11, in line with their peers.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	The school makes satisfactory provision for students with English as an additional language, and they achieve at the same rate as peers.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good overall. The ethos of the school is one where respect for the individual is promoted successfully, in line with the school's aims.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. There are very effective procedures for improving behaviour and attendance and for ensuring the safety of students.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Parents are satisfied with the school in general and make a positive contribution to their children's learning. The links with parents are unsatisfactory and reports need to be improved.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership to ensure a clear educational direction for the school's work. Key staff make an effective contribution to the running of the school and have good levels of commitment in pursuing continued improvement and raising standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school very well and fulfil an important role in moving the school forward.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. There are good systems and strategies to measure the effectiveness of initiatives in terms of their impact on raising standards.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Specific grants are used appropriately and planning takes full account of the budget in matching resources and priorities for improvement.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high expectations that the school has of their children. • Their children like school. • Parents find the school approachable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour of students, including bullying, and the use of discipline. • The use of homework. • The school does not work closely with parents. • A small range of extracurricular activities. • The high turnover of staff and the poor quality of supply staff.

The team found behaviour to be good and the use of discipline consistent and fair. Bullying is handled well when reported, but the school could improve awareness of bullying among older students. There is satisfactory use of homework. The school has experienced recent difficulties in staffing some subjects and some supply staff have been unsatisfactory, but staffing problems have now been resolved. The team found extracurricular activities to be good but not always well supported by students. Only a small number of parents are closely involved with the work of the school..

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has 104 students, which is below average size. There are more female students than male students in Year 12, and more male students than female students in Year 13. Some 50 per cent of the Year 11 students who gain appropriate GCSE qualifications are attracted to other educational establishments and the number currently on roll is below the predicted figure. The number of students from ethnic minority groups is low. There are no students on the register of special educational needs. The school sets a minimum requirement for admittance into the sixth form to embark upon AS and A2 courses, but administers the criteria with some flexibility. The retention rate between Years 12 and 13 is very high. The school admits students with a wider range of attainment than is usual and overall, the level of attainment is below average.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The school has an effective sixth form, which is cost effective and gives satisfactory value for money. Standards of attainment have not improved since the last inspection in academic subjects. Too many students started these specific courses with too low GCSE examination results. The school has tackled this problem and now provides a much wider range of vocational courses, including using successful partnerships with other colleges. There is now a very good curriculum of academic and vocational subjects, enhanced through close links with other education providers in Gateshead, and particularly through a partnership with Gateshead College. The overall quality of teaching is good, and students now make satisfactory progress in lessons, and achieve satisfactorily in GCE A-level courses and well on vocationally based courses. They have good, and in many cases, very good attitudes to their studies. The school has made a good level of improvement since the last inspection.

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall and promotes very positive attitudes among students and ensures that nearly all complete their courses.
- There is a wide choice of academic and vocational subjects that meet the needs and aspirations of the students.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.
- The post-16 enrichment programme is very effective in promoting students' social development.
- The care, guidance, and careers advice given to students is now good and effective in helping students to make appropriate choices.

What could be improved

- Standards in GCE A-level examinations need to be raised.
- The use of assessment and targets should inform students more closely about the progress they are making.
- The teaching of key skills.
- The development of students' independent learning skills.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Satisfactory. The quality of teaching is now good overall. However, there are too few opportunities for independent learning and assessment procedures are not rigorous enough. Students' achievement is satisfactory.
Biology	Satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory, but teachers sometimes lead lessons too dominantly and provide too few opportunities to students for independent learning. Their achievement is currently satisfactory.
Design and technology	Good. Good leadership and management of the department, together with good teaching generate positive attitudes in the students and they achieve well.
Business education	Satisfactory. The department is led and managed well. Teaching is good. Standards vary significantly in different years as the attainment on entry varies. Students' level of achievement is satisfactory.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. Teaching is good overall. Achievement in the new AVCE course is good. Standards in GCE A-level are well below average, but most students achieve satisfactorily and develop positive attitudes.
Art and design	Good. Teaching is good but target setting is sometimes unrealistic, and modern technology is insufficiently used. Students are encouraged to work independently and they are achieving satisfactorily.
History	Good. Stimulating and well-planned teaching results in good learning. Standards have improved, especially at GCE AS level, where enthusiastic students have achieved well.
Geography	Good. Teaching is good and students are attaining average standards. Currently, students' levels of achievement are good.
English	Satisfactory. English is a popular subject and the proportion of students successfully completing the course is very high. Teaching is good, and most students learn well. Achievement is satisfactory overall, but many achieve well.

Other work in the sixth form was sampled, and included lessons in music, chemistry and physical education. In all lessons, students made good progress in response to good teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The monitoring and support for students' academic and personal development are now good as a result of positive changes in the past year. Assessment needs to be used more effectively to keep students informed of the progress they are making. The school is now improving the guidance on to GCE A-level courses that it is giving to students, which has, in the past led to students following inappropriate courses. Students receive very good careers advice. The personal tutors closely monitor individual targets and they effectively monitor students' progress.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The governors and senior managers have recently strengthened the post-16 staffing and made new appointments to strengthen the leadership and management of this aspect of the school's work. The sixth form is led very well by a new assistant head, and is managed very well by the learning co-ordinator who knows the students well, and who takes a real interest in their futures. A thorough review has been successfully made of the provision of courses on offer. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively in line with the school's aims. A wide range of funding is successfully attracted and carefully used. The management of the sixth form budget is very good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They respect the staff who provide the leadership in the sixth form. • The good teacher/student relationships. • The teaching is good, and teachers have appropriate specialist knowledge. • They now have good access to computers for research. • There are good quality vocational courses. • They enjoy the "Challenge Activities" programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better accessibility to all courses being taught. • Greater consistency in the way target setting is used between departments. • More consistent staffing, because changes have affected the way their subjects have been taught to them, notably in art and design and English. • The expressive art subjects are undervalued in the school.

Efforts have been made to tackle the problems of accessibility to courses and students agree that the situation has improved. The school has thoroughly reviewed its target setting policy since last year and the system has been improved. There have been staff changes in some departments, and senior management has dealt with this in the most appropriate way. The inspection team agrees that the expressive arts do not have sufficiently high a profile. There is no appropriate space for drama or music presentations, and drama does not feature on the curriculum very prominently. The inspection team agrees with the positive comments made. The very high staying on rate from Year 12 to 13 is testimony to the students' satisfaction with the provision overall.

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

1. On entry to school, students' attainment is well below average overall. The results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were below the national average. The results were well above the average of schools deemed to be similar on the basis of the proportion of students entitled to free school meals. In 2001, Year 11 students' results in the GCSE examinations were well below the national average. They were average compared to similar schools. This group of students achieved well in relation to their starting points in Year 9. Their results were higher than predicted when their levels of attainment were assessed when they entered Year 7.

2. In the 2001 National Curriculum tests for Year 9 students, results were below average overall. Compared with similar schools, results were well above average. The proportion of students reaching level 5 and above was average in mathematics and science and well below average in English. The proportion reaching level 6 and above was average in science and below average in English and mathematics. The average points score was average in mathematics and science and below average in English. Overall, results were below average in these three core subjects. Compared with schools deemed similar on the basis of free school meals, results were well above average in mathematics and science and average in English. The results obtained by boys and girls are not significantly different overall. The results represent good achievement for this group of students particularly in mathematics and science. The trend in results over time is above the national trend.

3. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, the average points score per student was well below average. The trend in results is broadly in line with the national trend. When compared with examination results achieved in schools deemed similar, the results were average. This group of students made good progress, achieving good standards in relation to their prior attainment. Girls gained slightly better results than boys in line with the trend nationally. There were some variations in results at GCSE between subjects within the school. Students gained better results in English and combined science, double award. In some areas the results were significantly lower, including art and design, design and technology, French, Spanish, history, geography and ICT.

4. In the work seen in the inspection, students in Year 9 make good progress and achieve well in response to the good teaching they receive. Standards of work seen of students in Year 9 are average in English, mathematics and science. This marks good achievement in English and very good achievement in mathematics and science when account is taken of students' attainment on entering the school. In mathematics and science, this group of students benefited when the Key Stage 3 initiative was introduced in these subjects a year earlier. In English, standards in the current Year 9 are broadly average because students have made good progress in reading and writing notably as a result of the impact of the National Literacy Strategy. The levels of attainment of students when they enter the school vary in other subjects of the curriculum, but are below or well below average. The work of students in Year 9 is below average in design and technology, history, French, and religious education. In all other subjects standards are broadly average. These standards reflect students' good levels of achievement through Years 7 to 9. Only in religious education is achievement unsatisfactory because students do not achieve the standards they are capable of across the full programmes of study. This is primarily the result of too little time available, allied to a recent history of staffing difficulties. In modern

languages, the higher attainers are not sufficiently challenged and do not achieve as well as they should.

5. In the work seen in the inspection, students' levels of attainment in Year 11 are below average overall. Students achieve satisfactorily overall. This is in response to good teaching. The reason their achievement is not yet good is because students in Years 10 and 11 have experienced some disruption in the teaching they received over the past two years and, at this very early stage in the school year, have some catching up to do. Standards are well below average in modern languages and below average in English, design and technology, history, geography and religious education. In mathematics and science, standards are broadly average. In the other areas of the curriculum, standards of work seen are average. Only in religious education is achievement judged to be unsatisfactory, primarily as a result of a recent history of staffing difficulties. In modern languages the higher attaining students do not achieve as well as they should. Students achieve well in mathematics and science and in ICT, music and physical education. In all other subjects, including English, students achieve satisfactorily. Overall there are no significant differences in performances between boys and girls throughout the Years 7 to 9. In the GCSE examinations, differences in performance have been broadly in line with differences nationally.

6. Students with special educational needs make good progress overall. The overall provision is better than at the previous inspection and the teaching they receive is good. In Years 7 to 9 they make very good progress in mathematics and science and good progress in English. Their progress in all other subjects is good, in common with their peers other than in religious education where it is unsatisfactory. A similar pattern is found in Years 10 and 11, with more satisfactory than good progress in individual subjects than in Years 7 to 9. Of the 15 students on the special needs register last year who gained GCSE grades in English, mathematics and science, eight exceeded their target grades and three met their target grades.

7. The school has recently identified students in each year who are the highest attainers and/or have specific talents, for example in music or sport. The school is developing its policy and its practices to ensure that these gifted and talented students are catered for and are stretched and challenged. The systems are developing well and these students generally receive good provision that extends and enhances their curriculum. This is an area of developing strength and these students make good progress and achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. There is still room for further improvement so that higher attainers are more routinely stretched in French and English for example.

8. There is a small proportion of students of different ethnic background. Within this group there are 13 students whose English is at an early stage of acquisition. The attainment of students with English as an additional language in 2001 was well below average on entry to the school. Students with English as an additional language achieve well when account is taken of their starting point on entry to the school, and they progress at the same rate as other groups of students. This is because most of the students currently in the school are proficient enough in English to be able to understand the language and express themselves at least appropriately. The school analyses test and examination results, including by ethnic background. The analyses of results in English, mathematics and science show that students with English as an additional language often exceed their teachers' expectations.

9. Standards of literacy are generally well below average when students enter the school, particularly writing skills. In Year 9 they are broadly average. The main weaknesses are in writing accurately although there are also some shortcomings in speaking extensively and with clarity. Year 7 students spoke well in a religious education lesson as a result of the teacher's high expectations when the students reported back to the class. However, in many English lessons replies tended to be short. Students tend to expand their answers only when the teachers have used rigorous and probing questioning. As a result of good English teaching writing standards improve. Although many students continue to make errors in spelling and punctuation they make good progress in writing extended and well-organised essays. However, there is not enough explicit attention given to improving the clarity of students' writing across a number of subjects. During Years 10-11 students make good progress in reading, for example, in English they give informed opinions about a range of texts and support them by referring to quotations and other evidence from the text.

10. The standard of numeracy is average. For example, in science all students demonstrate satisfactory use of scale and measurement. In design and technology students are able to measure

lengths and weights accurately in practical work. In geography, students have a satisfactory understanding of the use of coordinates in map work. Despite well below average levels of prior attainment on entry to the school, students achieve well, matching national expectations by the age of 14.

11. The school set targets for the 2001 Year 9 students taking National Curriculum tests and for students in Year 11 taking GCSE examinations. In both cases the targets were realistic and challenging and based on good quality information about their attainment levels and the progress they were making. Year 9 students exceeded their targets in mathematics and science, but did not reach the targets set in English. The target set for the proportion of Year 11 students gaining five or more grades A*-C was just exceeded. The target average points score and the target for the proportion of students gaining one or more grades A*-G were not quite reached.

Sixth form

12. The results in the 2001 examinations at A-level were below the national average when compared to all maintained schools as measured by the average points score obtained. There has been a gradual rise in students' average points score over the past three years. In GCE A-level examinations, female students performed marginally better than males. Retention rates are high and the large majority of students completed their courses, for example, all but two of the students who completed their Year 12 studies went on to join Year 13.

13. In the 2001 A-level examinations, results were well above average in biology and average in other sciences. Results were below average in English and geography and well below average in business studies and information technology. In mathematics, results were very low. Many of the students who took these A-level courses started with below average attainment and some were well below. As a result, they found difficulty in meeting the demands of the course. Students achieved well in the science areas and when account is taken of their prior attainment, the majority achieved satisfactorily in other subjects.

14. In 2001, students took examinations for the first time in the new course leading to the GCE advanced subsidiary award (GCE AS-level). In a number of subjects the numbers entered were too small for valid comparisons to be made with national data. The targets set for this group were mainly met. In business studies, results were above average. They were broadly in line with the average in geography and design and technology, and well below average in the sciences, English, art and design and computer studies. Subject-specific comparisons reflect the way in which the results change as each group of students taking the courses changes. While the school operates a policy of selection for GCE A-level courses, the criteria have been used more flexibly in the recent past in an attempt to encourage students to continue their studies. As the curriculum has broadened, so there are now much greater opportunities for students to follow courses that are more appropriate for their level of attainment. In 2001, students who took post-16 vocational course examinations achieved an average points score above the national average. Vocational courses in the sixth form are well suited to the needs and aspirations of sixth form students.

15. The inspection took place in the first full week of term when very few vocational courses or evidence of course work were available for inspection. Thus, the focus was on GCE A-level courses. There are less students following GCE A-level courses than in the past. In the work seen in the inspection, attainment is now higher than GCE A-level results in 2001 in English and mathematics, although they are still below average. Students' attainment is also higher in history, geography and art and design, but here standards are broadly average. Average standards have been maintained in design and technology. In biology and business studies, standards are below average, but the prior attainments of the groups of students are so different that valid comparisons cannot be made. In all of these subjects, the achievement of current students is satisfactory when account is taken of their starting points at the end of Year 11, and in history and geography, students achieve well. There are no sixth form students on the school's register of special educational needs. Standards of attainment have not improved since the last inspection in academic subjects. Too many students have started these specific courses with too low GCSE examination results, and too many were directed on to inappropriate courses. The school is tackling this problem by providing a much wider range of vocational courses through many different means, including successful partnerships with other schools and colleges. The students who are currently taking courses in information technology

illustrate clearly the benefit of the wider selection of courses available. Results in GCE A-level computer studies have been well below average in the past and students' levels of achievement were below what was expected. The students now following vocationally-based courses in information technology are finding success, achieving satisfactorily, and many are achieving well.

Key skills

16. The school offers a course in key skills, but there has been insufficient demand to run the course in the past two years. However, the provision for the development of students' key skills through their work in subjects is satisfactory and in work seen in subjects, key skills standards were average overall. Working with others was a particular strength in biology, ICT, art and design, geography and history. The students' development and use of study skills is good in English, art and design, geography and history. Oral communication skills are well developed in English and history particularly. Students' use of ICT is focused mostly upon the use of the Internet for homework assignments except in English and the taught ICT course, where skills in word processing and presentations using graphics software are evident. Inadequate numeracy skills lead to below average standards of application of number and problem solving in business studies. Standards in the key skills of communication, ICT, study skills and problem solving are notably below average in biology. The need now is for the school to review its procedures to monitor the teaching and standards of key skills, building on the profiling and monitoring it has developed for students' achievement in subject areas.

17. The application of number is average overall. Standards are above average in mathematics, and as expected in most other subjects except business studies where a significant proportion of students do not have a sufficiently good facility with number to apply it in the context of the subject. In art and design, and in design and technology, appropriate use is made of reading and drawing to scale, measuring and cutting precisely. In geography, students interpret tables and graphs with acceptable accuracy.

18. Students' skills in communication are average. Discussion opportunities occur in most subjects. In general discussion, students are reticent. Where they develop confidence, for example making presentations and conducting interviews in history and English, and in feeding back to the class the outcomes of group work in history, they are articulate and clear. They write with good accuracy and clarity, particularly in English and ICT subjects where skills of drafting and redrafting are encouraged successfully.

19. Students demonstrate average competence in ICT. In almost every subject, students use the Internet extensively for homework. There are differences between the more developed skills shown by students who have followed formal courses in the subject in Years 10 and 11, and those who did not. Students are able to produce at least basic word-processed documents to support their work across the range of subjects, particularly in English and ICT, where redrafting and presentational skills are encouraged and improved. Very limited use is made of ICT to enhance work in art and design, and in biology.

20. Students work well with others as a result of encouragement in all subjects and this is the best developed of the key skills. Group working in history, biology, ICT, art and design, geography and history is strongly promoted. In turn students exhibit positive attitudes in their relationships towards each other, which are evident in the way they work cooperatively. There are examples of collaborative work, for example in ICT where teamwork is now actively encouraged, but students' ability to share tasks and to discuss the outcomes in a coordinated way requires further development.

21. Students display average study skills overall. They have good study skills in English, art and design, geography and history. Their research skills are well developed in English and history where they show a good facility for selecting appropriate information from text and the Internet. Students are strongly encouraged to research information from the Internet in support of much of their work in ICT, and for homework assignments more widely. Many demonstrate good skills in searching the network, but a significant minority has some difficulty in discriminating relevant information from the quantity available.

22. Students have limited opportunities to develop true problem solving skills. Those studying mathematics and history are encouraged to learn through problem solving approaches, where standards are good. However, problem-solving skills are under-developed elsewhere; for example opportunities are missed in biology, where students have insufficient experience.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

23. Students have good attitudes to learning. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Personal development is good and attendance is broadly in line with the national average. A small number of parents expressed concern about behaviour but inspectors found the behaviour of the vast majority of students to be good. Most parents agreed that their children like school.

24. In lessons, students have good attitudes and this has a positive impact on learning. Students are attentive and usually respond well to teachers' questions although many are reticent in promoting themselves. Students usually work quietly, but have a high dependence on teachers' input and do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning. They concentrate well and persevere with their work. Attitudes are unsatisfactory in only a small number of lessons where there has been a history of frequent changes of teacher, such as in personal, health, social and religious education. In nearly a third of lessons attitudes are very good. Students particularly enjoy design and technology where they are highly motivated and becoming increasingly confident. Students in The Award Scheme Development and Assessment Network group are gaining confidence. They contributed enthusiastically to a discussion about the influence of the diet industry on body image. Students with English as an additional language have good attitudes to the school. They concentrate and respond well in lessons, and usually have good relationships with their teachers. Students with special educational needs show good attitudes overall and learn well, particularly where they receive additional support.

25. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is usually good and often very good. In the last reporting year, there were 108 fixed term exclusions, mostly boys. This is broadly in line with national

figures for this size of school. There was only one permanent exclusion last year, which is well below average. Students identified with behavioural difficulties are given good support to help them learn effectively. Students withdrawn from lessons receive good support in the Learning Support Unit and behave well there. Students behave well at break times and can be trusted around the school with minimum supervision. They know how to behave well and are polite to visitors. Students take good care of resources and equipment and have good respect for their school environment, although some litter is strewn around the school each day.

26. Relationships across the school are good and contribute positively to students' learning. At this early stage in the term, teachers have not yet had time to establish the excellent relationships that existed at the last inspection. Students form good and constructive relationships with each other and with their teachers. They have very good relationships with their form tutors who stay with them through the school. Tutors get to know students well and give a very good degree of support and guidance for both academic progress and personal development. Students cooperate well in mixed pairs and groups and share resources well. They are learning to listen sympathetically to each other and respect each other's feelings, values and beliefs. Students mix well socially across age, race and ability groups. Students in Year 9 appreciate the support given to them by sixth formers. There is some bullying but no reported racism in school. When reported, incidents are usually dealt with quickly and effectively.

27. Students' personal development is good. They enjoy the opportunities they have to show initiative and take responsibility. Spiritual development is satisfactory and students are beginning to appreciate their role in society. Students showed good respect by observing a strict two minutes silence across the school in honour of the victims of the 11th September Twin Towers tragedy in New York. Elections for the year and school councils have not taken place yet this year, but last year elected members undertook their duties responsibly and made a positive contribution to the school community.

28. Students of all ages participate well in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. This contributes positively to personal development. Students' aspirations are raised by a good variety of visits to universities for science lectures and an insight into university life. The uptake of the Year 8 residential visit to an outdoor pursuits centre was low last year, but those who went valued the experience. Participation in residential visits is limited by financial constraints. The very good involvement by older students in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme has a very good impact on personal development.

29. Attendance in 2001/2 was broadly in line with the national average. It has improved both since the last inspection when it was poor and the previous school year, when it was below the national average. This is a direct result of the numerous strategies that have been successfully introduced by the school. Truancy and authorised absence are broadly in line with national averages. Attendance is satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9, but declines in Years 10 and 11. A significant proportion of the absence is due to holidays taken during term time

and poor attendance by small number of students. Punctuality of students to school and to lessons is usually good and lessons start promptly.

Sixth form

30. Students in the sixth form have very good attitudes towards study and this has a good impact on their learning. Their behaviour and personal development are very good. Students are keen to learn and well motivated. They nearly all complete their courses. When they start in the sixth form they need a high level of support from their teachers and confidence and independence grow as they go through the sixth form. The very good relationships that exist between one another and with staff are constructive and supportive. They have a good level of respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others and work well together. They are developing into mature and responsible adults. Students in the New Track group were attending a school induction course and were not observed during inspection.

31. Students are developing a good sense of citizenship. They play an important role in the school community through leading the school council and in 'challenge activities'. In response to a survey of students, the role of the post-16 management committee is being redefined so that it is more effective. A good number of sixth formers participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Students support younger students well in the school and in the wider community in a good variety of ways and are good role models. Some are trained to offer a peer counselling service that is valued by younger students. Others help by listening to readers, as librarians or supporting computer work. Several students take part in community service outside the school, for example by helping primary schools set up their own web sites, coaching football and listening to primary school children read. A number of art and design students worked with primary school children to produce the banners for the school's "Street" corridor. The chairman of the school council is an excellent ambassador for the school. Last year he chaired the Gateshead Youth Assembly and was rewarded with the Princess of Wales Memorial Award for citizenship.

32. Attendance is satisfactory overall. It is good for most students, but attendance of the New Track group is poor. This is partly due to the difficulty of registering these students who are educated at school for part of the week and partly because they are less enthusiastic about coming to school. Students are developing a satisfactory degree of independence and the vast majority have sound skills to enable them to continue their learning in adult life.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

33. The quality of teaching is good. In nearly two out of three lessons, teaching is good and there was some excellent teaching in a few lessons. Three lessons were unsatisfactory and one was poor in the main school. The impact made by the good teaching is seen in the levels of achievement among students, particularly in Years 7 to 9, and the good quality learning that is taking place. The overall quality of teaching is better in Years 7 to 9 where there is a greater proportion of very good teaching. Only in religious education are students judged not to be achieving well enough. In this case, students' achievement has been adversely affected by recent unsatisfactory teaching. This issue has been successfully tackled and teaching is now satisfactory overall.

34. In Years 7 to 9, the quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in all but three lessons observed, good or better in the majority of lessons and very good in around two lessons in five. Excellent teaching was seen in one lesson. Teaching is good in English, mathematics and in science. In most other subjects the overall quality is good. It is satisfactory in ICT, modern languages and religious education. The preponderance of good and better teaching ensures good learning. As a result, students achieve well through these years and very well in mathematics and science. In these two subjects, the school's early participation in the Key Stage 3 initiative has been beneficial and there is a greater consistency of good learning taking place as teachers adopt an effective common approach to their teaching methods.

35. The overall quality of teaching in Years 10 and 11 is also good, but there is a smaller proportion of very good teaching. In one lesson, teaching was unsatisfactory. Excellent teaching was seen in one lesson. Students receive satisfactory teaching in English and good teaching in mathematics and science. Teaching is good in most other subjects and satisfactory in geography, ICT, modern

languages and religious education. Students' learning is now good in Years 10 and 11. At the very early point in the school year when the inspection took place, the overall achievement of students is judged to be satisfactory, in spite of the good teaching that was observed. This is because students in Years 10 and 11 suffered as a result of staffing difficulties in the last two years. This resulted in poor progress and some disaffection. In all but religious education, these issues have been resolved. In the lessons observed, students were seen to be making clear progress in response to the good teaching, but many have some way to go in order to make up ground they lost in earlier years.

36. The highest attainers and those students identified as gifted and talented receive good teaching and achieve well. The school is currently using Excellence in Cities funding effectively to improve the teaching these students receive. The impact of this work has not reached all subjects. In French, for example, the highest attainers are not sufficiently challenged. Similarly, there has been a greater impact with younger students as the initiatives have worked in harness with the Key Stage 3 initiative to improve learning generally. Well formulated plans are in place to ensure that the classroom teaching received by these more able students takes more account of their particular needs and promotes their learning in the specific areas of their gifts and talents.

37. Students with special educational needs receive good teaching overall, both in the normal classroom lessons and when they are withdrawn from lessons to receive specific, targeted teaching. Learning is good in withdrawal work. A Year 11 student made good gains in speaking and listening skills in French. The lesson was well planned with a series of "small steps" that enabled the student to achieve at each stage and thereby gain confidence for further learning. This approach also resulted in good learning in a whole class French lesson in Year 10. ICT was well used in literacy withdrawal work seen, with students making good gains in reading skills through using a voice activated electronic library program. Support staff are used well in the majority of the lessons where they are deployed and are very effective. In a minority of lessons they are under-used, when they are not sufficiently involved in planning the activities for targeted students. In some lessons seen, very good classroom management was a key feature in enhancing students' learning. In a Year 11 science lesson students were constantly challenged to do better. The encouragement given in turn maintained students' interest and productivity, and learning about food chains was excellent.

38. Students with English as an additional language generally receive good teaching, in common with their peers. The overall teaching provision is satisfactory. This is because until this term, students with a very limited command of English have been withdrawn from some classroom lessons for small group teaching by specialist staff from the local education authority service, and subject departments have not taken responsibility for teaching language skills. Consequently, teachers have not been fully aware of the needs of some of their students. However, the school is now moving to a method of teaching where there is a joint lesson planning by subject teachers and specialist staff, and students receive active specialist support in the classroom. There is a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to improve the performance of all students and reduce any inequalities.

39. Teachers provide good role models for students. They have a good level of knowledge and understanding of their subjects. This is used to good effect to respond to students' differing needs as they arise. The quality of teachers' lesson planning is good throughout the school. In the most effective lessons, particularly in Years 7 to 9, the teachers' detailed planning ensures that students are clear about what they need to do and this leads to good learning. In a top ability group of Year 9 students taking a mathematics lesson dealing with Pythagoras' theorem, the teacher prepared well, demonstrated good subject knowledge and very good methodology. As a result, students knew precisely what was expected of them and they applied themselves well to the tasks set. Their enthusiasm and interest were fully exploited, they learned very well and made very good progress.

40. Teachers' class management techniques are generally good. Teachers use the time in the lessons effectively to ensure good pace to lessons so that good learning takes place. For example, in a Year 7 history lesson on the topic of England in 1066, the students were challenged by the high pace and the teachers' high expectations of what they could achieve. The impact was seen in the very good progress made in the course of the lesson and the real gains made by students in their knowledge and understanding. Their response was very good and they demonstrated very positive attitudes and very good behaviour as they were captivated by the approach and stimulated by the learning materials used.

41. In the best lessons, teachers use methods that are appropriate to the needs of students in order to focus on how students learn and to improve their ability to learn for themselves. In a Year 11 science lesson with a low attaining group, the students made excellent progress. This applied not only to developing their knowledge about food chains, but in their taking responsibility for the pace and amount of learning they experienced. The teacher's very good class management techniques, allied to good planning, enthusiasm and high expectations ensured real impact with a potentially difficult class. This approach needs to be extended because teachers use a restricted variety of teaching methods and do not always give students enough opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

42. Teachers are effective in ensuring that students behave well. They are helped by the positive approach of students so that behaviour is often very good and sometimes exemplary. The relationships that teachers engender with students and between students also helps to ensure classes where students expect to work hard and enjoy their work and they learn well. Where there is unsatisfactory teaching, it is clearly linked to inappropriate lesson material and teaching that is undemanding in its level of challenge, rather than poor behaviour by students. There was very little unsatisfactory teaching by the permanent teachers in the school. Where it occurred and in some of the pedestrian teaching that was satisfactory rather than good, students' learning was slowed by lack of pace and too little attention being given to the amount of progress students made in the course of the lesson.

43. Teachers' expectations of students are usually kept appropriately high. This not only applies to their behaviour and level of effort, but to the quality of their work. In the most effective lessons, teachers use question and answer techniques very well to ensure quality, to assess the progress being made during the lesson and to keep all students involved. In a Year 11 Spanish lesson, there was no hiding place for students as the teacher framed questions appropriate to the wide range of attainment present and took up the answers given as a platform for further questions. Some very good learning resulted.

44. The use of assessment is an improving area in the school. Increasingly, targets are set to help students stay on course and give them a point of progress to aim for. However, teachers do not always use assessment well enough to set short-term targets to guide students' progress towards the longer term targets. In the best practice, students' work is marked thoroughly and to a pattern that all teachers in a department use and students know. As a result, students know clearly where they are and what they need to do to improve further. Overall, this aspect of teachers' work is currently satisfactory, but some very good practice does exist, for example in history. The setting of homework is satisfactory overall. There is some good practice across a number of subjects where homework is set regularly and to a timetable to extend the work of the classroom, but inconsistencies still occur in a number of subjects.

45. There is no whole school policy to guide the teaching of literacy skills. However, the school has provided a range of training opportunities for teachers as a result of its involvement in the National Strategy for Key Stage 3 and this has led to effective attention to the development of key subject vocabulary across all subjects. The development of a systematic approach to teaching reading skills has some strengths, but is less effective than the provision for teaching key terms. There is no consistent, systematic teaching of writing skills across all subjects and the development of writing lacks the consistency and cohesion noted in the development of vocabulary. The current inadequate library stock of books does not encourage sufficiently students' development of literacy skills.

46. The lack of a whole school policy for numeracy across the curriculum is resulting in an unsatisfactory contribution being made by some subjects other than mathematics to teaching students' numeracy skills. However, the teaching of these skills is good in mathematics and standards in numeracy are average, which represents good achievement when account is taken of the well below average standards on entry to the school.

47. The teaching of the key skills of ICT in other subjects is very good in science, good in mathematics and satisfactory in English. There has been considerable investment in staff development for ICT. This has not yet had a significant impact on the contribution made by some subject areas because there has not been a rigorous, formal review of such provision.

48. The school has improved its teaching since the previous inspection and there is now a greater proportion of good and very good teaching and significantly less unsatisfactory teaching. As a result, the quality of learning is now good. The work undertaken by the headteacher, and governors and senior staff to consolidate performance management in the school is having a clear impact and is further improved by the monitoring of teaching within departments, which is more rigorous and systematic in its approach. There is a clear indication of good capacity to improve the quality of teaching further and the school is making good headway in ensuring that students' learning experiences are improved by widening the approaches taken by teachers.

Sixth form

49. Teaching and learning in the sixth form is overall of a good quality. In over three quarters of the lessons observed, in the subjects focused upon there was good teaching. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. There are no students in the sixth form on the register of special educational needs. The highest attainers and those identified as gifted and talented make satisfactory progress. Students with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress in line with their peers. The progress made by male and female students is not significantly different.

50. Teachers demonstrate very good specialist subject knowledge. Lessons are very well prepared, and good provision is made for higher and lower attaining students, ensuring their satisfactory progress. Question and answer sessions are used skilfully in order to produce good quality class debate. Students are frequently given imaginative and challenging tasks to complete, and teachers have high expectations of them. Concepts are reinforced, and this leads to good learning. In a number of subjects, teachers encourage students to be creative, and they raise their intellectual curiosity. In subjects such as art and design, students have acquired the capacity to think for themselves, and they have a high degree of independence. In the best lessons in art and design, teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons with a clear structure that focuses on building up students' knowledge and understanding and leads them on to extend this process to studying independently. In too many other subjects, teachers use too narrow a range of teaching strategies and do not give students enough opportunities to research and learn for themselves. As a result, the highest attainers in particular are not consistently challenged. There is some good practice, for example in history, and such practice needs to be more widely disseminated.

51. Teachers have very good relationships with their students and this enables them to demand and challenge. These very good relationships that exist, allied to the very positive attitudes shown by students, result in classrooms where there is a good climate for learning. Teachers use procedures for assessing students' attainment that are satisfactory overall, but there is some very good practice, for example in history. Systems and strategies have been put into place to raise standards of teaching further by providing students with well-informed intermediate targets and projections of the grades they are capable of attaining. This is an area of developing strength in the teaching of sixth form students and the effective use of data to inform the process has just started. This will help students understand more fully where they are at present in relation to the course demands and what they need to do to improve further.

52. There was little vocational education work taking place during the inspection as these students were involved in induction courses. As a result, the sixth form inspection focused upon GCE A-level work. There is still a legacy in the school of a minority of students working through GCE A-level courses because they wanted to continue their education at the school, but could not follow suitable vocational subjects. The impact of this legacy is seen in the good quality teaching resulting in satisfactory, rather than good, achievement by students. This is because there are students who embarked upon the A-level courses whose attainment at the end of Year 11 was comparatively low and they struggle to achieve well in relation to the course demands. In the past year, the new management of the sixth form has tackled this issue and both the courses available and the quality of advice and guidance have now improved significantly.

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

53. The quality and range of the curriculum are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The time allocated to the curriculum meets recommendations. The school has taken positive steps to rectify issues raised at the last inspection including not fully meeting legal requirements for some subjects and where provision in some subjects was too narrow. A new curriculum has been fully implemented since the last inspection. The introduction of citizenship into the curriculum remains at a very early stage of development. The school still does not meet the statutory requirement relating to the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

54. The curriculum provided for students in Years 7 to 9 includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education and personal, social and health education. The curriculum is enhanced by the provision of ICT as a separate subject and by the extra time available for English. The implementation of both the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies is good. The breadth of the history curriculum is enhanced by good provision for the study of local history. There is no opportunity to study a second foreign language or drama as a separate subject. The art and design curriculum remains rather narrow as at the last inspection. There is insufficient time available for religious education to cover the syllabus in depth. In physical education there is insufficient provision for girls' team games and for athletics. In some cases French lessons are not evenly distributed in the two-week timetable and this has an adverse impact in terms of the students' continuity of experience.

55. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides a good range of courses and opportunities for all students to broaden their experiences. National Curriculum requirements are met. The time allocation for religious education is again insufficient and in physical education there is again insufficient provision for girls' team games and for athletics. The core curriculum includes a GNVQ course in ICT, in contrast to the very limited provision at the time of the last inspection. Optional subjects available give students a good degree of added breadth with, for example, the opportunity to study both "new" subjects such as business studies and more traditional subjects such as history and geography. The opportunity to study a GNVQ course in health and social care gives added breadth. The choice available has been further enhanced by the provision of a work related programme. This provides a very good alternative curriculum for some students to the two option subjects on offer. The course includes school-based modules where there is a strong emphasis on the development of life skills and school taster courses to experience different vocational areas. In addition, the school makes very good provision for individual students who follow more extended off-site courses. The Learning Routes Centre provides very good support by providing individual programmes for students encountering problems that affect their learning.

56. There is a good provision of extracurricular activities to enrich the curriculum. There is a wider range of activities than at the time of the last inspection. The school faces some constraints to participation at lunchtime and after school, with a 45-minute lunch break and a high proportion of students having to travel by bus at the end of the day. A later bus has been provided to encourage participation in after school activities. Extra-curricular sport is particularly strong with about one third of the school population participating over a school year and with over a quarter of the teaching staff involved. There is a good range of clubs and the school enters a wide range of teams for competitions including athletics, cross country, swimming, basketball, cricket, netball and rugby soccer. The provision overall is enhanced by other club activities including drama, languages, modelling, and ICT. There is a wide range of lunchtime club activities in music. Study support is a strong feature of the provision and includes formally arranged "booster" sessions in mathematics and English, a homework club and an "open door" policy in modern languages with individuals encouraged to visit after school for speaking tuition. The learning resource centre is open from eight a.m. throughout the school until four p.m. All students have the opportunity to take part in a residential visit in Year 8. Other organised activities include regular skiing trips, a long-established Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, and a variety of curriculum area visits including theatres and art galleries. Some visits and school-based activities are designed to provide extra opportunities for gifted and talented students, for example in science, technology and geography. There is a wide range of provision in history with visits to different historical sites.

57. The school is committed to promoting equal opportunities for all and provision is good. The school meets statutory requirements for equal opportunities in its provision for both staff and students. The ethos of the school, related to equal opportunity, ensures that curriculum routes are not closed to any students. The publicly displayed aims of the school, which incorporate the slogan 'The world is your oyster', and the day-to-day workings of the school, confirm its ethos. In its work, in recent years, related to ensuring that all students are included in school activities, the school has created a very sophisticated and positive response to individual learning needs. All students have equal access to the curriculum, with additional opportunity for studies at out-of-hours classes. To enter the 6th Form students must first demonstrate a positive attitude to the post-16 opportunities available, a willingness to work, a mature, responsible approach, and, then, appropriate course requirements are considered. An on-site Learning Support Unit promotes a multi-disciplinary/agency approach to meet individual student needs. "Learning Routes" provides support for vulnerable and disaffected students. Where gender issues have been identified they are tackled, for example by whole-staff training focusing on teaching and learning approaches. A swipe card system allows students eligible for free school meals to remain anonymous. The large, multi-level building with excellent facilities to aid the physically disabled has resulted in the school being designated as a mainstream secondary school for the disabled.

58. The school makes good provision for students with special educational needs. The effectiveness of support staff is a positive aspect of the school's provision. The lack of support staff was an issue at the last inspection. The level of support staff now is average when compared with other schools. They make a good contribution to the school's provision by supporting individuals and groups in lessons and by teaching structured withdrawal programmes to support, for example, students with specific learning difficulties. They also run before-school and lunchtime activities including a handwriting club. Support is carefully targeted according to need with curriculum areas working closely with the special needs co-ordinator to establish priorities. Grouping arrangements in different curriculum areas further enhance the provision. In English, for example, the grouping arrangements in Years 9 and 10 more effectively support learning than the mixed ability groupings in Year 11. Other aspects of the school's provision enhance opportunities for students with special needs although they are not designed specifically for them. The Learning Routes Centre and the work related programme for Years 10 and 11 widen choice and opportunity. Individual curriculum areas make good provision overall to maximise students opportunities to achieve success in certificated courses by the end of Year 11.

59. The highest attainers and those students identified by the school as gifted and talented receive good provision. Funding from the Excellence in Cities initiative is used to increasingly good effect to extend and enhance the opportunities for this group of students to meet their potential. Good opportunities exist in the form of visits to Universities and other establishments to raise their aspirations. Within school, there are good opportunities for them to follow their interests in the wide variety of extracurricular provision. The development of subject based work to challenge these students in the classroom is developing, but is not yet widespread in its impact. In modern languages for example, the higher attainers are not stretched and do not achieve as well as they should.

60. The curriculum is accessible to all students with English as an additional language, and students have the opportunity to take examinations in their first language at GCSE. The school is making good progress in developing a range of practical strategies for use across the curriculum to offer more effective support to bi-lingual students. There are good links with the local college of further education, so students who enter the school in Years 10 and 11 are able to follow courses that match their particular needs. The school effectively monitors the progress of individuals and the group of students with English as an additional

language. The school is effective in promoting race equality, seen in the participation of students of all races in the full range of the school's activities.

61. The school has a good programme for personal, social and health education that contributes well to students' development. The programme has been revised this year and aspects are incorporated both in personal, social, health and religious education, mainly taught by specialists, and in guidance lessons delivered by form tutors. There is a good input on sex education, drug education, relationships, careers and citizenship. Healthy eating is included, but appears to have little impact on students' diet in school, which is poor. An audit of provision of citizenship across the curriculum has taken place but not of other aspects. The programme is well supported by a good variety of visitors, such as the community police, the school nurse and the local education authority drugs team. In guidance lessons, students are encouraged to set themselves targets to achieve well. Personal, social and health education is enhanced through assemblies and in some other areas of the curriculum, such as in English and history where students investigate moral issues and in geography where students look at environmental dilemmas.

62. Provision for careers education is good. Careers education begins in Year 9 as part of the guidance programme. It is taught by form tutors and very well supported by external speakers and the Tyne and Wear "Connexions" team. Students are encouraged to set themselves targets and make their own decisions. They are given sound guidance on option choices in Year 9. Annual Industry Day raises awareness of the opportunities in career choice and visits to universities raise students' aspirations. Students in Year 10 have a useful and well-organised one-week work experience, although some students do not get their preferred choice of placement. Appropriate extra support is given to underachieving students and those with specific needs. A careers officer spends three and a half days in school each week and contributes usefully to lessons in GNVQ health and social care for example. All students have a careers interview in Year 11 and sound advice is given on post 16 options both in the school and elsewhere. A useful guide is issued on the post 16 options at Joseph Swan. There is satisfactory provision for careers in the learning resource centre

63. The school has good links with the community and these contribute positively to students' learning and personal and social development. The curriculum is enhanced by occasional visits into the local and wider community, for example a Year 8 visit to a local farm and visits to art galleries and museums. Students experience the European community on a history trip to the battlefields of World War I and on one-day visits to France. Good industry links support learning in design and technology and health and social care. Students interview health workers to find out more about their role in the community and learn about future career options. Some students participate in community events, such as the occasional musical performances in primary schools and more often in sporting events. Links with the local community provide good support for careers education. Industry day and the work experience programme are well supported by local businesses. Five local companies gave very good support to the school's bid for technology status. Local partners in the community sponsor the awards evening. Good use is made of the school's technology facilities to support learning in the community.

64. The school has excellent relationships with partner institutions. These make an excellent contribution to every aspect of students' academic progress and personal development. Students join the school mainly from five local primary schools. The strong management, curriculum and pastoral links with these schools ensure very smooth transfer of students into Year 7. Every Year 5 student experiences an activity morning and Year 6 students spend an induction week in school in July in which they familiarise themselves with school routines. This ensures they settle well in Year 7. Appropriate information is collected from primary schools, especially concerning students with special educational needs. Joint training sessions are held with primary schools and teachers exchange visits in order to develop curriculum links. Curriculum links are particularly good in physical education, ICT and science. Older students support primary schools by listening to readers, helping with sport and designing web sites. There is a very good range of sporting fixtures with other secondary schools. Students represent the school well in district school sports events. The excellent links with Gateshead College enhance the curriculum by supplementing courses in vocational education and work related learning. A number of visits are made to lectures at local universities. The excellent links with a wide range of universities, including an Oxford College, are used well to raise the aspirations of students.

65. The school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good overall. The school aims to develop a school community which values all its members and demands mutual

respect and support. All subjects include aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, but they are not formally planned into schemes of work and opportunities for enhancement are frequently overlooked. English, history, music and personal, social, health and religious education make a stronger contribution than other departments.

66. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Assemblies focus on spiritual aspects such as the exciting journey through life into the unknown. Students are encouraged to work together and think positively. There is no provision for a regular daily act of collective worship, so there are lost opportunities for further spiritual development and the thought for the week is insufficiently addressed. Overall, there is not enough time set aside for students to reflect upon their own feelings, values and beliefs. There are good links with the local Jewish community but links with other churches and faith communities are underdeveloped. Subject contributions to spiritual development are sound but variable. Some make a good contribution for example, in personal, social, health and religious education where students learn about other religions and are encouraged to think about their purpose and meaning in life. In all subjects students are asked to reflect on their own learning and to set themselves targets for personal development. As they get older, students learn to debate issues and to express their own opinions in the knowledge they will be listened to with respect. In English, students discuss the values governing behaviour in 'The Lord of the Flies'. Students show a concern for the poor, the needy and the sick and raise funds for a wide range of charities such as Comic Relief.

67. The school's provision for students' moral education is good. Teachers are good role models and have clear expectations of good behaviour. They set out ground rules from the start and students are helped to realise the difference between right and wrong. The school council contributed to the review of the behaviour policy last year. Students understand the rules and consider sanctions and rewards to be fair and used consistently by most staff. This encourages students of all abilities to come to school on time, work hard and behave well. There is good provision for moral development across most subjects of the curriculum and especially in the personal, social, health and religious education, where students in Year 9 study moral dilemmas for example. Students following the Award Scheme Development and Assessment Network course are investigating the morality of media pressure and the diet industry. Fair play is consistently encouraged in physical education. Assemblies reinforce moral messages. There is open access to the school. Teachers place a good deal of trust in students to behave well in and around the school and they respond well to this. The swipe card system encourages students to take responsibility for their own registration in each lesson, which they do conscientiously.

68. The school's provision for social development is good. Students are given good opportunities in lessons and extra-curricular activities to work in pairs and groups. They are encouraged to take collective and individual responsibility for safety. Students have good opportunities to take responsibility in extra curricular activities, but limited opportunities to undertake routine classroom duties such as handing out books. Members of each form are elected to year group councils and representatives of the year councils join the school council which is consulted on a wide variety of issues affecting the school community. This has a positive impact on learning and personal development. There are satisfactory opportunities to form relationships across the year groups for example in drama and musical productions, but most extracurricular activities such as sport and charitable fund raising, take place within year groups. The breakfast club and lunchtime dining arrangements provide good opportunities for social interaction. The school's good links with the community encourage students to take an active part in the local community and develop an understanding of citizenship, for example when Year 10 students helped the elderly to go shopping by pushing their wheelchairs.

69. Provision for students' cultural development is good. Students gain a good insight on their own and other cultures across the curriculum and this contributes positively to academic progress and personal development. In English, students study classical works and modern pieces where multi-cultural aspects such as apartheid are emphasised. In history, students visit the Beamish museum, which has a good display of local culture. A Holocaust survivor makes an annual visit to talk to students about prejudice and his personal experiences. In geography students investigate different cultures from multinational economies to less economically developed countries. Year 9 students support a child in the developed world. In personal, social, health and religious education students learn about the cultures of other religions and racism. Last term the school celebrated One World Week by investigating and sampling cultures from across the world in every subject, for example local Asian women brought Asian dress into a textile lesson. The week even included an international menu in the canteen. The school participates in the Comenius Project and this is beneficial in widening students' understanding about life in other countries as well as gaining appreciation of the culture in which they live. A link has recently been forged with a French school and the school plans to develop this to enhance students' experience of the French culture.

Sixth Form

70. The curriculum provided in the sixth form is very good. Through its post-16 curriculum provision, the school provides a rich menu of choices through GCE AS, A2, AVCE and GNVQ Intermediate and Foundation courses. A careful analysis has been made of the specific demands of the students, and this is particularly evident through the options choices currently available to those in Year 12. To deliver this wide choice of opportunity, there is a close working relationship and developing links with other local sixth form providers. There is, in addition, a strong emphasis upon students being developed not only academically and intellectually, but also personally and socially through a full enrichment programme. To support this, there is an expectation that students will take advantage of the very demanding "Challenge Activities" provision, and of the responsibilities offered through these activities. In the current year, there are 27 male and 34 female students in Year 12, and 25 male and 18 female students in Year 13. No students have been asked to leave at the end of Year 12, and the retention rate between the two years has been consistently high. Only two students left at the end of the most recent Year 12.

71. The curriculum provides a wide range of academic subjects, including business studies, design and technology in food and product design, environmental science, health and social care, psychology and science for public understanding. A general studies course is available. ICT is offered as a single award AVCE, and science as a GNVQ intermediate course. Other courses offered in the sixth form include a CISCO Networking programme, key skills, media/performing arts BTEC first diploma, New Tracks courses in business and leisure, engineering/art and design and care, travel and tourism administration and law to GCSE level. The school ensures that students are given the opportunity to study religious education. A key skills course has been offered in each of the past two years, but there have been insufficient takers for the course. Poor key skills by a number of students contribute towards low results in some subjects.

72. Sixth form students have good provision for enrichment activities. The school aims to provide a safe, positive and stimulating learning environment where everyone is valued and can achieve and

succeed in the sixth form. Challenge activities are the foundation of the post 16 enrichment programme and contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A good number of students take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and several persevere to achieve the gold award. Students take part in a variety of community activities in primary schools. They also help within the school community by supporting younger students in ICT and reading. Some help out in the Learning Resource Centre and others act as office assistants. Sixth form students organise elections for the school council and chair the meetings. As leaders of the school council they have made presentations at the governing body annual meeting for parents. The good opportunities offered to sixth form students to take responsibility encourage them to become independent, caring and responsible citizens.

73. Subjects in the sixth form curriculum make a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A small number of students take general studies at AS and A2 level. This includes a good range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural topics and contributes very positively to students' personal development. Students' spiritual development is enhanced, for example through reflective poetry in English. Aspirations are raised through visits to universities. About three quarters of the students in Year 13 organised their own work experience in the summer term, giving them a taste of working life and broadening personal development. Students discuss moral issues in a variety of subject areas, such as business education where students debate whether money is the only incentive to work. Geography students undertake a residential visit, which enhances social development. Cultural and spiritual development have been enhanced by a conference on orthodox Judaism run by Jewish rabbis and a visit to a multi-cultural conference organised with a consultant from Newcastle university to investigate different lifestyle and experiences. The school's provision helps students to become mature and considerate adults.

74. Students' personal and academic development in the sixth form is supported by good links with the community. Some areas of the curriculum use the local and wider community to support learning, for example in GNVQ courses and in geography. Other subjects make insufficient use of community links. There are excellent links with partner institutions. Links with Gateshead College broaden the provision in the sixth form by offering support for New Track students in the school. Links with universities enhance learning and help students with their choice of course on leaving school. Good opportunities are given to students to visit universities. Forty-five Year 12 students attended a great North Higher Education Event at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities. A good number of students attended a forensic workshop and three attended a residential engineering workshop at Northumbria University. Students are encouraged to attend university open days before completing their UCAS forms. Some subjects such as design and technology have good links with industry, but others have too few links. Links with local primary schools have a positive impact on students' academic and personal development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

75. The school provides a very good level of pastoral care for students, which has a positive impact on achievement. There is good educational and personal support and guidance to enable students to make further progress with their learning. Monitoring of students' academic performance and personal development is very good. However, teachers do not always use assessment well enough to set short-term targets to guide students' progress towards the longer term targets. The school takes very good care of students' welfare. The school has good procedures for monitoring and assessing the progress of students with English as an additional language. The school's effective partnership with the local education authority enables those students who come into school with very little knowledge of English to benefit from good specialist support. Testing and re-testing are well used to identify and monitor the progress of students with special needs. Individual education plans, which were criticised at the last inspection, are now very good in format and content. There are regular reviews of progress with the appropriate involvement of staff and students, but the recording of the evaluation of students' targets is not sufficiently clearly set out in records.

76. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance are very good and have improved since the last inspection. The school has introduced an electronic swipe card system of self-registration that enables it to track individual student's attendance better and to analyse unsatisfactory attendance. This system is backed up efficiently by manual registration. Registration time is used well to establish good relationships between students and their tutors and to promote personal

development. Tutors monitor home/school contact books in tutor time. The school rightly emphasises the importance of good attendance to parents. The routine use of telephone calls on the first day of absence has encouraged better attendance as has the governing body non-attendance panel which expects parents to explain the reasons for their children's absence. The learning support unit provides good support for a few students with poor attendance. The provision of an alternative curriculum has encouraged some disaffected students to attend. These initiatives have a positive impact on the learning of students involved. The school analyses attendance figures to target areas for improvement. There is very good support from the Educational Welfare Service. The swipe card system registers lateness and encourages students to be punctual both to school and to individual lessons.

77. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are good. The behaviour policy is positive and used very effectively. Good training has been given to staff in managing behaviour positively. Most teachers have high expectations of good behaviour and students respond accordingly. Rules are simple and well published. Students know what is expected of them. They believe sanctions to be fair and appreciate the merit reward system. Good records are kept of all incidents of poor behaviour and bullying. The "On Call" system is effective in controlling unsatisfactory classroom behaviour so that other students' learning is undisturbed. Students who behave badly are removed to a sixth form class where they are given the same work as they would have done in their own lesson and where they can observe better attitudes to learning. Those with more persistent bad behaviour work in the Learning Support Unit. Incidents of poor behaviour and those resulting in exclusions are properly recorded. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating bullying are satisfactory. Awareness of bullying is promoted to younger students in personal, social, health and religious education, but it does not have a high profile in display around the school and there is no discreet way of reporting incidents of bullying. The vast majority of students are confident that any reported incident will be resolved quickly and to their satisfaction.

78. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' personal development are very good. There is very good liaison with primary schools and a well-organised induction process. Year 5 and 6 primary school students have good opportunities to visit the school so they become familiar with the school and its procedures. Students in Year 7 have settled very well after their first week in school. Satisfactory information is gathered from primary schools, especially for students with special educational needs. There is a good programme of guidance and personal, social, health and religious education to support students' personal development. Students have careers lessons from Year 9. They are offered sound guidance on option choices for Year 10 and good advice on their post 16 options. There is a well-organised work experience programme in Year 10 that gives students a good insight into the world of work. Learning mentors give good support to targeted students from all year groups. Form tutors, overseen by guidance co-ordinators, play an important role in supporting and mentoring. They monitor academic progress and personal development and help students set achievable targets in each area. Students' academic progress and personal development are tracked through contact books, interim and annual reports. There are regular pastoral meetings, which are effective in maintaining the progress students make. Students are confident they can turn to tutors or guidance co-ordinators for help and support. Good use is made of outside agencies to support students. Students are well prepared for adult life.

79. The school takes very good care of students' welfare. Procedures to ensure the health and safety of all students are very good, but the policy needs to be revised. A member of staff has responsibility for coordinating health and safety. Teachers give good attention to following safe procedures in lessons. Good risk assessments are in place for all activities, including trips out of school. The school is aware of the hazardous nature of the shared pedestrian and vehicular access at the entrance to the school and takes appropriate measures to avoid accidents. Evacuation drills are carried out properly and recorded appropriately. First aid procedures are very good and good records are kept. There are good procedures for dealing with child protection issues and the school maintains good links with appropriate outside support agencies.

80. Assessment procedures are good with some very good features. Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements in the use of assessment to help raise standards. Under the very strong leadership of the senior management team, targets are set for all students in all subjects throughout the school. The targets are based on rigorous analyses of the students' previous results in tests at the end of Year 6, Year 9 and Year 11. During Years 7-9, each subject's National Curriculum level is further divided into three sub levels resulting in more precise procedures. This effectively contributes to shorter-term target setting. The performance of the students in public tests and examinations is analysed closely at senior management and departmental levels.

81. The procedures for monitoring and supporting the students' overall progress are very good. There is an established assessment procedure each term. Attainments are recorded in National Curriculum and GCSE levels and grades. Subjects retain detailed records of the students' progress. The school makes very effective use of new technology to record and monitor progress each student's progress across a range of subjects. Form tutors fulfil a key role in monitoring overall progress. This leads to appropriate intervention. In Year 11, 30 students who were not fulfilling expectations have been identified via the monitoring process and given more focused support on how to study effectively. This includes courses on study skills and very effective mentoring.

82. Most subjects carry out the assessment policies consistently. Practice in history is exemplary with targets for improvement set after each piece of work. There are also good examples of assessment leading to changes in courses and teaching in order to meet the needs of the students better, for example in mathematics and history. In music, assessment supports good provision for students with special educational needs and for gifted and talented students. At whole school level, new courses such as the New Tracks course in Year 12 meet the needs of students who require a distinct type of post 16 course of study. Good use of the assessment of Year 9 students helped to improve standards in the 2002 English tests.

83. Despite the rigour of the procedures there is one area for improvement. Students are not receiving enough information on their progress towards meeting their target between formal assessments. There is a need for better and more frequent sign-posting to the students of what they need to do to improve during lessons.

Sixth form

Assessment

84. Procedures for monitoring students' progress are satisfactory. However, there is a need to improve the use of assessment to inform students more precisely about the progress they are making towards meeting their longer-term targets. Problems with assessment procedures have been encountered over the past year. In some curriculum areas, such as ICT where students have to complete assignments with timescales, and are given responsibility to meet deadlines, they would prefer to have more monitoring and advice to complete work. Some are unclear about tracking and target-setting processes. In some subjects, such as art and design, students believe that informal verbal feedback during lessons constitutes assessment and some students regard target setting with suspicion. The sixth form management team is aware of these inconsistencies, particularly with regard to formative target setting, and has already set up new systems to tackle the issues. Already, in the second week of the autumn term, students have been given their projected grades to achieve in AS examinations in a year's time, and at A2 level in two years' time. Students meet their tutors on a regular basis; there is a discussion, in light of information received from the academic staff, on whether they are moving towards their predicted grades. Tutors monitor the progress of each student, and a grade is given at the end of each term. A report is sent home each term describing the students' progress. Parents have an open-access policy to arrange an interview to discuss their child's development at any time. Full reports are given out annually, which are satisfactory.

Advice, support and guidance

85. Students are complimentary about the support and guidance they receive in the sixth form, and of the provision for advice about careers. There is a friendly staff/student relationship, and this enables a firm foundation for students to gain the most from their years in the sixth form. Health and safety procedures in the sixth form are similar to the main school and there are no issues specific to the sixth form.

86. Students now feel that they are well prepared for entry into the sixth form, and those interviewed felt that they had been directed to study appropriate courses. GCE A-level results suggest that this was not always be the case. They confirm that there is a good working ethos in the sixth form. Students receive an informative brochure about subject option choices in Year 11, and are given talks by subject teachers about the courses being offered. Year 12 students talk formally to Year 11 students about the nature of the courses they are following. There is an open evening in Year 11, when parents are involved in discussions. Members of the senior staff subsequently arrange interviews and there is sufficient flexibility for students to change courses by the Year 12 first half-term.

87. Each student becomes a member of a tutor group, and is seen daily by that tutor for registration. The tutor deals with student concerns, and guidance programmes are delivered. These programmes involve reference to study skills, writing curricula vitae, careers advice, higher and further education advice, and citizenship and health issues. A wide range of visiting speakers supports this work. In addition, students are allocated an individual learning mentor who meets them three or four times a term to check progress, to set targets, to detect and deal with problems, and to ensure that achievement is recorded. The quality of the monitoring by learning mentors has been variable, and is in the process of being reviewed. Extra revision classes are provided, and students value this additional provision.

88. The provision of careers information to members of the sixth form is very good. A well-informed "Connexions" team member is in the school for three days a week, and directs a highly valued careers programme. At the end of each year, students' progress is reviewed carefully. The personal adviser, together with the managers of the sixth form, set up extensive programmes for taking students out to conferences, to visits to universities, and other projects. They also bring a range of speakers into the school. Careers resources are good, including a dedicated careers computer, which is always available for research.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

89. The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is unsatisfactory. Only a small number of parents attended the OFSTED parents' meeting and less than five per cent responded to the parental questionnaire. Those that did are generally pleased with the school. The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school is satisfactory.

90. Parents like the high expectations that the school has of their children. Their children like school and parents find the school approachable. A few parents expressed concern about behaviour of students and the use of discipline. Several raised concerns about bullying. A high proportion of those who responded were concerned about the level of homework. A number of parents feel that the school does not work closely with parents. Inspectors agree with the positive aspects. They found behaviour to be good and the use of discipline consistent and fair. Inspectors found bullying to be handled well when reported, but the school could improve awareness of bullying among older students. There is satisfactory use of homework. Only a small proportion of parents is closely involved with the work of the school. Several parents were concerned about the high turnover of staff and the effect this has on standards. The school has experienced recent difficulties in some subjects, but staffing problems have now been resolved. A significant minority of parents expressed concern about the range of activities outside lessons. Inspectors found these to be good but not always well supported by students.

91. The quality of information provided for parents, particularly about students' progress is unsatisfactory. Newsletters and occasional letter are brief but informative. The prospectus and governing body annual report to parents provide parents with useful information. Students' contact books are used well to monitor progress and homework and to communicate with parents. The school is currently developing a more effective reporting system to parents. The recent introduction of termly interim progress assessments and the use of National Curriculum levels in setting targets is a positive step and good practice. Parents appreciate this information. Students' annual reports are currently unsatisfactory. They do not provide commentary on what students have studied, what they know and understand and what they need to do in order to improve. Parents are invited to a consultation evening. Last year's consultation evening for Year 7 parents was cancelled because of industrial action and no suitable alternative provided. This is unsatisfactory. Last year the school piloted a new system of consultation with parents of Year 8 students. This was extremely well attended and popular with parents. The links with parents of students with special educational needs are good. Parents receive copies of students' individual education plans and they are now appropriately involved in review procedures, which was not the case at the time of the last inspection.

92. The contribution that parents make to their children's learning at school and home is satisfactory. Parents are invited to a number of information evenings designed to help them help their children to learn, for example on sex education, drug education, study skills and ICT. The induction evening during Year 6 induction week is well attended, but attendance at option evenings in Year 9 and careers evenings is lower than normally found. The school canvasses parental views on subjects,

such as the new style reports and the new consultation arrangements. Parents are given good guidance in supporting homework. There is no parents' association in the school, but parents help out occasionally when asked. The parent governors have a good impact on the work of the school. Parents enjoy students' performances, which are well attended. Many provide Internet access at home to help their children develop study skills.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

93. The leadership and management of the headteacher and senior staff are good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and ensures a clear educational direction to the school's work where all students are fully included, in line with the school's aims. The major issues arising from the previous inspection have been dealt with comprehensively apart from providing sufficient books in the library. In this comparatively new school the senior staff have developed their roles and responsibilities to ensure a clarity of purpose and a well defined leadership role. Throughout the school, teachers who have management and leadership roles are clear in terms of what this entails and to whom they are accountable. Good systems and strategies have been put into place to guide progress and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives taken in terms of their impact on raising standards.

94. The priorities established in the school development plan are appropriate. Good systems and strategies have been put in place to monitor and evaluate the success in meeting these priorities. The school's procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of its work are good. Sophisticated and effective methods for gathering data are now in place to measure how well the school is performing. The school now monitors the quality of teaching and learning effectively and this has led to an improvement in both areas. Areas for further improvement in teaching have been identified and effective measures have been taken to deal with past weaknesses, for example in improving the quality of teaching in science, religious education and modern languages. As a result the overall quality of teaching is better and this represents a good level of improvement since the last inspection.

95. Because of the school's positive response to the previous inspection there are now good systems and strategies in place for the evaluation of the school's work and there is good capacity and commitment to improve further. Senior managers and staff leading subject departments and year groups demonstrate energy and good commitment to raising standards further. Their overall contribution to managing the teaching in their areas of responsibility is now good. The improvement of teaching and the spreading of good practice were areas identified at the previous inspection as needing improvement and the school has responded very well.

96. The school is well organised, and governors and staff deal effectively with the bureaucratic demands made upon its administration. In this process, information technology is used to good effect as befits a school with technology status. Targets for whole-school improvement are realistic and challenging and are now increasingly based upon accurate information about students' attainment levels. The setting of individual targets for students is becoming well established, but needs to be improved by better use of assessment in the shorter term so that students know what they need to do to progress.

97. The school's approach to the previous inspection report has been very positive and largely very successful, for example in raising levels of attendance and in making better provision for students with special educational needs. This positive approach has also led to a marked improvement in the whole process of development planning and the impact is seen in a school development plan that is of good quality. The process of continued improvement is guided by this plan, which is much improved and is a very good working document that guides whole school and departmental progress. It gives a very good level of detail about the school's priorities and how financial and staffing resources are to be used to meet these priorities. The priorities are appropriate to the school's current position. The cycle of school development planning ensures full consultation with staff and governors and provides an effective framework for budgetary decisions.

98. Governors take a very active role in the leadership of the school and make a very positive contribution to the decisions that are taken, particularly in the areas of accommodation, staffing and finance. In the short life of the school, the governors have had an important role to play and they have done so very effectively. The governing body, through the work of the curriculum committee in

particular, is in a very good position to make informed judgements when holding the school to account for the educational standards achieved and the quality of education provided. The relationship between the governing body and the staff of the school is good. The governing body has a very good knowledge of the strengths of the school and the areas needing further development. Overall, they are very effective in fulfilling their statutory duties, but the school does not meet fully the legal requirements relating to the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

99. The process of financial planning is sound and there are effective procedures in place to ensure that the school consults and compares to gain best value in its spending. Spending is controlled well and the principles of best value are applied well in the school's use of resources. The governing body's finance committee has a very good level of awareness of the financial situation of the school. At present, there is a larger than average balance in the current annual budget, but amounts are earmarked for planned developments which restore the balance to a more appropriate level so that over the next financial year the balance carried forward will be an acceptable proportion of the school's income. Financial administration is sound and day-to-day accounting procedures are efficient. There is a satisfactory programme of audit. The strategic use of resources is good and specific grants are used appropriately. The school gives good value for money.

100. The leadership and management of special educational needs are very good. There is a very good whole school approach to special needs and this represents a very good improvement from the time of the last inspection. Although this inspection took place in only the second week of the new school year, provision for students' special needs was already very well organised. Full account has been taken of the requirements of the revised Code of Practice. Governors are appropriately involved with a designated governor appointed. The special needs co-ordinator presents a report to governors each year and they in turn report to parents, although the governors' annual report does not contain sufficient information on the implementation and success of the school's policy. The management structure linking relevant staff is very good. The special needs co-ordinator meets very regularly with both senior management and with link teachers from all curriculum areas. Staff are kept fully informed about students' special needs by the special needs co-ordinator. The use of individual education plans in different curriculum areas needs to be more closely monitored.

Professional development is very good and appropriately includes both whole staff activities as well as more focused training involving, for example, link teachers and support staff.

101. Resources for learning, including books, equipment and materials are unsatisfactory overall because the library provision is unsatisfactory. Although the Learning Resource Centre is readily accessible to all students and provides good facilities for students to access the Internet, the number of books in the library is well below average. This restricts the opportunities for subjects to adequately develop research skills and support students' individual learning outside of lessons. Most departments have a satisfactory supply of books, equipment and consumables to support learning and teaching. There are no subjects where the number and quality of textbooks available is having an adverse effect on students' learning although there are some subjects, for example science and modern foreign languages, where students are required to share textbooks. The technology school status has meant that there has been a significant improvement since the last inspection in the provision of ICT across the school. The ratio of computers to students is now slightly better than the national average and the quality of ICT resources is very good. Some subjects, for example mathematics, science and design and technology, now have access to computer rooms for their own use. Other subjects have to access computers by booking rooms. At the moment these facilities are not used as well as they should be because the teaching of ICT across all subjects lacks the benefit of a rigorous and formal review of the quality of the provision.

102. Overall, the match of teachers to the demands of the curriculum is good in the main school and the sixth form. However, the school is currently experiencing some difficulty in recruiting qualified and experienced staff in modern foreign languages, religious education, physical education and creative arts subjects. In addition supply cover of the appropriate quality is not always available. There have been twenty-one staff appointed in the last two years to replace the eighteen who have left the school. This has enabled the governors to improve the balance of staff and there is now a better blend of experienced longer serving teachers, recently appointed experienced staff and those more recently qualified. Technical staff undertake a valuable role in assisting and supporting the teaching of the curriculum in science, ICT and design and technology. The secretarial, clerical and site management staff make a significant contribution to the smooth day-to-day running of the school.

103. Very good arrangements are in place for the induction of newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school. The former receive very effective mentoring and departmental support. In addition they have school-based training and are supported in their attendance at local education authority courses arranged specifically to meet their needs. The school is also a very good provider of initial teacher training. The school has effective procedures in place for supporting the professional development of teachers. Evaluation and feedback systems ensure that the school receives value for money from the courses attended by its teachers. Priority is appropriately given to training linked to the school development plan, curriculum and guidance plans and performance management. Support is also given to individuals to pursue further qualifications when funding allows. The school has taken a very positive approach to performance management and procedures are good. The first cycle has been completed and staff targets have been agreed and set. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and students' achievement.

104. The accommodation is good and is an important factor in creating a positive environment for learning. Since the school moved onto its new site in February 1999, the vast majority of subjects have benefited from spacious, light and well appointed classrooms. Facilities for all aspects of design and technology are very good. Mathematics and science make good provision for a wide range of practical work to be undertaken by students, as well as their own ICT rooms to promote skills in information technology. Art and music each have particularly spacious rooms with effective sound insulation in practice rooms in music. However, noise from neighbouring classrooms in science and ICT can occasionally constrain learning. Most of the teaching in the humanities subjects is now done in large, classrooms located together, which benefit from good display and storage space. However, some specialist staff, such as in humanities and mathematics, have to teach outside specialist rooms, as classroom space is becoming tight. Social areas for students have been much improved since the last report with the imaginative creation of the "street" and its café. Library accommodation is good. A well-managed programme of internal decoration has resulted in the refurbishment of many classrooms. Staff maintain the buildings well so that the pleasant, clean and tidy environment is conducive to effective learning. Although physical education have good indoor facilities, outdoor

provision for girls' games and athletics is poor. The poor drainage of the school's playing field can also constrain sports activities in the winter months.

Sixth Form

Leadership and management

105. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. There have been significant changes in the last academic year and the impact is now being seen in the wider curriculum on offer and the good quality of advice and guidance given to students. A new assistant head directs the sixth form very well. It is managed very well by a learning co-ordinator who is much respected, who knows the students well, and who is concerned to give students the best opportunities to enhance their future careers.

106. A thorough review has been made of the provision of courses on offer, and consideration is being given to providing more high profile vocational courses. Extensive negotiations have been made with other establishments in order to provide new courses. A wide range of funding is sought and carefully used. This enables students who have financial problems to stay on into the sixth form. The aim is to ensure that all students achieve their potential on courses that match their needs and this vision is shared by all concerned. It is effective in giving a clear direction to work in the sixth form. The increased width of the curriculum on offer allows students a greater choice. As a result, fewer students take GCE A-level courses, where such courses are not the most suitable for their level of attainment at the end of Year 11.

107. Students in the sixth form develop into mature and responsible young people through the range of experiences and opportunities offered. There are good opportunities provided for students to take wider responsibilities within the school. However, there are specific areas that require improvement. These include the need to raise attainment in AS and A level examinations and to develop students' independent learning skills. Work on establishing target-setting is in hand but needs to be further refined by better use of assessment to inform students about the progress they are making.

Resources

108. Resources for learning, including books, equipment and materials are good. The director of sixth form actively seeks out budgets from which he can obtain the means to facilitate improvements for the students. Any finance he obtains, he manages effectively. There is a very well resourced careers library. Departments make very good use of specialist resources. Fifteen new PC's have recently been obtained: they are already operating in the study area, and are in full use. The designated PC for careers information in the library is a good resource and is also much used.

109. Across the sixth form, the provision of staffing is now good. There have been problems in the recent past, which have necessitated a change of staff mid-course for some students. Over the past two years, twenty-one new teachers have been appointed to the school. This has enabled a better balance and match of staff to the demands of the sixth form curriculum. Supply teachers currently being employed are appropriately qualified and experienced.

110. Sixth form students use the same specialist accommodation as the main school. They therefore share the benefits of having spacious, well-appointed and well maintained classrooms. Large practical rooms in science and design and technology allow a good range of practical work to be provided. Students studying vocational courses are well provided for with two separate rooms for effective study. Sixth form students have their own exclusive common room and study area; both are adequate. The study area particularly is spacious and has good computer facilities to promote skills in information technology and research. The school has plans to improve the toilet and catering facilities in the sixth form centre.

111. The governors have a good understanding of the issues facing sixth form provision and are actively involved in making decisions. They are in a good position to account for the standards attained by these students. There is a great deal of competition for sixth form students and many are

attracted to sixth form provision in the nearby city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. At present over a half of Year 11 students leave to attend such institutions. The school's leadership has recently taken appropriate action to widen its curriculum to offer courses at the school that more closely meet the needs and aspirations of its students. The head teacher and governors have taken appropriate action to create a strong and effective senior management team for the sixth form. There is good teaching provision in the sixth form by a committed group of teachers. Most students state that they are able to follow the courses they wish to from the existing options. This results in very good retention rate with almost all students completing the courses they start. The management of the sixth form budget is very good and the sixth form is cost effective.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

112. In order to improve standards further, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

- (1) Improve the provision for religious education by:
 - Placing the management of the subject into the hands of one individual to ensure clear direction to the development of the subject.
 - Ensuring that there is adequate teaching time to cover the programmes of study of the Local Agreed Syllabus in sufficient depth and improve the timetable arrangements for Year 7 students.(Paragraphs: 210-215)

- (2) Raise standards achieved in modern languages in Years 10 and 11 by:
 - Increasing the level of challenge to higher-attaining students.
 - Introducing new ways of engaging students' interest, in particular through the use of visual aids and ICT.(Paragraphs: 185-192)

- (3) Increase the overall effectiveness of the school's links with parents by
 - improving the quality of annual reports.
 - extending the good practice piloted at the Year 8 consultation to all year groups.(Paragraph: 92)

- (4) Enhance the effective use of the library to support learning by increasing the number of books available to support students' learning.
(Paragraph: 101)

Sixth form

- (1) Raise standards in GCE A-level examinations by:
- Maintaining the drive to fit students to appropriate courses.
 - Widening the teaching strategies used to give students more opportunity to research and learn for themselves.
 - Ensuring that higher attaining students are consistently challenged.
- (Paragraphs: 50, 52, 84, 223, 235, 240, 248)
- (2) Improve the use of assessment to inform students of the progress they are making by:
- Spreading the good practice that exists in some subjects.
 - Relating assessment more closely to the progress students make towards attaining their longer-term targets.
- (Paragraphs: 99, 226, 243, 249, 256)
- (3) Raise the quality of teaching key skills by:
- Giving this area of students' learning a higher profile.
 - Involving individual subjects more closely in planning and teaching these skills.
- (Paragraphs: 16-22, 222, 224, 226, 255)
- (4) Enhance the development of students' independent study skills by:
- Providing more opportunities for students to develop problem-solving skills.
 - Planning more carefully to involve students in determining how they learn as well as what they learn.
- (Paragraphs: 147, 223, 235, 240, 256)

In addition to the areas to be improved above, the school needs to:
Meet fully the requirements relating to providing a daily act of collective worship for all students.
(Paragraph: 53)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	166
	Sixth form	42
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		62

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	2	22	80	58	3	1	0
Percentage	1	13	48	35	2	1	0
Sixth form							
Number	0	4	30	8	0	0	0
Percentage	0	10	71	19	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 one percentage point.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1147	125
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	259	21

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	31	1
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	243	1

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	42

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	34
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	51

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.6
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	127	99	226

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	53	80	83
	Girls	62	70	64
	Total	115	150	147
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	51 (54)	66 (58)	65 (50)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (12)	34 (29)	30 (16)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	56	76	68
	Girls	58	57	61
	Total	114	133	129
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	50 (53)	59 (56)	57 (50)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	15 (10)	27 (23)	19 (14)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	124	84	208

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	36	110	114
	Girls	30	75	77
	Total	66	185	191
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	32 (32)	89 (89)	92 (95)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	30.6
	National	39.0

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

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	18	17	35
	Average point score per candidate	9.9	13.4	11.6
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.8)	17.9 (18.6)	17.5 (18.2)

		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	13	16	29	5	1	6
	Average point score per candidate	11.4	13.9	12.8	6	6	6
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

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	967	108	1
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	4	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	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	16	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	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	267	0	0

The table refers to students of compulsory school age only. It 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)	74.4
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	563

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.7
Key Stage 4	23.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	3 400 303
Total expenditure	3 340 277
Expenditure per pupil	2 655
Balance brought forward from previous year	122 214
Balance carried forward to next year	182 240

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	21

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	3
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1200
Number of questionnaires returned	58

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	28	60	7	3	2
My child is making good progress in school.	28	53	12	4	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	14	55	17	9	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	10	52	21	17	0
The teaching is good.	17	62	10	2	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	52	12	12	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	41	16	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	34	57	5	2	2
The school works closely with parents.	24	41	21	9	5
The school is well led and managed.	21	50	9	10	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	50	16	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	52	14	7	9

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Achievement is good in Years 7-9 and in English literature in Years 10-11.
- Improving results in end of Year 9 national tests.
- Good leadership and management, especially in development planning and monitoring and evaluating the work of the department.
- The students' very good behaviour.
- Good use of target setting to keep students on track to improve standards.

Areas for improvement

- Sharper emphasis on improving writing in Years 7-9.
- Better and more frequent use of assessment information so students know precisely how to improve.
- Higher expectations when students make spoken contributions.
- Challenging higher and above average attainers more in Year 11.

113. When the students enter the school their overall standards in English are well below average. Current standards are broadly average in Year 9 and below average in Year 11. The effective introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in Years 7-9 is helping the students make good progress. Students make good progress in their response to reading, through Years 10-11. Standards of behaviour are very good but spoken contributions tend to be too short in all years.

114. In the 2001 national tests for fourteen-year-olds, standards were below average, matching those of the previous two years. The proportion reaching the expected Level 5 or higher was well below average. At Level 6 or higher the proportion was below average. However standards on all measures were average when compared with students from a similar background. From 1998-2001 the results of the boys were closer to those of boys nationally than the girls' results were in relation to girls nationally. In 2002 the results showed a significant improvement: the proportion at Level 5 or higher increased by ten per cent.

115. In the 2001 GCSE English examination the proportion attaining grades A*-C or higher was below average for all schools but above average for students from a similar background. There was no significant difference in the relative performance of boys and girls. Students tended to do better in English than in their other subjects. The overall average grade was as expected given the students' earlier test results. In 2002 the percentage at C or higher fell slightly. In the 2001 GCSE English literature examination the proportion at C or higher was below average but in line with what the students' earlier results indicated. The students tended to do better in literature than in most of their other subjects. In the 2002 examination the proportion at C or higher improved significantly mainly because the boys' results were higher. This appears to have been a good achievement given that the school enters significantly more students for this subject, especially boys, than most schools.

116. Standards in the current Year 9 are broadly average because students have made good progress in reading and writing notably as a result of the impact of the National Literacy Strategy. These students entered the school with below average standards so have achieved well to reach their current levels. However, a weakness across all levels of attainment is the standard of spoken contributions. Listening skills are above average but too many students give very short answers. They tend to expand their answers only when the teachers have used rigorous and probing questioning. Approximately three in ten students are working at an above average level. Only a few are well above average. The writing of these students is typified by strengths in organisation and sentence structure. Many are extending their range of vocabulary effectively so that it engages the reader. But the standards of some students are undermined by weaknesses in spelling such as 'climed'. They read fluently and are developing above average skills in identifying features of texts such as persuasive language in advertising copy. Most students are reading and writing at average standards. They have made good progress in paragraphing their writing and using punctuation with a more reliable accuracy. They do not reach above average standards because their writing and expression lack the range and maturity required. They also make too many spelling errors. Some potentially middle attaining students are approaching the nationally expected level of accuracy in their writing, but too many inaccuracies in their first drafts result in below average standards. Other students are below and occasionally well below average in reading and writing. They describe the main features of the characters in 'Goodnight Mr Tom' but do not illustrate their opinions by using and commenting on quotations. Their writing includes many errors and their handwriting often lacks maturity in letter formation.

117. In Year 11 standards are below average. Students achieve well in their response to literature and satisfactorily in terms of the standards of their writing. As in Year 9 too many students provide only short spoken answers. However, one class achieved above average standards during a small group activity on 'Lord of the Flies', suggesting that the students will rise to the challenge when given the opportunity. Recent examination results suggest that many students achieve well in response to literature and the work of the current Year 11 confirms this. A few reached very high standards in their rigorous analytical comparison of stories by Wilkie Collins and Ray Bradbury. The best progress was observed in the work of middle attaining students. Their assignments on how Petruchio tries to alter Katherine in 'The Taming of the Shrew' used detailed knowledge to focus specifically on the essay title. Those who are below average in reading retell too much of texts such as 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'A Kestrel for a Knave'. Nevertheless, their recall of events is detailed and accurate. Most students do not reach C grade standards in their writing because of too many inaccuracies in paragraphing, spelling, sentence punctuation and written expression. Better progress in these structural aspects of their writing would help a significant number improve their standards from grade D to C. About one in five students are above average in their writing standards. They have a reliable written accuracy but only a few write with the range of vocabulary and sentence structure associated with the very highest grades.

118. The English department adopts a highly inclusive approach to its work. Consequently there is an above average entry rate for literature because many boys are entered; students with special educational needs have the same opportunities as other students; likewise those students for whom English is not the first language. In the recently introduced groupings by ability in Year 9 there is a broadly equal boy/girl balance in the higher attaining groups. The achievement of these different groups of students matches those of other students: good in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in 10-11. The highest attaining students in Year 11 need to be challenged further.

119. The quality of teaching is good and results in good learning. It is good in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in 10-11. In Years 7-9 the introduction of the literacy strategy has had a strong positive impact on students' learning. Good planning means that the lesson activities effectively focus on the learning objectives. Teachers are well trained in the structure of the three part lesson. They make good use of the review time at the end of lessons to ensure that the students talk about and reinforce what they have learnt. The management of the students' behaviour is very good. As a result students work hard and learn effectively. Teaching and learning are clearly benefiting from the recent re-grouping of students introduced in Year 9. The pace and challenge for a higher set discussing styles of writing were well-targeted on the students' needs. Therefore they covered a lot of ground and their subsequent writing showed strong evidence of good learning in the application of the techniques they had studied. Likewise, a lower attaining group of students made very good progress in writing sustained articles in the style of tabloid newspapers because of the very well-judged resources and good teamwork between the teacher and the class assistant. The use of teaching methods that enable all students to make good progress is a strength in the Year 9 teaching. In Year 11, however, although middle attainers make good progress in literature, the students' progress in writing is no better than satisfactory. The teachers have a very good knowledge of the syllabus requirements for literature so the students are well-prepared. However, too much teaching focuses on the average to below average levels in the all ability groups. As a result the challenge to the potentially higher attainers is not as rigorous as it could be. In the lessons observed these higher attaining students could have covered more ground in terms of both the quantity and quality of their response. Teachers ensure that ICT skills are developed satisfactorily in the subject. There is a significant amount of word-processing used well and the Internet is used effectively to develop research skills. The teachers in general have well-developed ICT skills and use them to good effect.

120. The behaviour of students is very good. Overall attitudes are good, although many tend to be passive during lessons. The lessons have a good climate for learning as a consequence.

121. The department is now well led and managed and has, overall, made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. There is a good range of experience in the team. There is a well-established formal system for monitoring teaching and learning. The department's planning is clear, relevant and manageable. The department is highly collaborative. The head of department is a recent appointment. She and her colleagues have rightly identified the need to secure a more explicit approach to the development of writing and spelling in Years 7 to 9 but the resultant planning requires full implementation. The teachers carry out the school's level and grade target setting procedures well. However, there is not enough use made of appropriate criteria in lesson-to-lesson teaching to focus the students' concentration more effectively on what they need to do to improve. Reports for parents contain helpful information about target grades and levels but not enough subject information about a student's strengths and weaknesses.

Key Skills: literacy

122. There is no whole school policy to guide the development of literacy. However, the school has provided a range of training opportunities for teachers as a result of its involvement in the Key Stage 3 Strategy. This has led to effective attention to the development of key subject vocabulary across all subjects. Displays of key words are displayed prominently in all areas and referred to frequently. A very good example was observed in art and design where students in Year 9 learnt terms such as 'sub conscious' and 'metamorphosis' to support their discussion about surrealism. In science teachers referred specifically to the Persian derivation of alkali and the Latin basis for symbols. An

excellent example was observed in a Year 7 history lesson, which concluded with pairs of students exchanging the key terms and concepts learnt, then reporting back to the teacher.

123. The development of a systematic approach to reading skills has some strengths, but is less effective than the provision for key terms. There is good provision in history and geography with frequent use of skimming, scanning and annotation techniques to locate relevant information efficiently. In science, an effective emphasis on reading for understanding had a positive impact on Year 10 students' knowledge and understanding of the issues pertaining to nuclear energy. Although ICT lessons provide a lot of technical guidance regarding the use of the Internet, there is little guidance on how to extract relevant information. There is no planned systematic approach to developing reading skills in mathematics. However, older students in music used the Internet effectively to research lives of composers. Opportunities for enhancing independent research skills are constrained by the below average provision of books in the library.

124. There is no consistent systematic development of writing across all subjects. In geography and history more guidance on how to produce effective extended writing is required. There was some evidence of the use of writing frames in science but there was little evidence of their use in ICT. The notes of GCSE physical education students were neat and well-presented. Overall, however, the development of writing lacks the consistency and cohesion noted in the development of vocabulary.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall.
- Students' level of achievement is very good in Years 7 to 9.
- Very good leadership and management give a clear direction to the subject.
- There are very well-planned schemes of work.

Areas for improvement

- The marking of students' work to provide feedback on how to improve.
- More opportunities for students to learn independently.
- Quality of information to parents in reports.

125. When students enter the school, their standards in numeracy are well below the national average. Levels of attainment are average at the end of Years 9 and 11. Students' achievement is good overall. It is very good in Years 7 to 9 where the numeracy strategy has had a significant impact on students' learning. Good teaching and the positive attitudes of students results in their making good progress as they move through the school.

126. In 2001, the proportion of students at the age of 14 achieving level 5 or above matched the national average. The proportion achieving level 6 or above was below the national average. These results are a significant increase on previous years' results. Results in 2002 are similar. The average points score is in line with the national average for all schools and well above average for similar schools. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. The average points score is similar to science and better than English. Given that attainment in mathematics by students at the age of 14 is broadly in line with the national average and is well above their prior attainment on entry to the school, the department is adding very good value over Years 7 to 9. In 2001, the proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A*-C was below average with girls performing slightly better than boys, but not significantly so. The proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A*-G was below the national average and again girls performed better than boys. These results represent satisfactory achievement in relation to students' attainment at the end of Year 9. The average points score was not as good as in English and science. Students' performed as well in mathematics as they did in most other subjects studied. Over the last three years the proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A*-C has shown a steady improvement. Results in 2002 have fallen back slightly.

127. The standard of work of students in Year 9 seen during the inspection is average, with some work above average, particularly by the highest attaining students. Standards improve as students move from Years 7 to 9. There are clear examples and complete exercises with working shown, which enable them to refer to and practise newly taught skills. The standard of recorded work by the lowest attaining students is overall below average with not enough care taken over the presentation of results. Examples of extension work for gifted and talented students were common. Elements of all the National Curriculum attainment targets are represented. The standard in the work seen of students in Year 11 is average. Students cover a range of topics in line with the GCSE scheme of work. Work by the highest attaining Year 11 students is above average. Students' work illustrated good use of previously taught skills such as the use of number and algebra when solving quadratic equations. Work of average and lower attaining students is average although a small proportion of students do not present their results well enough

128. Achievement in mathematics is good overall for all students, including those with special educational needs. It is very good in Years 7 to 9. This is because the school's involvement as a pilot school for the numeracy strategy has had a very good impact on students' progress. Very well planned schemes of work, the commitment of teachers and the overall quality of teaching and learning are having a very good impact on the achievement of all students. Year 9 students demonstrate satisfactory data handling skills and have a satisfactory understanding of the concepts of shape and space with problem solving skills developing well. In a lesson on Pythagoras' Theorem, average attaining students developed well their understanding of calculating the lengths of sides in right-angled triangles. Number skills are not yet as well developed as they should be and algebraic skills are still weak for all but the highest attaining students. Average attaining students have difficulty substituting numbers into formula accurately. By the end of Year 11, algebraic and number skills are still not well developed for many students although data handling skills are good. Students' problem solving skills in GCSE coursework are average with most students able to find rules, use formulae, and predict and test results. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make good progress in common with their peers.

129. Teaching and learning overall are good. Students are acquiring skills, knowledge and understanding well. Teachers' good subject knowledge ensures they are able to explain skills and concepts clearly. They question students well and provide a variety of activities, including mental and practical activities, to help students learn. A weakness in the teaching is that the teacher directs much of the learning and not enough opportunities are provided for students to learn by themselves. Teachers plan well for lessons with the objectives shared with students at the beginning of lessons. Good links are made between lessons and activities usually meet the needs of all students including those with special educational needs. Starter activities are being used well in most lessons to develop students' mental skills, review learning and introduce new topics. Plenary sessions that summarise the work covered are part of nearly every lesson although often they do not involve students' well enough in exploring what they have learnt. Homework is used effectively to support students learning.

130. Where support is provided in lessons for students who have special educational needs it is used effectively. There are some large classes where more than half of the students have special needs. These students are not supported and as a result teachers have to work very hard to ensure that all students make at least satisfactory progress. Key words displayed in classrooms and teachers' insistence that students use them during oral contributions are helping to develop students' literacy skills. Although students' work is marked regularly it does not have enough comments about what students should do to improve their work. The teaching of gifted students is good. Teachers provide them with extension tasks, which challenge them. As a result they make good progress. Effective feedback is given in lessons to help students overcome their difficulties and identify how well they are doing. At present computers are not used sufficiently to help students learn. However, the subject now has its own bank of computers and their use is well planned. Students behave well and show positive attitudes to their work. Teachers manage and organise students well. This results in students listening attentively during discussions, concentrating on their tasks and cooperating well with each other during group activities. Lessons are marked by the good atmosphere for learning that results.

131. Leadership and management are very good. The leadership provides a clear direction for the development of the subject. There is a clear commitment to raising standards by all the teachers and they work well together to share good practice. The department have worked very hard to implement the numeracy strategy as a pilot school and this has had a very significant impact on the achievement of students. Very good schemes of work are suitably prepared to match the needs of different groups of students and to incorporate the new numeracy strategy. They ensure good progress for all groups of students as they move through the school. Arrangements for assessing students' attainment are good. Targets are set and students' progress towards those targets is well monitored. The results are used well to encourage students' progress as they move through the school and to monitor the subject's overall performance in external tests and examinations. The information reported to parents, however, does not include comments about the areas of the curriculum that students need to improve. For example, no comments are made about students' standards in work on number, data handling or problem solving.

132. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good. All of the weaknesses at the time of the last inspection have been tackled. Teaching, achievement, schemes of work, attainment in using and applying mathematics, resources, accommodation and classroom support have all significantly improved.

Key skills: numeracy

133. Standards of numeracy are average. In science, students in Years 10 and 11 make very good use of graphs to display results of experiments and all students demonstrate satisfactory use of scale and measurement. In design and technology students' are able to measure lengths and weights accurately in practical work. In geography, students have a satisfactory understanding of the use of coordinates in map work. Despite well below average levels of prior attainment on entry to the school students achieve well matching national expectations by the age of 14. The lack of a whole school policy for numeracy across the curriculum is resulting in an unsatisfactory contribution being made by some subjects other than mathematics to developing students' numeracy skills

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Very good management and leadership, and a shared commitment within the department to improve standards of attainment.
- Teaching is good overall and leads to good learning.
- Students achieve very well in Years 7 to 9.
- Assessment procedures, particularly in Years 7 to 9.

Areas for improvement

- The development and consolidation of ICT, using the newly acquired provision within the department.
- The provision of more extension work to challenge, even further, the most able students.

134. When students enter the school their levels of attainment in science are well below the national average. In the work seen in the inspection, levels of attainment are broadly in line with the national average at the ends of Years 9 and 11. By the end of Year 9 students achieved very well, frequently supported by very good teaching in Years 8 and 9, have shown very good achievement, and by the end of Year 11, good achievement, when account is taken of their starting points in Year 7. The Key Stage 3 Strategy pilot work has impacted significantly on the quality of teaching within the department, as teachers share good practice, increase investigative work, and gain confidence in areas outside their science subject specialism. Students respond well to the overall good teaching that takes place, and their very positive attitudes and good behaviour have a significant impact on their level of achievement.

135. In the 2001 National Curriculum tests, the average points score in science was broadly in line with the national average, when compared to all schools, and was very high when compared to similar schools. Within the school, the average points score was just below that for mathematics, but above that for English. Since 1997, the trend in average National Curriculum points has been above the national trend. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. In the 2002 National Curriculum tests, the results of the department show an average gain of a third of a level per student, from entry to Year 9. The percentage of students gaining Level 5 and above has been maintained, with a slight decrease in the percentage of students achieving the highest levels. All students in the year group are entered for GCSE double award science. In 2001 the percentage of students gaining A*-C was below the national average, and for those gaining A*-G was above the national average. Students achieved better results in science than in mathematics but not as good as in English. From 1999 to 2001, the percentage of students achieving A*-C increased significantly each year. In 2002, the results of the department indicate an average improvement of a third of a grade per student, for both boys and girls, on earlier attainment. A small number of lower attaining students achieve very well in the Certificate of Achievement examination, and have also achieved lower grades in the double award examination.

136. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards overall in Years 9 and 11 are broadly in line with the national average. Good teaching, with regular marking and support, assists Year 11 students in achieving day-to-day work standards higher than those achieved by them in external examinations. Lower attaining Year 8 students are aware of the workings of a universal indicator, and using a colour chart can identify acids and alkalis within household products. Higher attaining Year 8 students can describe the effects of a series electrical circuit. Other students can identify three main groupings of micro-organism, knowing examples of each, and their working. Higher attaining students gave good support to others who found difficulty with the exercise. Students know the methods used by the human body to deal with pathogens. Lower attaining Year 9 students competently access Chemistry Set 2000, a detailed ICT database, to discover information related to the properties of metals. In an investigation exercise, knowing that some metals react with dilute acids to form salts, they react with a certain amount of awe and wonder as they hear the "pop" of hydrogen in some of their test-tubes. Observing health and safety procedures, students collaboratively work together, as they identify the presence of starch, sugar and proteins by chemical test. Higher attaining Year 10 students are aware of and can discuss the moral and social issues related to a continued use of fossil

and nuclear fuels. Year 11 students are aware of adaptation processes, used by plants and animals, in order to survive, and lower attaining students are able to construct simple food chains and webs. Graph work, necessitating minimum guidance from the teacher, was of good quality, as students studied the motion of objects and created distance/time graphs. Year 11 higher attaining students can explain the difference between mass and weight. A scrutiny of the good quality Year 11 coursework of last year, showed good evidence of the use of ICT for both word-processed presentation, and the use of the Internet for research. Students with special educational needs make good progress and clearly benefit from grouping arrangements, appropriate levels of work, good worksheets, and additional classroom support. In addition to beneficial grouping arrangements, there is evidence of extended and differentiated work prepared for higher attaining students.

137. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching is never less than satisfactory, and over a third of the fifteen lessons seen were judged to be very good or better. The high quality of teaching, with well-prepared, and organised lessons, has a positive impact on students' learning. A stable, committed staff of twelve teachers, with a wide range of experience, demonstrates good subject knowledge. By the use of appropriate teaching material and method, the use of lesson objectives closely aligned to a plenary session that summarises the work covered, teachers encourage students' active interest and enthusiasm for their work. Students are aware of their National Curriculum targets, and these are shown in their exercise books, and test results are given National Curriculum levels. Since the last inspection the increase in the amount of investigative work has allowed staff to plan lessons which include variety and pace. Using their good relationships, teachers challenge and have high expectations of students, in particular the lowest attainers. In teaching set ability groups or mixed ability groups, the needs of individual students with special educational requirements are known, and well supported by the teacher. Learning support assistance, where provided, is of good quality.

138. Generally, working groups and seating arrangements tend to be single-sex, but external examination results indicate that this is not disadvantaging boys or girls. The grouping of students into ability sets and the provision of booster and master classes assist gifted students. However, the planned further development and implementation of CASE (Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education) lessons in Years 7 and 8, will provide even greater opportunity to extend and challenge the thinking skills of the most able students. The regular and consistent marking of work, supported by constructive comment, is evident in the students' work. Assessment procedures are good. The reports to parents include targets and National Curriculum levels of attainment, but there is insufficient information about the work students have covered and what they need to do to improve. The standard of presentation and organisation of work by students is of a high quality, allowing them to use their exercise books, and files, profitably for revision purposes. Appropriate and adequate homework is set.

139. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is well developed within the department, but need to be aligned to written policies to ensure consistency of approach. Key words are emphasised in lessons and place mats are used illustrated with science vocabulary, which helps poorer readers access the curriculum. However, it is necessary to continue to develop and consolidate the use of ICT, using the newly acquired suite and hardware provision, and recent staff training, in particular in the use of sensors and data logging by students. Health and safety precautions are properly observed in laboratory investigative work. Two full-time technicians, who are unobtrusive in their working, give good support to teachers and efficiently manage the department's equipment.

140. Standards of behaviour are good overall. Attitudes and behaviour are never less than satisfactory. In Years 7 and 8, attitudes are mainly good, and in Year 9, mainly very good. In Years 10 and 11 attitudes are mainly good. Students respond to the challenge of their teachers to achieve their highest standards. For example, lower attaining Year 11 Science-Plus students, having already achieved bronze and silver awards are now aiming, with the support and enthusiasm of their teacher, to achieve the gold award, and entry to double award science examination. Students generally arrive punctually at their lessons, settle quickly, mainly show interest in their work, and keep on task. Students often have a very mature approach to learning, particularly in the highest sets. Opportunities for taking responsibility and for independent learning are limited. When performing investigative work, students handle equipment carefully and confidently, and work collaboratively. Relationships between students, and teachers and students, are good and students enjoy their science.

141. The very good leadership of the department, the commitment of all the teachers to raising standards of attainment and the quality of teaching are strengths of the department. The monitoring of performance, teaching and learning by the head of department is good. The support and challenge offered through the provision of extra-curricular classes by staff encourage students to achieve well. Links with the primary schools are strong. To motivate student attitudes towards the subject, a number of external visits have been made, and subject competitions and quizzes are entered annually. Standards of accommodation in the science suite are good, although soundproofing between some classrooms is inadequate. There has been a very good response to the issues raised at the last inspection. There has been an overall improvement in external examination results. The introduction of CASE to promote thinking skills and independent learning is being developed into the teaching programmes in Years 7 and 8.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and this results in good learning.
- Students respond positively and behaviour in lessons is very good.

Areas for improvement

- The setting and marking of work, which needs to be carried out on a more regular basis.
- Assessing and recording systems need more rigour.
- The current curriculum, which is too narrow and gives little opportunity for ICT or photography.
- The provision of work-related, vocational courses within the curriculum.

142. Students enter the school with lower than average levels of attainment in art and design. By the end of Year 9, attainment is broadly in line with the national average. Students are making good progress and achievement is good. In Years 10 and 11, students make satisfactory progress. Most work well to improve their skills in drawing and painting. Students respond positively to the tasks that are set and behaviour in lessons is very good. Students with special educational needs are well-integrated into all teaching groups.

143. In the GCSE Examination in 2001 there was a significant decline in the number of students who gained the highest grades A*-C by comparison with those for 2000. Attainment by both boys and girls was very low when compared against levels of attainment achieved by students nationally. Within the school, boys' performance was much lower than girls' in 2001. In 2002 there was improvement in

the number of girls who achieved the highest grades, whereas the figure for boys showed a slight drop. Overall there is an improvement in attainment at GCSE level in 2002.

144. Work seen during the inspection indicates that current standards are higher than recent results as the impact of new staffing is having a positive impact. They are now broadly in line with national averages and improve through Years 7 to 9. The department has experienced significant disruption in staffing since the previous inspection, but a new subject leader has been appointed and the situation has improved. As a result of good teaching, students in Year 9 achieve well in relation to their starting points in Year 7. Girls' attainment is better than boys at this level. Students with special educational needs are encouraged to make a concentrated effort to develop their potential and they achieve well. Year 7 students find drawing from observation difficult mainly due to lack of practice and unfamiliarity with different drawing materials. By Year 8, students produce reasonable two-dimensional studies using pencils, coloured pencils and paint to communicate their ideas and to express their feelings. A significant minority continue to struggle however, and have not yet succeeded in raising their drawing and painting skills to the required level. In Year 9, the lowest attaining students continue to have great difficulty in producing finished pieces of work as they lack the necessary skills. Middle and higher attaining students in Year 9 showed great interest in investigating the work of Surrealist artists such as Salvador Dali and most have begun to produce paintings and drawings of a standard that is broadly in line with national expectations. Gifted and talented students produce drawn and painted studies that are of a standard above national expectations. They work with concentration over time to produce drawn and painted images that demonstrate good control over their chosen media and materials such as pencils, coloured pencils and paint.

145. In work seen during the inspection, students make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. The majority show enthusiasm for the set tasks and work with concentration to acquire the necessary skills and techniques that will enable them to communicate their ideas, concepts and feelings to others. At present these students are working within a narrow curriculum, which places undue emphasis on traditional painting and drawing skills. There is little opportunity for students to explore ideas through the use of photography and ICT in a design context that is based upon work-related, vocational experiences. Within the constraints of the narrow curriculum, students are attaining average standards and their level of achievement is satisfactory overall. The highest attaining students work independently and successfully to explore their own attitudes and beliefs through art and design. In one Year 11 lesson, students were investigating the work of Pop Artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. They worked productively and at a good pace and achieved well. Overall girls worked with greater application than did boys. Students with special educational needs are very well assimilated into the teaching groups, as are students with English as an additional language, and they too achieve satisfactorily.

146. Teaching ranges from satisfactory to good throughout Years 7 to 11 and is good overall and results in good learning in most lessons. The subsequent achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 because the progress, whilst good within the lessons seen, is made within the confines of a curriculum that lacks breadth. Teachers possess good subject knowledge and understanding which inspires confidence in the students. They are well-informed and suitably qualified to teach basic skills in drawing and painting. There is evidence of sound planning, good organisation and good use of available time and resources. Teachers set challenging tasks for students, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In Year 11 lessons observed, students were expected to conduct research into the "Pop Art Movement" of the Sixties in their own time. This provided them with an informed understanding of the historical context of their own learning and resulted in good progress. The marking of students' work and the setting of homework on a regular basis currently lacks rigour and is unsatisfactory. However, the new head of the department has set in place well formulated plans to ensure a more rational and coherent approach to both areas.

147. Most students have very positive attitudes towards their work and show interest in the tasks that are set by their teachers and are keen to improve their technical skills in drawing and painting. The studies seen in the sketchbooks belonging to students in Years 7 to 9 show that some are beginning to develop the capacity to work independently. In Years 10 and 11 students are beginning to introduce concerns of a more personal nature into their work. Behaviour is very good and this ensures a good working atmosphere in lessons that allow students to concentrate and make good progress.

148. The leadership and management of the art and design department are currently satisfactory, with some good features. The newly appointed assistant co-ordinator has only been in place since the start of this term, but already she has begun the process of preparing new schemes of work and improving the assessment and recording procedures. This is having a positive impact upon the work in the department. Although there has been quite significant disruption within the department over recent years, improvement since the last inspection is good. Overall standards in Years 7 to 9 are in line with national expectations and in Years 10 and 11, standards have improved, albeit on a narrow front.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall; teachers have good subject knowledge and their lesson planning is thorough.
- Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9.
- Accommodation is very good.
- The good leadership and management of the head of department.

Areas for improvement

- The levels of attainment of students, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Planning for the more systematic and progressive development of design and graphical skills in Years 7 to 9.

149. Students enter the school with standards well below the average and by the end of Year 9 they are below average. Students make good progress and achieve well in relation to their starting points. At the end of Year 11, levels of attainment are well below average, and recent results at GCSE were adversely affected by staffing problems over the last year. The school was unable to recruit suitable, high quality supply staff to cover long-term staff absence. This situation has now been resolved with the permanent appointment of three experienced specialist teachers. In the work seen during the inspection, the quality of teaching was consistently good and resulted in good learning, especially in Years 7 to 10. The majority of students in these years were keen to learn, attentive to their teachers and interested in the subject.

150. In 2001, the proportion of students obtaining GCSE grades A*-C was well below the national average. Results in the resistant materials, textiles, food and graphics courses were all well below average at these higher grades. In all the courses the proportion of students achieving A*-G grades was just below the national average. Results in 2002 are lower in the resistant materials and textiles courses, the two areas most affected by the staffing difficulties, but the results in food and graphics at the higher grades were similar to those of 2001. In both these years, the attainment of the boys was significantly below that of the girls. Overall students achieved GCSE results in design and technology that were below the levels achieved in their other subjects.

151. In the work seen during the inspection, attainment at the age of 14 is below average. However, inspection evidence shows that students make good progress as a result of good teaching and an appropriate curriculum that now includes modules of work on systems and control. The majority of students have stronger making skills in a range of materials and these are near to the nationally expected levels by the end of Year 9. Design and graphical skills are not so well developed for the majority of the students, especially the middle attaining boys. Key technical vocabulary is emphasised in all lessons and literacy and numeracy skills are stressed and developed in design and making activities. In Year 7, students in a food lesson were set the task of producing a product description for four different varieties of apples. They were able to identify ways to record taste, texture and appearance and prepare the apples for testing using basic practical skills safely and hygienically. They could record their findings by drawing up a star diagram so their results for each variety of apple tested could be compared. In a Year 9 lesson, the students were introduced to pneumatics systems where they were taught the correct way to build a simple circuit from the components provided. Throughout, the teacher stressed the correct technical vocabulary, which the students were quick to grasp. The highest attaining students have a more secure grasp of the subject knowledge and their design skills are more highly developed than those of other students. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs have greater difficulty with design skills but their making skills are better developed. The achievements of the girls are higher than those of the boys.

152. Standards of work in the current Years 10 are below average. In Year 11, standards are well below average as the work of these students, especially on the textiles and resistant materials courses were most affected by the staffing difficulties of last year. The pattern of attainment in the various elements of the courses is very similar to that at the end of Year 9. Practical making continues to be the strongest area for the majority of students. They handle tools and materials with increasing precision. For example in a Year 11 GNVQ Foundation lesson, the lower attaining students were selecting and using a range of hand and machine tools to shape and join accurately wooden blocks, and make simple mechanisms for the child's toy they were producing. The students following the Year 11 graphical products course have the best developed graphical skills and use a range of techniques and media with care, accuracy and skill to develop their design folders for their major project. Subject knowledge and understanding are well below the expected levels for the majority of students but achievement is good in some lessons. For example, students in a Year 11 food lesson, developed their theoretical knowledge of fats and their uses in cake-making as well as their analytical skills through testing and tasting samples. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs, continue to have design and graphical skills that are weak. Higher attaining boys and girls achieve satisfactory standards in all aspects of the subject.

153. Through Years 7 to 9, progress and achievement are good as students' design and technology experience is deepened and broadened. In Years 10 and 11, the scrutiny of work showed satisfactory progress. However, the rate of progress among current students is already increasing as the impact of consistently good teaching is having an effect on the standards of work in all courses. In all years students handle tools, equipment, machines and materials with increasing confidence, accuracy and skill and work with due regard for safety and hygiene. Graphical communication skills improve over time as students use a range of drawing and projection methods to model and communicate their design ideas. Design skills develop less well for middle and lower attaining students, but the higher attaining students make good progress as they research, analyse and evaluate with increasing depth and rigour.

154. Overall, the quality of teaching is now good. Learning is good in Years 7 to 9 where the impact of improved teaching is more clearly evident. Learning in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. At

this early stage in the Year, these students are still overcoming the detrimental effects of staffing difficulties in the recent past. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan and prepare resources for their lessons effectively. They set tasks and use projects that challenge their students, and have high expectations of the work they produce. In the lessons observed, the teachers used a range of methods and learning activities appropriate to the students' levels of attainment. For example, in a Year 10 systems and control lesson the teacher started the lesson with a clear and concise explanation of the work to be done and then gave a precise demonstration of building a pneumatic circuit. The students were then divided into pairs and threes before building their own circuit. Time deadlines were given for this, and all the subsequent tasks that were introduced at regular intervals. This approach ensured very good pace to the learning and maximised the use of the time available. Throughout the lesson the teacher's own subject knowledge and expertise contributed to the students' level of understanding and achievement. Teachers give high levels of individual support to the students and well-informed feedback encourages them to value their efforts and raises their level of motivation. In most lessons the teachers shared the aims of the lesson with the students but rarely did they review the progress made at the end of the lesson.

155. Students' attitudes to design and technology are very good overall. The majority of students are keen and interested to learn. They respect the resources and materials provided for their use. Behaviour, and the students' levels of concentration on their work are very good. Relationships between students and with their teachers are also very good, and the students cooperate with each other very well when working in groups.

156. The department is well led and managed and there has been a good level of improvement since the previous inspection. The new staff team is working together well and a good team spirit is developing. The problems caused by the long-term absence of staff and less than adequate supply cover are being overcome and the department is moving forward. The work of the department is kept under review and monitoring of teaching and learning is in place. The curriculum meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and the use of ICT is integrated into it. However, the teaching of design and graphical skills should be more systematically and progressively planned for in all modules of work in Years 7 to 9. The assessment system makes use of National Curriculum levels. Target setting is in place for all students in all years, but in lessons teachers rarely refer to them or set intermediate targets to aid students progress in the short term. Most of the identified weaknesses in the previous report have been addressed. The accommodation is now very good and specialised facilities are in place for systems and control and ICT.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Good leadership with a commitment to raising standards.
- Teaching is good and leads to good learning for the majority of students.
- Assessment strategies are effective in helping students to make good progress.
- Students are prepared well for their examinations.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure a greater consistency in the demands made on students.
- Further integration of ICT into the curriculum.

157. Students' attainment is average at the end of Year 9 and in Years 7 to 9 students' achievement in relation to their prior learning is good. In Year 11, students' attainment is currently below average, but it is rising slowly. In the GCSE examination in 2001, girls performed better than boys overall, but the percentage of boys reaching the A grade at GCSE is above the national average and represents very good achievement for boys of higher ability.

158. Although the GCSE results at A*-C in 2001 were below average when compared with national figures, the proportion of students reaching these higher grades has risen slightly over the last three years. In contrast, the proportion of students reaching A*-G dropped significantly in 2001. This is not so for 2002 when all but one student attained these grades. Girls continue to outperform boys. Students are prepared well for the examination. This is the major factor in the reduction in the number of low and ungraded results in 2002 together with a detailed analysis of the causes of underachievement in 2001. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in almost all lessons and overall provision is now good.

159. The overall standard of work of students in Years 7 to 9 seen during the inspection is average. Teachers' assessment of standards at the end of Year 9 in 2001, were close to the national average, having risen steadily over the last three years. There was no significant difference between boys and girls. Students enter the school with low levels of attainment in geography but make good progress and achieve well. By the end of Year 9 higher attaining students are reaching standards well above average showing a good understanding of geographical skills and concepts. Students with special educational needs reach standards that are below national expectations. However, because of individual support from their teachers and work that is matched to their needs, these students make good progress. Students with English as a second language make good progress and reach standards commensurate with others of the same ability. For example, one student at a relatively early stage in the acquisition of English, understood geographical terms as well as the rest of the class and made good progress in common with the rest of the class.

160. Students in Years 7 to 9 generally develop a good understanding of geographical skills, concepts and the way in which the physical environment impacts upon population distribution and economic activity. For example, most students in Year 9 have a good understanding of the structure of the earth and can accurately describe the features of a volcano. Using the Kobe earthquake as an example, students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs can describe the effects of the earthquake but only higher attaining students can relate the level of damage and loss of life to the proximity of the earthquake's epicentre, the nature and age of the buildings and the population density. Students of average ability do not identify the push and pull factors resulting in the migration from rural areas to cities. Students' understanding of industry is enhanced by the fieldwork visit to Hill Hall Farm. Fieldwork reports written by students of all abilities, give detailed accounts of the farm, and higher attaining students demonstrate good analytical skills as they accurately explain the inputs, outputs and processes of the farming system. Written work is highly structured. It is completed diligently and is well presented. Geographical vocabulary is correctly used and spelt by the majority of students. However, there are insufficient opportunities for students, particularly those of average and above average ability to direct their own investigation and research and to write about geographical issues in depth. This limits students' attainments at the highest standards.

161. The overall standard of work of students in Years 10 and 11 seen during the inspection is below average although higher attaining students are reaching standards well above average. The achievement of students of average ability is improving with a significant number of students making good progress and attaining higher results than expected. This is reflected in the GCSE results for 2002. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Overall, the achievement of students in relation to their starting points is good. Most students have a good knowledge of the methods of electricity generation in the United Kingdom. Higher attaining students can give a reasoned account of the factors governing the location of power stations. In the work of students of average and below average ability an understanding of the links between location and fuel supply is less developed and students were not able to analyse fully differences that occur over time, for example changes in the relative cost of gas, oil and coal. The standard of presentation in students' individual study is uniformly good, and students are conscientious in amassing the data required to test their hypotheses concerning the spread of visual pollution in a local park. Little use is made of ICT either to word process material or to draw graphs, reflecting students' lack of experience in the use of ICT in geography. Study skills continue to develop well. Students demonstrate the ability to write accurate notes and to identify key ideas and vocabulary.

162. The overall quality of teaching is good and results in good learning for the majority of students. There are still some areas within the teaching provision as a whole that need to be improved further. These include increasing the pace and challenge in some lessons and ensuring that all students are clear about what they need to do in order to progress. In the best lessons, where teachers communicate an enthusiasm for their subject, plan effectively to meet the objectives for the lesson and the needs of the students, good learning takes place. These lessons, which move on at a good pace, are often broken down into a number of short varied activities. A Year 9 lesson, for example, began with a brainstorm exercise, utilising students' previous learning to list natural hazards. It was followed by a short dramatic video sequence of an earthquake. Skilled questioning then enabled students to contribute to a time line of events using information from the video before starting a written exercise matching these events to a seismograph. In others, students work collaboratively in matching and sorting exercises for example, successfully developing their knowledge of Ordnance Survey map symbols in Year 7 and in Year 10 perceptively analysing the causes of fluctuating electricity demand. Students make less progress in the few lessons where the pace is too slow, where they are unsure what to do and where the plan for the lesson does not systematically advance students knowledge and understanding. Teachers make good use of word walls, glossary pages and structured written exercises to develop students' basic literacy skills but opportunities for longer written assignments, which enhance students' research and analytical skills are limited.

163. The procedures for formal assessment and target setting are good and are instrumental in raising levels of attainment. Regular assessment at the end of each unit of work, gives students a good knowledge of their own learning, and the accompanying review sheet details what students should do to improve. Between assessments, files are regularly marked for accuracy and completion but these marks and comments do not provide an ongoing evaluation of students' progress towards their targets and should be developed.

164. Teachers create a good environment for learning because students are well managed and generally behave very well and show a very positive attitude towards their work. Teachers expect students to work hard and as a result they are quick to engage in written work and group tasks. On occasion, however students are reluctant to answer and the pace of the lesson slows and the standard of learning declines. Regular homework is generally used effectively to develop classwork. It is sometimes used well for students to conduct individual research particularly in Years 10 and 11.

165. Leadership and management are good. Curriculum provision is good ensuring that students' geographical skills and knowledge progress year-on-year. The department handbook gives good guidance to all staff. As a result there are consistent approaches to classroom management, assessment, and the use of display throughout the curriculum area. The development of additional strategies to monitor teachers' planning to meet lesson objectives, and the maintenance of a brisk pace in all lessons are areas for further improvement. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and teachers are committed to the continued improvement of standards.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards in Years 7 to 9 have improved and students achieve well.
- Teaching is now good and is producing good learning.
- Improved resources and accommodation and a range of outside visits are resulting in good learning.
- Good relationships with their teachers and students' positive attitudes to work are leading to good learning.
- The department is led well and high standards and expectations are being set.

Areas for improvement

- Raising the level of attainment of middle and lower attaining students in Year 11.
- More systematic use of computers to enrich lessons and develop history skills.

166. Levels of attainment are below average at the end of Years 9 and 11. As students enter the school with skills in history that are well below the national average, their achievement by the end of Year 9 is good, as is the quality of their learning. They make satisfactory progress in their achievement by Year 11. Teaching, overall is good. Considerable improvements have been made since the last inspection and nearly all the issues raised then have been successfully tackled.

167. GCSE results in 2001 were well below the national average for all maintained secondary schools. The proportion achieving A*-G grades was close to the national average. Students did less well in history than in many of their other subjects. Results in the two years previous to 2001 were broadly the same. However, the 2002 results show some improvement and this group of students achieved well. In the last two years, boys have attained significantly better than girls at grades A*-C. Overall, this represents satisfactory achievement for all students compared with their attainment at the end of Year 9.

168. Standards in work seen by the end of Year 9 are just below average. This matches the teachers' assessments for 2002 for the proportion of students attaining National Curriculum Level 5 and much better than those for 2001. Boys perform as well as girls. Students' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry in Year 7 is good as they enter the school with skills and understanding in history well below average. Students have a sound knowledge and understanding of key events and chronology. They have satisfactory skills of enquiry and can record of evidence from different sources effectively. This was seen in their project work in Year 9 on the cholera epidemic in Gateshead and nineteenth century factory conditions; higher attaining students produced well researched and fluently written work. These students are also developing skills of analysing sources for reliability and interpreting evidence. Such skills are less developed in students of lower ability. Encouraged by the emphasis on skills development in the schemes of work, teachers are developing writing and oral skills in students of all abilities. For instance, middle attaining Year 8 students could effectively discuss in pairs the diverse social conditions in England in 1500. Year 9 average attainers wrote sensitive and lengthy accounts of the concentration camps after hearing a talk from a Holocaust survivor. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs are often helped to develop effective writing skills by teachers. For instance, a mixed ability group in Year 7 were helped by good support materials to consider carefully the claims of the different contenders for the throne in 1066.

169. Standards of work in Year 11 are below the national average. This is better than the GCSE results for 2001 as the cohort is more able and has benefited from the increased emphasis on developing history skills in Years 7 to 9. The students' achievement is satisfactory compared with their attainment at the end of Year 9. Students have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and events they study. This is enhanced by the teachers' well-prepared booklets, which provide outline notes for completion at different levels of ability. Nearly all students develop sound skills of selecting and recording evidence, although lower attaining students and those with special educational needs find note-making difficult without support materials from the teacher. Gifted and talented and higher attaining students evaluate sources well and write fluently and analytically with supporting evidence, for instance, Year 11 students' writing in coursework on reasons for Germany losing the First World War. However, students of average and lower ability in Year 11 struggle with the difficult tasks of analysing and evaluating different sources, for instance in examining the impact of the First World War on civilians. Their skills of writing confidently and coherently at length are also less well developed, although the use of drafting and writing frames is helping to tackle this problem.

170. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. They are often very good and there is no unsatisfactory teaching. It is best in Years 7 to 9. This is an improvement on the situation at the time of the last inspection. Teachers use their good subject knowledge and planning to set more varied activities than previously reported. These involve students actively in enquiry work and problem solving and challenge students' thinking, especially higher attainers and the gifted and talented. For instance, higher attaining students in a Year 9 lesson on life in England in the 1750's were stimulated by well chosen primary sources to sort them into categories of their own choosing through discussion in pairs. They then summarised their results in a succinct paragraph of only 30 words. Very good learning resulted as the students were fully engaged and their skills of understanding, writing and speaking were developed well. Lessons are well structured and timed, with objectives clearly shared with students and referred to at the end of the lesson, when students' understanding is assessed, often by students telling their neighbour what they have learned. Marking is done frequently and consistently well in explaining the students' weaknesses and giving valuable advice. Students in Year 11 are aware of their current and predicted grades and how to improve.

171. Students make good progress in lessons as a result of this good teaching. They acquire knowledge and learn important new skills of enquiry, communications and organisation. This now enables them to work and learn better by themselves. This is also promoted by the students' interest in the work and their good behaviour, seen in nearly all lessons. It is encouraged by the teachers' warm relationship with them and their good management of students that keep them on task well. Literacy skills are being improved by using glossaries, writing frames and drafting of work. Those with special educational needs in the lower attaining groups make good progress in their learning as they

are well supported with materials produced by the department, especially to improve weak writing skills. However, although teaching in Years 10 and 11 is generally good, those with lower attainment and some of average ability in the more mixed ability groups achieve less well by Year 11. This occurs when methods and materials are not fully provided to support them in the demanding tasks of analysing and interpreting sources.

172. The department is well led by an enthusiastic head of department who has made a strong contribution to the considerable improvements since the last inspection. Priorities for raising achievement reflect those of the school, especially in promoting literacy, thinking and enquiry skills. These are strongly emphasised in the thoroughly revised schemes of work. The assessment procedures use data well to set individual targets in Years 7 to 11. They inform changes to teaching and the curriculum and guide students on how to improve. There are now sufficient books for students in all years. The subject has benefited greatly from the new building work and the spacious rooms provide a good environment for learning. There is now a good programme of outside visits, which is used well as a resource to stimulate interest. Although written into lesson plans, ICT is not systematically used in all classes to enrich the subject and provide an additional resource for enquiry work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The overall commitment of the school to improve ICT facilities.
- Increasing use of student performance data to inform curriculum planning and through it, to improve the learning of students.
- The improved match of the curriculum to the needs of students in Years 10 and 11 leading to better achievement.
- The wide access to the subject for students of all ages.

Areas for Improvement

- Raising students' attainment at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- The development of teaching strategies to enable students to become more independent in their learning.
- The writing of more informative reports to parents and students so that they know what has to be done to improve their work.
- Broadening the syllabus to encompass ICT in everyday life.
- Improve arrangements to develop ICT skills in all subjects across the curriculum.

173. The distinction is drawn in this section between ICT taught as a separate subject in Years 7 to 11 and the provision of ICT by all subjects in their planned teaching. The provision in both is satisfactory overall, but some aspects in the cross-curricular ICT provision need improvement. The subject is no longer taken at GCSE level and students now pursue a nationally recognised GNVQ (Intermediate) programme which has a vocational focus and which is not weighted to examination performance. Results in GCSE for 2001 were well below the national average for similar schools in terms of the proportion of A*-C grade passes and unconfirmed results for 2002 suggest a similar picture. Boys perform more poorly in this subject than others taken in Years 10 and 11. This pattern is repeated for girls although the difference between their results in ICT and other subjects is less. There are no results to report for GNVQ with the first cohort completing their studies in 2003.

174. Standards at entry are below average, although the range of prior attainments is relatively wide. Teacher assessment data indicates that that, overall, the gap between the performance of students and the national average has been reduced by the time students reach the age of 14, which represents good achievement.

175. In the work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are close to the national average, representing good achievement overall from a starting point below average. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls and students with special educational needs make

similar progress to their peers. Numeracy and literacy skills represent a barrier to learning for some students of lower and middle attainment, for example in a lesson observed dealing with cell formulae. Here, students quickly grasped the significance of individual cells but were unable to construct the relevant mathematical formulae to calculate stock values accurately. Nevertheless, by the end of Year 9 many students can use appropriate control software with confidence, for example to navigate model turtles. Work for students within Years 7 to 9 is rather too dependent on worksheets and these sheets are not always appropriate to the age of the class or to the topic. The department is aware of this and schemes of work are presently being reconsidered in anticipation of new national specifications, which are to be announced shortly. The emphasis in current work programmes is on the acquisition and application of basic skills. There is insufficient focus on the practical applications of new technology in everyday life, for example in the use of digital cameras or the application of various recognition technologies in finance and retailing. Consequently, students' knowledge of the use of ICT in everyday life is more limited than might be reasonably expected. Students of a wide ability range are not confident in independent research skills, for example in work in preparing for a major social event within a large commercial organisation and the communications which need to be set in place in planning terms.

176. Within Years 10 and 11, students continue to make satisfactory progress and standards are close to the national average. This represents satisfactory achievement overall, including for students with special educational needs. Technical vocabulary, for example in graphics work dealing with vectors and bitmaps is secure for middle and higher attainers. Numeracy and literacy skills are less of a problem and students can undertake more complex applications for example in spreadsheet work and databases. Boys and girls make progress at broadly similar rates. Oral skills for both groups are under-developed and this causes difficulties for consolidating learning, for example in work on determining effective commercial logo design and application within project work.

177. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In Years 7 and 8, the overall impact of teaching is reduced because students receive too much variation in terms of the teachers who deliver the subject and some timetabling arrangements that are unsatisfactory. In Year 9, subject specialists undertake the teaching and timetabling arrangements are more suitable. The teaching provision in Year 9 is good and students achieve well. In the best lessons there is a good range of individual and group tasks with demanding time challenges given, for example in some lessons dealing with logo design. In Years 7 and 8, the most effective teaching prompts students to reflect on what they are doing, for example in simple spreadsheet activities. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are satisfactory, and students make sound progress. By Year 11, students are making more noticeable progress in recognising the integrated business applications of ICT, for example within project work on 'World Club Travel'. Lessons nevertheless are often too teacher-directed and this has a negative impact in encouraging students to take responsibility for problem solving. This is true for both younger and older students of all abilities.

178. There were, however, some unsatisfactory features in the lessons observed. Students' entitlement between Years 7 and 9 is uneven and a number of groups are taught exclusively by non-specialist staff who are not always confident in presenting material or in challenging higher and lower attaining students effectively. This has an adverse effect upon their learning. Similarly, continuity of teaching for students in Year 8 is poor. Students in this group are each taught by three teachers and ensuring work is completed and uniformity of expectation in terms of performance is very difficult. For older students, the department has now been able to strengthen the level of specialist teaching with recent staff appointments. The department is at an early stage in using post-16 students to assist in the learning of younger students in Years 7 to 9. This is a welcome initiative and students were seen to support students in project work within a Year 9 class effectively, including some with learning difficulties. The school is well aware of the problems of teaching quality and have made significant efforts to attract and retain appropriately qualified teachers and improve the continuity of teaching for students in each year group.

179. In the main, students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory although exclusions from lessons in this subject are higher than for many in the school. In lessons where teachers' knowledge is good and expectations are made clear, students take their work seriously and are prepared to persist. This was seen in a lesson dealing with the importance of correct data entry in setting up and applying databases in a commercial context. Lessons where attitudes and behaviour were less satisfactory were typified by low expectation, poorly timed activities and insufficient opportunity for

students to take responsibility for their own learning. Although most lessons involved a plenary session, these were not always well planned nor gave sufficient opportunity for students to reflect on their learning and articulate difficulties they had, for example with basic numeracy, literacy and research skills.

180. Leadership and management are now good and are starting to have a positive impact on raising standards in the separate subject of ICT. For students in Years 10 and 11, schemes of work are well considered and now match the learning needs of students more appropriately. For younger students, it is recognised that current schemes of work are now outmoded and the department is preparing for changes which meet the requirements of new national syllabus specifications. There is a brief but well-focused departmental development plan which emphasises wider curriculum opportunities and raising standards, together with the need to further improve resources. The new co-ordinator has made strenuous efforts to rationalise the teaching team, which remains large and unwieldy with 17 staff required to provide the ICT curriculum. In the past two years there has been difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. This has had an adverse effect on standards for students of all ages and abilities. The school has worked effectively in reducing this problem. Resources have improved and the ratio of modern computers to students is now slightly above the national average. There are insufficient texts for students of all ages and abilities. This problem is made worse by the extremely limited book stock in the Learning Resources Centre. The department is overly reliant on a relatively narrow range of software. This restricts the consolidation of learning for students who are overly dependent on spoken presentations from teachers.

181. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are now near to the national average. The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 now meets statutory requirements. Students' prior attainment is now used to inform curriculum planning in Years 10 and 11 and there are suitable progression routes for

students of varying abilities. Students' performance is now more rigorously tracked but has not yet led to a comprehensive re-evaluation of teaching and learning strategies.

Key Skills: ICT

182. The provision and co-ordination of key skills across the curriculum is satisfactory overall but suffers from a lack of overall effective leadership. There is no management post with responsibility for monitoring the way in which ICT supports learning across subjects of the curriculum. This task is left to individual subject heads. There has been considerable investment in staff development for ICT via distance learning delivered by an external provider. This has made a significant impact on the implementation of ICT within some areas, for example science where well-focused training has permeated both planning and practice very well. The use of ICT is well planned for in mathematics and there is now improved access to appropriate equipment. It is used to increasingly good effect in English, particularly in the use of word-processing and the use of the Internet to support learning and research.

183. Generally, curriculum subjects support students' development in ICT more strongly in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school. In music, there is effective use of software for compositional work. Older students in religious education are encouraged to undertake Internet-based research when addressing the role of charitable organisations. In physical education, students use video technology to evaluate and analyse their own movement in sport and gymnastics. Developments in science represent good practice. There is a very helpful website list in the departmental handbook. ICT is used creatively in a number of different ways within science including modelling, simulation and remote sensing. As a result, older students are particularly confident in selecting loading and applying a range of specialist software.

184. Overall, the principal means by which ICT currently supports learning is through the use of word processing, for example in English and modern foreign languages. The majority of curriculum areas do not address the broader range of ICT skills and applications or make use of new technology such as digital cameras sufficiently. In geography and history, ICT skills are not taught effectively. The monitoring of the contribution made by individual subjects is not undertaken with sufficient rigour.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Good leadership of the department has provided new direction and purpose.
- The majority of students are well behaved and have positive attitudes.
- Teaching, while satisfactory overall, has many good features.
- Students with special educational needs achieve well and make good progress.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in French in Years 10 and 11, which are well below average.
- The more consistent use of the foreign language by teachers and students in class.
- More challenge for higher-attaining students.
- The sharing of classes with non-specialist teachers, which creates lack of continuity.

185. The modern foreign languages department has suffered in recent years from low morale and a rapid turnover of staff. In turn this has taken its toll on standards which have been consistently lower than those of most other subjects in the school, and well below the national average. New leadership of the department, however, is beginning to reverse this situation. The morale of staff is high, new initiatives are bearing fruit, and standards among younger students show that they are achieving what is expected of them. In Years 10 and 11 French, however, standards are still well below average and a number of higher-attaining students are under-achieving. Teaching is satisfactory but has strong features which encourage sound learning. Most students respond well to learning a foreign language.

186. GCSE results in 2001 at grades A*-C were well below the national average in French, German and Spanish. Nearly all Year 11 students took one of these languages at GCSE and the large majority achieved at least grade G. For many students this represented satisfactory achievement and was in line with their predicted results. At the higher end, however, very few students were awarded grades A*, A or B. Girls did better than boys but not by a greater margin than nationally. Results in French in 2002 were similar to those of the previous year with a small rise in the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades in French. Compared to 2001, however, results in German and Spanish in 2002 were lower. As a result of this the school has decided to discontinue the teaching of these two languages on the timetable, and concentrate on French.

187. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards overall are below the national average at the end of Year 9. At this stage the positive impact of the department's new direction is beginning to be felt and most students are achieving satisfactorily given their attainment when they entered the school. At this stage there is little difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Boys are often more ready to volunteer answers in French, and girls are more accurate in their writing. Students with special educational needs achieve well because teachers take particular account of their needs. Higher-attaining students, however, are not achieving to their potential because teaching does not always expect enough of them. In one Year 9 class with students of a wide range of attainment thorough teaching ensured that all students were confident in recognising shopping items and saying their quantities. This was appropriate for students of average and lower attainment, but not enough for higher attainers.

188. In Year 11, standards are well below the national average. The attainment of many students at this level has been affected by staffing difficulties in the past. Overall, achievement is satisfactory. Students of average and lower attainment are now achieving satisfactorily, but higher-attaining students are not challenged enough and as a result they are under-achieving. These students are capable of good replies in well-pronounced French and remember language well from one lesson to the next. But in their speaking and writing there is little sign of a confident use of French when describing events in the past or plans for the future. In lessons where teachers use the foreign language consistently students understand French well and react immediately to instructions. In a number of cases, however, this does not happen enough and students' understanding is not as sharp as it could be. All students would benefit from more exposure to simple reading materials in French.

189. Teaching of French is satisfactory overall. Teaching of Spanish and German to students in Year 11 is good. Learning, too, is satisfactory. Of the lessons seen half were good or better and half were satisfactory. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers are especially good at managing students and creating a quiet learning atmosphere. They get on well with students and treat them with politeness and respect. In turn students respond well and most behave sensibly. Teachers suit their methods well to the needs of lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs. In a Year 10 lesson with a large proportion of such students they all learned well and were able to ask and answer simple questions in French about each other and their family life. Teaching was demanding but friendly and coaxed responses from them by gradually building on small successes. The very best teaching is brisk and rigorous, using French and expecting students to use it, challenging all students and withdrawing prompts at the right moment. In too many lessons, however, teachers do not use French consistently enough or demand that students use it for everyday requests such as asking for paper. As a result of this students do not hear enough French and some, particularly higher-attainers, are lacking the extra challenge they need to make the progress they are capable of. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, all students in a class with a wide range of attainment revised higher numbers in French and learned them well. A few high-attaining students quietly got on with the work, finding it easy and finishing early. They would have benefited from greater challenge by taking away their written prompts and expecting more of them. Often these students are in large groups with others of much lower attainment and motivation to learn. Unusually, teachers make no use of overhead projectors and very little use of ICT. Students are therefore missing out on the significant benefits such technology can bring to language learning. Teachers mark students' work regularly and with encouraging comments, but they are not rigorous enough in insisting on students doing their own corrections and giving them ideas for improving their work.

190. Students respond well to this well-managed teaching and behave responsibly for the most part. They listen attentively, concentrate well and, when given the opportunity in activities such as

pair-work, they co-operate with each other sensibly. A few students, mostly boys, in Years 9 and 11 show signs of poor motivation, but teachers manage this with firm good humour.

191. Problems of recruiting specialist teachers have obliged the school to use the services of five non-specialist staff, each of whom teaches a small amount of French to one group of students, mostly in Year 7. The quality of this teaching is satisfactory and students' learning is not adversely affected by the lack of specialism. However, this teaching is shared with specialist staff and continuity is thereby affected. The two-week timetable, while giving a fair allocation of time to French, causes very long gaps between some lessons that are unevenly distributed throughout the fortnight. For example, one Year 7 group has all of its French lessons in week two. A Year 8 class has two consecutive one-hour lessons of French at the end of the day. This reduces the amount of work that can be covered and puts undue strain on students' capacity to remember what they have learnt.

192. Leadership of the department is now good. The new curriculum co-ordinator and her deputy have made a very positive impact. Teachers now work as a team, support each other and share ideas. Jobs are delegated and good new initiatives designed to raise standards are beginning to take effect. An example of this is the decision to drop German and Spanish for the time being to allow the department to focus on and strengthen standards in French. This has unavoidably reduced what is on offer to students. To compensate for this an after-school Spanish course is offered to students who have the time and commitment to devote to it. The department's development plan clearly puts the raising of standards as its chief priority and has achievable goals for getting there. Assessment of students' performance and the setting of realisable targets for the future are now well under way. Students know what they are aiming for and are beginning to understand what they have to do to get there. Much remains to be done, in particular improving further the quality of teaching by sharing good practice and introducing new ways of engaging students. Overall, the department has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. With effective leadership and a unified staff it should be well placed to continue improving.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership, which is leading towards better teaching of the subject.
- A successful strategy to move the music curriculum in Years 7 to 9 towards a more practical based approach.

Areas for improvement

- Raising the profile of music in Years 10 and 11 and attracting more students onto the GCSE course.
- Further developing music technology across all years.
- Increasing students' development further through extracurricular experiences.

193. Levels of attainment are broadly in line with the national average at the end of Year 9; the most recent department assessments indicated that they were slightly higher than the average and these appear to be accurate. Standards are well below the national average for the majority of students when they enter the school. The department has experienced staffing problems for lengthy periods, and this has affected continuity and progress. The staffing has been stable for the past eighteen months, and this is beginning to show an effect. Students are now making good progress in Years 7, 8 and 9, and this is reflected in a rise of standards across the three years. No students were entered for GCSE examinations in 2001. In the 2002 GCSE examinations, for which there are not yet any national comparisons, three students gained results which qualified them to move on to take the AS music course in Year 12. Year 10 and 11 students are currently working at standards in line with the national average.

194. By the age of 14, most students are able to successfully compose for various combinations of instruments, using at least four chords, and of writing effectively in a range of styles, including rock and roll, South American idioms, and classical variation form. Ensemble performances of compositions are usually well co-ordinated, and are often successfully conducted by the composers. Aural skills are well developed, with recognition of instrumental sounds and form structure being notably accurate. Singing, particularly by the boys, is confident and pleasant by the time they reach Year 9. These students are achieving well in relation to their starting points and attaining standards that are broadly average.

195. Students in Year 10 have modest standards of practical musicianship, being mostly elementary instrumentalists or singers. They take an intelligent approach to their studies, and sensibly apply the information they have already gained to successfully work out solutions, when analysing scores and improvising in practical sessions. Just over half of the nine students in Year 11 have good practical standards, and are on target to gain A to C results. Their analytical skills are well developed, and their ensemble work, as demonstrated through an effective samba improvisation, is good.

196. Students of all ability make good progress from Years 7 to 11. The relatively new head of department has produced schemes of work for Years 7 to 9, emphasising a practical approach to music making. This appeals to students at all levels. Students with special educational needs and those students with English as an additional language make good progress and achieve as well as their classmates. Lessons include targets aimed at students with varying abilities, and these targets enable all students to achieve well in lessons. Good teaching contributes to the quality of progress made by students. The pacing of lessons is exactly right. There are a variety of activities within lessons, which maintain interest: and a successful choice of music to study ensures students' concentration. Students on GCSE courses in Year 10 often start with low levels of practical ability. They work at a fast rate in Years 10 and 11 to develop their composition, performance and analysis skills. Good teaching and successful, detailed research contributes towards the good progress they make in their learning.

197. The overall quality of teaching is good, with some very good features and leads to good learning and clear progress being made. Lessons are well prepared, and much thought is given to choosing music which is appealing to the students. Lessons develop at a fast pace, and are sufficiently varied to maintain the interest of the students. Very good provision is made for tasks appropriate to students of differing abilities. Those with special needs are given extra attention during practical work, and talented students are given more challenging objectives. Lessons are very carefully prepared, and appropriate resources are used. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge when preparing students for public examinations. Focused key words are produced for each lesson, which contribute towards students gradually acquiring a secure knowledge of the correct musical vocabulary.

198. Students have very good attitudes in Years 7 to 11. They listen attentively to the taught part of lessons, and to music they have to analyse. They move efficiently round the room between activities. All work purposefully and productively when doing practical work. Students enjoy singing the songs they are familiar with, and do so enthusiastically. In almost all lessons, the students' good attitudes lead to a good quality of learning.

199. Improvement since the last inspection has been significant. There has been a marked increase in the provision of extracurricular activities, but there is still room to increase the number of visits to concerts and provide opportunities for performances and workshops in school. Provision for the less able to achieve in lessons, through carefully targeted objectives, is showing success. The use of music technology is beginning to be developed, though there is scope for further development in order to raise the quality of students' compositional skills. Although the department has recently acquired new, more advanced keyboards, students still have to share two to one instrument, which adversely affects their progress. The music department is very well led. The relatively new head of department has thoroughly tackled curriculum matters. Detailed programmes of study have been produced, which meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. There has been a concentrated effort to raise the importance of technology in the department through the acquisition of new keyboards and two computers, and by incorporating their use into the regular curriculum. Members of the department are using the musical skills of the students effectively by presenting public performances, and producing revenue to buy more resources. The profile of music in the school is being raised successfully.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management are having a positive impact on raising standards.
- Notable improvement since the previous inspection has resulted in higher standards of attainment in Years 10 and 11.
- Students of all abilities achieve well in GCSE.
- Extra-curricular sport provides very good opportunities for all students to excel.

Areas for improvement

- The teachers' assessment of students' levels of attainment at the end of Year 9, which is too generous.
- Unsatisfactory outdoor provision for games and athletics, which has a negative impact on standards of attainment.

200. When students enter the school, their standards in physical education are below average. By the end of Years 9 and 11, students achieve average levels of attainment, and this represents good achievement in relation to their prior attainment. Over the past four years, GCSE standards, including the proportion of students gaining the higher grades, have significantly improved. The quality of teaching is good and this promotes good learning. Students have positive attitudes to the subject, and all groups of students make good progress.

201. In the 2001 GCSE examination, the proportion of students gaining grades A* - C was well below the national average, although all the students who entered gained a grade. Girls performed better than boys. Students' results in physical education were better than in most of the other subjects that they studied. GCSE results in 2002 show a significant improvement bringing the subject close to average expectations. This year, physical education students gained the highest average point score in the school.

202. The latest teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that students attain standards that are well above the levels expected, but this is not confirmed by the work seen during the inspection. This is because teachers were not adequately prepared to assess students' work against the new levels of attainment. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards, overall, are in line with the national average. The majority of students, including those with special educational needs, attain average standards in team games. Boys make good progress from Years 7 to 9 in football and basketball, developing the basic skills of the game through strategic play. Year 9 boys play basketball with speed and precision, showing good ball control and demonstrating attacking skills and techniques effectively. The performance of high attainers at this age is well illustrated by the previous year's basketball team, which reached the last eight of the English Schools' Basketball Championships. Standards in rugby are less well developed, and they are hindered by the lack of time devoted to the game and the poor facilities for play. From a hesitant beginning in Year 7, girls make good progress in dance. By Year 9, they work with confidence and poise. They have a sound understanding of the principles of dance, using space, levels and changes of speed effectively, as they develop a motif with a partner. Standards in gymnastics are average, and students of all levels of ability achieve well. Year 7 students show good understanding of the meaning of 'tension' as they practise basic balancing skills, performing with control and appropriate quality of movement. Low attaining students take pride in making their work aesthetically pleasing.

203. The development of students' skills of observation and evaluation varies according to which class they are in. There is an inconsistency of expectation of students to evaluate their own and others' performance and make spoken suggestions related to their findings. These skills are still under developed. Similarly, students' literacy and numeracy skills develop satisfactorily in some lessons, such as gymnastics and dance, but not in others. Key words are planned, but are not developed sufficiently to give students a firm grasp of the specialist language of the subject. Most students know how to warm up before exercise, when led by the teacher, but opportunities are missed to give students a more active role in the process. Overall, students of all levels of ability achieve well in Years 7 to 9.

204. Students maintain good levels of learning in Years 10 and 11, and standards are in line with the levels expected. This is a marked improvement since the previous inspection. Well developed departmental planning to extend the application of examination criteria to the teaching of non-examination classes accounts for these improved standards. The majority of boys continue to make good progress in basketball. Year 10 students can feint and dodge effectively in practice, while high attainers are able to outwit their opponents successfully in the game. The same good progress is evident in dance. Year 11 girls move like dancers, as they learn a new motif. The degree of accuracy is very good, and students show assured quality of movement and sensitivity in partner work. Standards in GCSE practical work are above average, well illustrated in a Year 11 trampoline lesson, where students demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of technique and safety issues. Independent learning skills develop well, as students assume responsibility for aspects of the lesson. GCSE written coursework reflects a wide range of knowledge and understanding of theoretical aspects, and overall attainment is broadly in line with course expectations. Low attaining students achieve well in the examination. In a Year 10 theory lesson a student with special educational needs, prompted by the teacher's skilful questions, worked out for himself the benefits of exercise for health and well being. There is no evidence of students' use of ICT in their coursework. Overall, boys and girls in Year 11 have achieved well since their starting point in Year 10.

205. An extensive programme of extra-curricular sport is a strength of the department, providing very good opportunities for all students, particularly the gifted and talented, to excel in their chosen sports both in school and beyond. The school is justifiably proud of the successes of its boys' and girls' football teams. Individual students gain representative honours at district, county and, sometimes, national level in rugby, netball, football, basketball, cross-country running and athletics.

206. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Two lessons observed were very good, and one was unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning are consistently good in Years 10 and 11. In the unsatisfactory lesson, students' progress was limited by weak organisation and planning, resulting in a slow pace and insufficient activity. All teachers have good, and often very good, specialist knowledge, and they ensure that students know the appropriate skills and techniques required for a range of activities. Teachers have clear objectives, and planning is sound, resulting in challenges that are relevant to all abilities. However, some teachers do not plan to teach observation and evaluation skills or to develop students' literacy, numeracy and ICT sufficiently. Lack of planning for the involvement of non-participants in every lesson is also an area for improvement. Teachers have high expectations of their students, and set a brisk pace in lessons. Time targets are used to good effect to ensure that a demanding pace of learning is maintained. Good observation, evaluation and feedback by teachers help students to improve their work. This was particularly effective in a dance lesson, where the teacher's intervention moved the whole class forward and there was a marked improvement in the quality of movement. The marking of GCSE written work is regular and encouraging. However, students do not

receive sufficient information to know what progress they are making, or how to improve their work.

207. The teachers' management of students and class organisation are strong. This, combined with very good relationships between teachers and students, contributes significantly to students' high participation levels, smart standards of dress and good behaviour. In the best lessons, a range of teaching strategies is used to challenge students intellectually, as well as physically, and to give them some responsibility for their own learning. Question and answer techniques were used to good effect in a dance lesson, while students were stretching in their warm up. The teacher made the students think hard about what they were doing, and extended their knowledge and understanding of the effect of exercise on the body. In a Year 11 trampoline lesson, students successfully took responsibility for setting up the equipment safely, organising their groups and sharing the time fairly between each performer.

208. Students relate well to the enthusiasm of the teachers, and are motivated to succeed. This leads directly to the positive attitudes of students towards their lessons, reflected in the energetic physical effort that they put into their work, and their support for extra-curricular activities. Students behave well in lessons and this helps to create an atmosphere where students enjoy their work and learn from each other.

209. The leadership and management of the subject are very good, enabling the department to embrace change positively, and there has been very good progress since the last inspection, particularly in raising standards of attainment. The co-ordinator has a very clear sense of educational direction, evident in the very good departmental development plan and the subject documentation. A successful, fully inclusive programme is provided for all students, complemented by the school's involvement in the new School Sports' Co-ordinator initiative that involves primary schools and the wider community. Extra-curricular activities go from strength to strength, with many more opportunities available for girls. A strength of the department is the quality of its self-evaluation; monitoring and evaluation strategies are in place, reflecting the teachers' commitment to raise standards. The department has recently experienced a rapid turnover of staff, and this contributes to some inconsistencies in teaching and learning identified in the inspection. Although some monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching takes place, further development of this strategy is required to ensure there is a consistent approach to teaching, and to create more opportunities to share best practice. The outdoor provision for games, particularly girls' games, and athletics is still unsatisfactory, and this has a negative impact on standards of attainment. The department makes the most of the facilities available, and it is a credit to the teachers that students achieve as well as they do. Although assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory, teachers need to become more practised in assessing students accurately against the new attainment levels.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Recent improvements in staffing have brought about stability of teaching and learning in Years 8 to 11.
- Specialist teaching provides a sound foundation for learning.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are improving.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment is below expected levels and most students are under-achieving in the subject.
- There is not enough time within the curriculum for personal, social and health education, religious education and citizenship to fully meet the requirements of the local agreed syllabus.
- The provision for students in Year 7 is unsatisfactory.
- The arrangements for the management of religious education are unsatisfactory.

210. Religious education is taught as part of a programme of work, which also includes personal, social, and health education and citizenship. Students have two lessons within a two-week timetable. While it meets minimum requirements, the time allocation does not allow the full programmes of study to be covered in sufficient depth under the present teaching arrangements. Because of staffing problems in the last school year, many classes were taught by supply teachers, most of whom were non-specialists, and the lack of continuity in teaching has had a negative impact on standards and on the attitudes of some students. Although the staffing situation has now improved, there are still problems in Year 7, and there is no permanent specialist co-ordinator for religious education, as the school's recruiting efforts have not yet been successful.

211. In recent years most students in Year 11 completed the GCSE short course in religious education, and a very small group took the full course. Although the proportion of students gaining A*-C in the short course examination in 2001 was below average, the results showed a slight improvement on those of the previous year. In general, the girls did better than the boys. Standards improved considerably in 2002. There was a rise in the number of A*-C grades, and the majority of students, both boys and girls, met or exceeded their targets. This represents satisfactory achievement, given the discontinuity in the teaching. Results for the few students who took the full course examination in 2001 were not as good as in the previous year. Standards were below average, and in 2002 they declined still further. This year there are no examination courses taught in Years 10 and 11.

212. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards are generally below the level expected, as set out in the Local Agreed Syllabus, and at this early stage in the new school year, the majority of students of all levels of attainment are underachieving. This unsatisfactory achievement is a direct result of recent staffing problems and the consequent negative effect on students' attitudes and behaviour. In Year 9, students' knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of Christianity and other major world religions are too limited, and their written work is not sufficiently well organised. There are too many examples of unselective copying from the text, and tasks are often left unfinished. Students in Year 11 often have a superficial approach to religious issues, such as reasons for belief in God, and they produce written work which is too brief and carelessly presented. However, those students who were regularly taught by a specialist teacher last year usually achieve in a satisfactory way. Their written work is carefully prepared and they use ICT effectively, both for research and presentation of project work. Their responses in lessons show a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of Christianity and other major world religions, and they make thoughtful contributions to discussions on moral issues such as the most important values in life.

213. In the lessons seen during the inspection it was clear that the new stability in staffing has brought about an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, which is now satisfactory overall. Most of the teaching is done by specialists, or those with experience of teaching religious

education. In the most effective lessons students enjoy their work and know what is required of them. For example, in an excellent Year 7 lesson on the role of symbols in identifying ideas and beliefs, the teacher's dynamic approach and very good knowledge and understanding of the subject spurred students on to think things out for themselves. The opportunity given to reflect enhanced the students' spiritual development, but is not a common feature in lessons. Lesson activities centred on the listening and the speaking elements of the National Literacy Strategy, with the result that students were able to make confident responses to demanding questions on the significance of different symbols. By the end of the lesson, students could explain the concept of the Buddhist Wheel of Life and they could use symbols to good effect in creating symbolic designs to show their own values and beliefs. In this lesson the teaching was successful in meeting the needs of all the students in the class. Some of the lesson activities took into consideration, for example, the particular writing requirements for students with special educational needs, or extension tasks for those who have been identified as gifted and talented. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, it is often because there is not enough variety of activity, so the pace of the lesson slows down and students indulge in off-task chat. Nevertheless, the strengths of the teaching outweigh the weaknesses and the learning that takes place is satisfactory overall.

214. A major strength of the teaching lies in the good rapport that teachers have established with their students, and attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall. Most students now have positive attitudes towards the subject and are keen to take part in class discussions, as in a Year 10 lesson in which students explored the theme of relationships and marriage. However, teachers occasionally have difficulty in managing a group of students. This is particularly the case with those students who are still disaffected because of the unsettled conditions prevailing in the last school year. Their lack of co-operation and unacceptable behaviour can disrupt the lesson to such an extent that the objectives are not achieved and students do not make enough progress. The teaching staff have a good awareness of these problems, and at this very early stage in the school year are still engaged in tackling the problems of disaffection that is a legacy from last year.

215. Since the last inspection there has been a decline in standards, and despite the improvements made at the beginning of this school year, there are still significant areas of weakness in the school's provision for religious education. The time allocated means that students do not cover fully the programmes of study in religious education as set out in the Local Agreed Syllabus. The provision for students in Year 7 is unsatisfactory because several classes have two teachers for the subject, and the lessons are not timetabled on a weekly basis. The overall direction of religious education within the area of personal, social and health education is not clear enough and the arrangements for the management of the subject are currently unsatisfactory.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 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	1	0	70	0	31	0	2.2
Chemistry	5	60	86	20	41	1.4	2.8
Biology	23	39	83	9	34	1.0	2.6
Design and technology	5	100	83	0	25	2.0	2.3
Physics	2	100	85	0	40	1.5	2.8
Business studies	23	100	86	48	27	3.3	2.4
Computer studies	9	22	78	0	20	0.2	2.0
Art and design	3	100	86.7	0	43.5	2.0	2.9
Geography	13	100	90	23	39	2.8	2.9
History	4	100	93	25	42	3.0	3.0
English language and literature	38	79	93	8	36	1.6	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	6	17	87	0	43	1.0	5.8
Chemistry	3	100	90	0	43	5.33	5.9
Biology	9	100	88	33	34	6.22	5.3
Physics	2	100	88	50	40	7.0	5.7
Business studies	12	83	92	8	32	3.17	5.5
Computing	3	67	86	0	23	2.0	4.6
Geography	6	83	92	17	38	5.0	5.7
History	4	100	88	25	35	5.0	5.5
English language	18	94	91	22	30	4.3	5.3
French	3	33	89	0	38	0.7	5.6
Spanish	2	50	89	0	39	1.0	5.7

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and Social Care	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6.0	10.8
Information technology	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.2	9.9

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and biology but one chemistry lesson was seen. The teaching in this lesson was good and students made good progress.

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Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good, and teachers' knowledge and understanding are very good.
- The students' positive attitudes to learning helps them to make satisfactory progress in a subject many find difficult.
- The subject is very well led, ensuring that teachers work together and share a commitment to improvement.
- There are very well planned schemes of work.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at GCE A-level, which are too low.
- Better guidance about course expectations so that students are able to meet the demands of the course.
- Increased opportunities for independent learning.

216. The 2001 GCE A-level examination results were very low. This represents poor achievement in relation to students' attainment at the start of the course. Only six students completed the course, and only one of these was successful. Some students began the course with modest GCSE results, and only one student achieved as well as they should have done. Results in 2002 showed a slight improvement. In 2001, there were insufficient numbers of students entered at AS-level to enable a valid judgement of comparison to be made.

217. The standard of work of current students is below average. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course and are achieving as much as can be expected at this point in time. A significant number of students begin the course with grade B standard from Intermediate level GCSE examinations, which is lower than normal for entry into mathematics A-level courses. As a result, many of them are not yet able to cope with the demands of the course, for example in algebra. Students lack of prior knowledge was seen in a mechanics lesson where the teacher had to introduce the sine and cosine rules to some students so that they could use them in problems involving vectors.

218. In Year 13, students are making satisfactory progress in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. Although standards are below average, they are higher than those of previous years. The number of students taking the course is higher and they started the course with better GCSE results. In a pure mathematics lesson they were developing well their understanding of graphical methods for solving quadratic equations, and in a statistics lesson they were confidently using Venn diagrams to solve problems on probability. Students have not yet completed three modules to obtain an indication of AS-level performance. In the two modules they have completed, about half of the students are on track for successful completion. Overall, students' level of achievement is satisfactory. This comes about as a result of good teaching that helps them to overcome very real obstacles to their understanding.

219. Teaching is good overall. It is carefully planned, and lessons always have clear aims. Teachers structure lessons well and provide appropriate levels of challenge and approaches to help students learn. They show a very good knowledge of mathematics in their questioning and explanations and in the tasks they set. Some teachers direct too much of the learning; not enough opportunities are provided for students to work independently. While this conflicts with the need to provide students with opportunities for independent study, it is an appropriate strategy in the context of students whose level of prior attainment is such as to require clear direction and help from their teachers. As a result, even though many students find difficulty with the demands of the subject they show positive attitudes and work hard. They make considerable efforts to understand the work they are doing. As a result, students' learning is satisfactory and the number of students who complete their courses is high. Homework is used effectively to consolidate and extend work that is introduced in the lesson. The day-to-day marking and assessment of students' work is good. It usually contains comments to help students see how they can improve but there needs to be more regular formal assessment of students' progress as they move through the sixth form. Overall, a strength in the teaching is seen in the manner in which the teachers adapt their methods to the ability of their students.

220. The subject is very well led and managed. Teachers are deployed well so that their specialist knowledge can be utilised effectively. There is a clear commitment to improving standards, although the below average levels of attainment on starting the course are restricting what students are able to achieve. The scheme of work is very well planned, effectively reflects the subject requirements, and sets the stage for good teaching. The systems for monitoring and evaluation are effective in ensuring that good practice is shared between teachers. The teachers are enthusiastic and committed to bringing about improvement. Sixth form provision was not reported in the previous inspection.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- GCE A-level results were well above average in 2001.
- The performance of students in practical examinations.
- The teachers' effective use of clear objectives and explanations during lessons.
- Good relationships that are engendered between teachers and their students.

Areas for improvement

- Results in AS level examinations.
- An increase in the variety of activities in lessons, to involve students more in their own learning.
- Better strategies for teaching key skills and using ICT.
- The more effective use of homework.
- More effective processes for setting targets and supporting and communicating with students.

221. In the 2001 GCE A-level examination, results were well above the national average, and they improved in both 2000 and 2001. In 2002, results declined to a level similar to those before 2000. In the last two years, students' results were better than predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades; these students made good progress. At AS level in 2001, results were below average, and many students failed to gain a pass grade. The results were similar in 2002, and in both years many students did not continue into the second year of the sixth form. Staff illness, timetable problems and the quality of some teaching, contributed to the underachievement of some students in 2002. In both A-level and AS examinations, the performance of boys and girls is similar. Only a few students gain the highest grades.

222. The standards of work seen in lessons, and in students' folders in Year 13, are below average, but indicate satisfactory achievement when account is taken of their level of attainment when starting in Year 12. In an introductory lesson about respiration, higher attaining students gained a good understanding of the chemical processes involved in respiration, and of the way in which energy is released from glucose. However, most students in that lesson had difficulty understanding what was being taught because of their lack of background knowledge. In Year 12, in a lesson concerning cells, students' knowledge of cell structure and their understanding of the functions of the organelles in the cells, was below average. In both years, students' speaking skills are below average; many are very hesitant when explaining biological ideas, and this has an adverse effect on the development of their understanding of biology.

223. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Objectives are made clear to the students, so that they understand what they are doing, and the reasons for it. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is good, and their explanations are clear and often interesting. In one lesson, in Year 13, good use was made of a power point presentation that kept students' attention, and ensured good progress. Good use is made of photocopied support materials to reduce copying of information, but in some lessons there is over reliance on these materials, so that students do not have enough occasions to write about biology in their own words. This is a missed opportunity for learning. In good lessons, a variety of teaching methods is used, promoting interest and understanding in the students. In some lessons, there is too much teacher talk; this gives few opportunities for students to test ideas or plan aspects of their own work. In these lessons, particularly in Year 12, students learn less about biology, and they do not improve the learning and literacy skills that they need to gain better examination grades, especially at AS level. Sometimes the pace of the lesson is too slow. During one lesson, homework was completed during the course of the lesson. Homework is not set and checked systematically, and insufficient use is made of ICT, so that students do not benefit from the opportunities for research and problem solving provided by computers.

224. Learning, overall, is satisfactory. It was good in a Year 13 lesson about respiration in which a variety of teaching methods was used. On this occasion, students' attainment, although below average, represented good achievement in comparison with their GCSE grades. In Year 12, learning is satisfactory when related to the below average GCSE grades gained by the students. When teaching is varied, for example when video and reading research tasks are used, learning is good. In

lessons that are largely led by the teacher, learning is satisfactory, for example as in a lesson about inheritance, in which students were not given opportunities to learn in different ways or to consolidate their learning.

225. Students' behaviour is always good: they listen carefully, sometimes for long periods, and they are interested in biology. Teacher-led lessons often inhibit students from adopting a critical approach to their work, but they are patient and their sound attitudes keep them from distraction and ensure that they make progress. Relationships with teachers, and between students, are good. A high proportion of students complete their courses.

226. Management of the department is satisfactory and has ensured satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. Schemes of work contain detailed plans for coverage of the examination syllabus, but they lack guidance about teaching approaches, means of improving students' literacy skills, and use of ICT. Students welcome the opportunities that they have to get advice and support from their subject leader. There is a need to make this support more consistent, to ensure that students are more fully involved in target setting, and to enable them to be better informed about their progress. Central collection of marks, using the science department's system, is not done at present. Students are provided with excellent, and enthusiastic, preparation for their practical examinations. Accommodation and laboratory equipment are good, and very recently more books have been bought for the library. Prior to this, there were not enough of them to support private study.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology and GCE A-level and vocational courses were observed.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is always at least good, and results in good learning.
- The subject knowledge and expertise of the teacher.
- The very good attitudes of the students to the subject.
- The leadership and management of the subject by the head of the department.

Areas for improvement

- An increase in the number of links with industry to enrich the curriculum and broaden the students' experience.

227. In 2001 there were no entries for GCE A-level in design and technology. At AS level there were five students entered for the product design syllabus and all achieved pass grades, one at C and two each at D and E. These results are broadly in line with the average. In 2002 there were two students entered for A2-level food technology and both achieved C grades, whilst in product design there were five entries who all achieved pass grades. At AS-level in 2002, of the ten students entered for food technology, nine achieved pass grades. In product design, results were lower than in 2001 with only four students from the seven entered achieving pass grades. A high proportion of students complete their courses.

228. Standards of work seen during the inspection are broadly in line with the national average on the food technology course. The Year 13 students are maintaining their good progress from AS-level as they now work towards A2. In the work seen they are doing well as a result of effective teaching that is well planned, sets high expectations and is well resourced. The teachers' own subject knowledge and expertise also makes a significant contribution to the standards achieved by the students. In one lesson, as part of a module of work on "quality related to food products", student's evaluation skills were developed effectively and their understanding of food quality deepened. They had to devise the criteria for a quality investigation into chocolate digestive biscuits from various manufacturers and how they would record their results. This led to a much greater understanding of quality control, quality assurance and total quality management. The making skills of the students are good, and they handle food materials and equipment safely, hygienically and with confidence. Overall, students achieve well in relation to their standards at the start of their courses.

229. In Year 12 the students have only just started their course and are beginning to come to terms with its demands. They are taught jointly with Year 13 and so far have been involved in similar learning activities, but given more detailed support and help by their teacher. They are now beginning to build on their experiences at GCSE and make progress. At the time of the inspection there were no students studying the product design course in Year 12 or Year 13.

230. Teaching is consistently good and students learn well as a result. The teacher has clear objectives for lessons and the methods used are matched well to the subject material to be taught. Very good use is made of small group work. The lessons are well planned and appropriate resources are provided to support learning. Tasks are challenging and high expectations are a feature of the lessons. Very effective support is given to individuals, often including evaluative comments aimed at raising levels of achievement and the rate of progress.

231. This good learning is promoted by the very good attitudes of the students towards their work. Students in both years are very attentive and work productively in class. All the students are enthusiastic about the subject and concentrate well. This has led directly to very good retention rates as students continue their studies from Year 12 to Year 13. Behaviour was very good in all the lessons observed. Relationships between staff and the students and between the students themselves are also very good, and they support each other well when working in small groups.

232. The leadership and management of the sixth form courses are good and there has been a satisfactory level of improvement since the previous inspection. Documentation for the courses is up to date and the teaching scheme is constantly under review. However, more opportunities should be made for students to undertake visits to local companies and experience first hand, commercial and industrial practices in designing and making. The

choice of the two design and technology courses to AS and A2 levels provides good continuity from GCSE for the students interested in continuing to study the subject.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on business studies.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good with very good relationships established between teachers and students.
- Good practice is shared and teaching approaches are revised and developed.
- Students' attitudes are very good ensuring a good working atmosphere in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- There needs to be a greater emphasis on addressing initial weaknesses in students' numeracy and literacy skills on entry to the sixth form.
- Assessment is not used consistently to inform planning.

233. The department offers business studies at GCE AS and A2 levels. The subject is popular and the great majority of students complete their courses. It also offers a GNVQ (Part 1) in business. The work of students on the GNVQ course was not seen during the inspection. Standards of work seen during the inspection are below average. The prior attainment of students can vary significantly from one year to another, and students' level of achievement in relation to the course demands vary accordingly. Weaknesses in literacy and numeracy skills on entry to the course limit the achievement of some students. However, the achievement of current students in relation to their starting points on joining the course are satisfactory overall, primarily because their attitudes are very good and they receive good teaching.

234. GCE A-level results in 1999 and 2000 were average but well below average in 2001 due to poor performance in one particular section of the examination. AS results for 2001 were above average, with all students achieving pass grades and with an above average proportion achieving the highest grades. A-level students in 2001 under-achieved compared with their GCSE results whilst AS students achieved well. No consistent difference was seen in the performance of boys and girls. In 2002 A-level results improved with a smaller degree of under-achievement; AS results compared unfavourably with the previous year with a much lower average points score.

235. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection is below average, but reflects satisfactory achievement on the part of students when account is taken of their level of attainment at the start of the course. Year 12 students, new to the AS course, show confidence in starting to use unfamiliar terminology in discussion. They use well their own local knowledge to discuss, for example, reasons for industrial location. Year 13 students have good recall of motivation theories from the previous year. In the classroom setting, they confidently use ICT to discover salary variations in different parts of the country. In writing reports on factory re-location AS students' independent use of ICT varies considerably. Higher attainers in particular use the Internet well to find relevant information for their reports. They organise and present their work clearly. In the work of some lower attainers, basic errors in spelling are left unchecked. Literacy skills are also very variable. Good quality work sometimes misses fundamental points, for example a conclusion. Relevant information found from research is not always applied well to the question. Independent learning skills are very variable. Year 13 students do not always capture the breadth and depth of class discussion in notes taken. Basic numeracy skills are weak in work on data handling.

236. Teaching is good and teachers adapt well to the individual and very different needs of their students. The teachers' secure knowledge is a strength in all the teaching and this enhances the quality of discussion work, although in "open-ended" discussion students do not have sufficient skills to maximise their learning by taking detailed notes. Knowledge of the local business environment is good and gives an extra dimension to lessons by enhancing students' interest. Relationships are very

good. Confidence building is a very positive feature of the teaching and students respond very well to this by displaying very positive attitudes. Lessons are well planned and link well with previous work. This gives students a secure learning environment so that at the start of lessons their confidence is enhanced by their participation in recall of previous work. Confidence building is, at times, over-emphasised and there is a resulting loss of pace and rigour. Teaching is more effective with lower attaining students in particular when each stage of the lesson is carefully structured, including the requirement to make notes. Learning is also enhanced because methods take account of potential weak areas such as numeracy skills, with activities to consolidate learning. On the whole, individual activities were seen to more effectively consolidate learning than open-ended class discussion, especially for lower attainers. In one lesson seen, a series of progressively challenging tasks tackled very well students' weak numeracy skills. In another lesson, students completed a series of tasks using ICT as part of their study of financial motivation. These included looking at their own career interests and this enhanced their motivation and learning. The good teaching ensures that students achieve at least satisfactorily in relation to the demands the course makes upon them. Because of their background on entering the course, this often represents good individual achievement on the part of many.

237. Leadership and management are good. There is a cohesive staff team and they exchange ideas and plan together on a regular basis. They identify weak areas of understanding and revise teaching approaches. This needs added rigour including the greater use of assessment to inform planning, and a more strategic approach to addressing shortcomings in numeracy and literacy skills within the planned curriculum.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on GCE A-level courses and vocational courses.

Information and communication technology

Overall, the provision for ICT is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Lesson planning is good and demonstrates clear and appropriate expectations and timescales.
- Positive and productive working relationships between teachers and students are helping to ensure good learning.
- Relevant courses are now in place that are matched well to students' needs and aspirations.

Areas for improvement

- Students' research skills, especially their ability to discriminate and select information appropriately.
- The diagnosis of students' difficulties in coursework and providing support to overcome them.

238. Three students entered the 2001 GCE A-level computing examination, and two gained low pass grades, which was well below the national average. Their achievement was less than predicted. Two candidates gained low grades at AS level in 2001 and 7 students entered A-level in 2002; only one gained a low pass grade. Their achievement was much lower than expected. Results in the dual award GNVQ advanced course (AVCE) in information technology for 2002 were better than the AS and A-level results. Four of the nine candidates achieved higher grades than expected, and three as expected. There is no information presently available to make national comparisons.

239. Following an evaluation of all courses, the school now offers a programme that is more appropriate and well suited to its students' abilities. The GCE A-level computing that is currently being taken by only two students in Year 13 is no longer offered in Year 12, and a single award course AVCE course in information technology is now taken instead of the dual award. Two students left at the end of Year 12 in 2002 with the equivalent of low grades at AS level and eight students now in Year 13 will complete their course in 2003. Eleven students have embarked on the course in Year 12, although a large minority did not take a formal ICT course during Years 10 to 11. A new, very relevant, vocational course leading to the Cisco Certified Network Associate award is being taken by four students in Year 12 and is already attracting further interest.

240. Students' attainment in lessons and work seen is below average. Year 13 students are able to deploy word processing and presentational software skills competently. Most use search engines to interrogate Internet sites confidently, and successfully, as a result of foresight and careful planning. However, a significant minority is not able to discriminate and select information appropriate for their purpose, and this illustrates insufficient forethought and inadequate preparation. As a result of following a more appropriate course, and of successful teaching, two thirds of students are now achieving more highly in units of work submitted for examination than their prior attainment at GCSE would indicate. Overall, students are achieving satisfactorily. Work in assignments in computer studies lacks a sufficiently wide range of ideas for exploration, and shows under-developed analytical and evaluative skills in terms of the standards needed for higher grades.

241. The teaching is good overall, and sometimes very good, with no unsatisfactory teaching. As a result, most students are achieving satisfactorily in an area where they start the course with a comparatively low level of attainment and experience. Many students achieve well. Lessons are well planned, with clearly set objectives and timescales that help students to know what is expected of them. Teachers' good subject knowledge, familiarity with the course requirements, and individual support given to students, inspires their confidence. These, coupled with appropriate tasks that are based on realistic situations in vocational areas or syllabus requirements in GCE work, help students make clear progress in lessons. For example, in a Year 13 computing lesson about system analysis, students developed a sound grasp of concepts about entities and attributes in work about business organisations. In Year 12, new students in Cisco Certified Network Associate award work about networking computers were successfully helped to learn about the role of patch cables and to

construct and test them. In a Year 12 AVCE information technology lesson, other new students showed clear gains in the key skills of team working and researching in their work on presenting information.

242. Students' attitudes are good and occasionally very good. They are attentive and maintain concentration and engagement during the lesson. These attributes stem from working in a conducive climate for learning that teachers create by fostering good relationships. They are also clear and consistent about expectations, and give individuals suitable support during lessons. Most students are willingly responsive to questions, but a small number, especially in Year 12, are somewhat reticent and lacking in confidence, due to their lack of recent experience in the subject. Students are developing teamwork and study skills. They cooperate well with each other, sharing ideas and seeking help when necessary, but their ability to work collaboratively, by dividing and coordinating tasks, is less well developed and rarely evident. At this stage of course development it is too early to judge rates of completion, but students state and show a good commitment to their studies.

243. Teachers are very conversant with new course structures and examination requirements. Courses are carefully planned, with units for study carefully chosen and sequenced, linked with good deployment of teachers' expertise. Although teachers' assessment of students' work meets the examination and awarding bodies' regulations, there is not sufficient action taken after indicating inaccuracies or omissions on the scripts and this is unsatisfactory. Students would benefit from a closer diagnosis and discussion of the difficulties they experience, and more extensive targeted support to help alleviate them.

244. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Provision for information technology has clearly improved since the last inspection. An effective appraisal of courses offered has led to clear improvement. A new range of opportunities at advanced vocational, and technical vocational levels, are realistically helping to put the school's action plan for technology into practice, as well as being better matched to students' and community aspirations. Taught courses are well managed, although there is no monitoring or coordination of the development of students' ICT skills in other subject areas. Teachers' expertise is successfully kept up-to-date through effective relevant in-service training. Accommodation and facilities are good. Computer resources, with Internet connection, are adequate. Students would benefit from access to a wider range of text materials and software than presently available.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No subjects were focused upon in this domain, but two lessons were observed in physical education. Teachers are very good subject specialists who deliver their lessons with good humour, but with high expectations, to which the students respond positively. In practical and theory lessons, students make good progress. In the lesson observed, students quickly demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the cognitive aspect of learning new skills.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design, but one lesson was observed in music. No students have taken AS or A level music in recent years, but four students have started the AS course this term. In this lesson, the students displayed very good attitudes to their work and made good progress by the end of the lesson, gaining a real insight into the baroque music. The lesson was well taught.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good; lessons are well organised and planning is good.
- Challenging tasks are set for students and this leads to good learning.
- The subject is now well led.
- Students are given the freedom to explore their own ideas and beliefs.
- Students are encouraged to work with a high degree of independence.

Areas for improvement

- The setting of targets for students.
- Procedures for the assessment, recording and tracking of students' progress.
- The access students have to modern technology such as photography and ICT.

245. Small numbers of students have been entered for GCE AS and A-level art and design over the past three years. Of the five students who were entered for the GCE A-level examination in 2000, one achieved grade C, two others grade D and one a grade E. These results were well below the national average for that year. In 2001 two students achieved grade C at AS Level. There were no candidates for A-level in 2001. In 2002 two students achieved grade B, one grade C and one grade D at AS Level. Two students at A-level achieved grade D. These small numbers preclude valid comparisons with national data.

246. The standard of work currently being produced by students is broadly in line with the national average. In Year 13, students are working well in response to the demands that have been placed upon them by their teachers. They apply themselves readily to the task of acquiring new skills that they will need to communicate ideas clearly to their audience. It is apparent that most of these students have the capacity to work with varying degrees of independence to solve problems. However, the majority work within a context that places undue emphasis on drawing and painting with traditional materials. Only one student was seen to be working from photographs as a starting point for investigation and exploration through art and design. There was little evidence of any use of ICT as a means of producing images and communicating ideas and concepts. Overall, students are achieving satisfactorily.

247. In Year 12, students are already acquiring those skills that will enable them to work in a more structured fashion. Their visual diaries contain a range of well-researched material that demonstrates their capacity for independence of thought and action. At this very early stage in the course, their levels of achievement are satisfactory. Students make good use of available media and materials, although most continue to work within a very restricted model of the curriculum, which emphasises drawing and painting. They are beginning to think and learn for themselves and many have developed the confidence to work from their own ideas and concepts as legitimate starting points for their investigations. There is little distinction to be made in terms of standards achieved by boys and girls.

248. Teaching is now good overall and this is having a positive impact on students' learning. The new subject leader has been in post for only two weeks and already has put good systems and strategies in place to improve teaching further. There is still some way to go in ensuring better access to modern technology, to improving assessment procedures and to improving the use of targets. These are issues that have been inherited, and a good start has been made in tackling them. Teachers possess good subject knowledge and are familiar with the examination requirements and in particular with the requirements of the assessment objectives at both AS and A-level. They encourage students to resolve their own problems and to satisfy their creative and intellectual curiosity through drawing, painting and manipulation of various craft materials. There is evidence of good planning prior to, and very good organisation of time during lessons. The teachers set very clear objectives for students. Management of students is good and very good relationships have been established between teachers and students who feel that they are well-advised and well-supported by their teachers. Students are regularly engaged in discussion about their own work and they are expected to be able to explain to others why they have made certain choices. This process ensures that students develop the capacity for critical evaluation of their own and others' work. The impact of these good practices will take time to be fully effective in raising students' level of achievement, which is currently satisfactory.

249. Assignments are set on a regular basis for students in which they are expected to carry out independent research without undue influence from their teachers. Work is assessed regularly by staff, but the process of setting briefs, assessing work, recording achievement and tracking performance over time is unsatisfactory at present. This aspect of the teachers' work and practice needs to be modified to ensure that students are provided with accurate information as to what they must do to improve the quality and standard of their work. Greater use should be made of objective data to improve the accuracy of the targets set.

250. Students display very positive attitudes to their subject and respond enthusiastically to the assignment briefs that they are given. Many are highly motivated and are prepared to make concentrated efforts to produce work of a high standard. They have acquired the confidence to rely on their own views of the world as legitimate starting points for exploration through art and design. Very good use is made of visual diaries as a means of collecting and storing visual information. Only one student was making use of photography in her work and none were seen to be making use of ICT. In both Years 12 and 13 students are obliged to work with a high degree of independence in pursuing the development of their own ideas. They carry out initial research in a variety of locations, from which they develop ideas out of which come the final paintings.

251. Leadership and management are now good and this is resulting in a clear direction being given to the work of the department. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Weaknesses have been diagnosed in the department's provision and have been tackled effectively. Schemes of work are being improved and brought up-to-date. The new head of department is working to produce new assignment briefs that will meet the needs of students in relation to the GCE A-level examination syllabus requirements, with particular emphasis on assessment objectives.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography and history.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Teachers provide a supportive classroom environment, which enables students to learn effectively.
- The enthusiasm of teachers and their very good subject knowledge, which is used to stimulate and maintain students' interest.
- Very good procedures in marking work, which show students how to improve.
- Good use of homework to extend the work of the classroom and consolidate students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT in the classroom, which is currently insufficient.

252. In the 2001 GCE A-level examinations, results were below the average for all maintained schools. The number of students studying for the examination in this year was small, significantly lower than previous years. Of the six students who sat the examination, one student failed to obtain a pass grade. At AS level, all students gained at least a pass grade and results were very close to the national average. This improvement in standards has continued into the 2002 A-level results. All students gained at least a pass grade and results were again close to the national average. This represents good progress in Years 12 and 13 and a significant number of students achieved higher results than expected.

253. At this early stage in Year 12, standards of work seen are below average. Students are slow to apply their previous knowledge to new work and lack confidence in their ability. When discussing factors influencing population distribution in Europe, students were reluctant to identify patterns of population distribution and needed much encouragement to link these patterns to physical and economic factors. However students are well motivated and good teaching is helping them to develop their knowledge and understanding. Comprehensive portfolios of work in human geography demonstrate that by the end Year 12 students can interpret population statistics with confidence. This progress throughout the year is mirrored in students' understanding of physical geography and fieldwork visits to York and Silloth develop their understanding of river management and the development of ecosystems.

254. Standards of work seen at the start of Year 13 are broadly average and the achievement of these students is currently good. A residential field trip to Dorset undertaken at the end of Year 12 has given these students a sound understanding of coastal environments. In a lesson at the beginning of Year 13, students used this experience well to describe the results of wave action on beaches and the process of longshore drift. Students make good use of fieldwork techniques in compiling their individual studies. Students have a good understanding of the changing nature of tourism over time. They are knowledgeable about the factors governing this change and the impact such changes have on tourist destinations. Written work in Year 12 and 13 is conscientiously completed. All students make very good use of the notes framework for each set of lessons which encourages them to be concise, to highlight the relevant points and to include apposite, up to date examples.

255. Teaching is good. As a result all students make good progress with their learning. Enthusiastic teaching inspires confidence in the students. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and they ensure that students are well prepared for their examinations. The mixture of class teaching and seminar discussions, which include student presentations, ensures that all students are well supported. Lessons are well planned, and a great number of up to date resources from newspapers and geographical periodicals are used to enhance student's knowledge and to provide wide-ranging examples. The choice of fieldwork excursions, both residential and day visits, enhances students' understanding and provide good exemplars for students' individual studies. Students use of ICT is increasing, particularly to access information for research. They make some use of data processing packages in their individual study. However, the use of ICT has little impact in lessons and remains an area for improvement.

256. Very good assessment procedures in Years 12 and 13 are instrumental in maintaining students' good progress towards their target grades in AS and A-level examinations. Homework is marked and returned quickly. Comments and amendments to students' note pro-forma are detailed and informative. They identify what students have omitted, correct any misconceptions and are focussed on improving attainment. Assessment exercises at the end of each section of work are marked using examination criteria and gradings and the results are entered onto individual monitoring sheets. Students are therefore fully aware of their progress towards their target grade. Following discussions with the teacher, students complete a self assessment sheet identifying what they need to do to improve.

257. Students enjoy the subject and the staying on rate from Year 12 to Year 13 is very high. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. Students have real confidence in their teachers. They feel supported and encouraged by teachers and respect their good knowledge of their subject and the demands of the examination. They appreciate the individual support that is available to them at lunchtimes and after school. Students feel that they make good progress because teaching is good, lessons are interesting and because the intensive revision period at the end of each year prepares them well for the examinations.

258. Leadership and management of sixth form geography are good. Teachers are committed to raising standards and fully understand how this is to be achieved. The team of teachers works well together. Selective training opportunities ensure that knowledge of examination requirements is up to date. The curriculum is well planned and good use is made of students' prior learning. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

History

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving and are now in line with the national average at AS level.
- Students achieve well and often exceed their targets.
- The good teaching encourages good learning, especially in giving the students the skills and confidence to work effectively by themselves.
- Students are well-motivated and work well with each other and the teacher.
- The department is well led and managed; this promotes high standards and the subject's growing popularity.

Areas for improvement

- To encourage all students to further develop the skills of critical evaluation and apply them to historical enquiry.

259. In the GCE A-level examinations in 2001, standards were below the national average on the average points scored, and on the proportion gaining A to B grades. Of the four students entered, all female, three did not do as well as expected. However, this was better than in the previous year when none from a larger entry attained the higher grades. The department's figures for 2002 show this improvement continuing with three of the four students matching or exceeding expectations. There has been no marked difference between females and males in the last three years, though numbers are too small to be significant. GCE AS results for 2001 were close to the average: all passed and most achieved as expected. AS results for 2002 improved further. All passed from a larger entry of ten. A third of students achieved better than expected, with most of the others meeting expectations. The subject had the best results in the school at AS level. Retention rates are excellent, with all of the ten students continuing on to the A2 course in Year13.

260. Standards in work seen were in line with the national average. In Year 13 students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. They have a sound understanding of the main concepts of the periods being studied. They have competent skills of note making and recording of relevant evidence from a number of sources. In a Year 13 lesson, students worked effectively in groups to examine how well prepared the young King Edward VI was for kingship, using a mixture of primary and secondary sources. The same students showed good understanding in expressing their views when they made effective presentations to the rest of the class. In considering how successful Edward might have been if he had survived into adulthood, many presented balanced arguments and competent skills of enquiry. Although not all speak freely and with confidence, the frequency of discussions and presentations is helping to develop these skills. Year 12 students, however, were more reticent about discussing in pairs the nature of the Weimar constitution, but the course has only just begun and teachers have already adopted good strategies to address this issue. More able students in Year 13 have mature skills of analysing and evaluating key issues. They are beginning to write well-structured, analytical essays, with good supporting evidence. This has been promoted by the high expectations set by the teachers in developing enquiry and analytical skills and the thorough feedback provided on essays. Middle and lower attaining students in Year 13 are achieving at least as expected, though their ability and confidence to draw conclusions of their own on key issues require more development.

261. Teaching overall is good and is promoting good learning. Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject to plan lessons which offer stimulating activities based on the students' own enquiry. Group work is frequently used to encourage students of different abilities to help each other, promote speaking skills and to reinforce understanding. Where teaching is most effective, there is a brisk pace to lessons, time is used well in setting deadlines, and questioning checks understanding and stretches students' thinking. Year 13 students were fully engaged in pairs in scoring on a graph the effectiveness of different aspects of Edward's upbringing in preparing him as a monarch. The teacher challenged their results and encouraged others to do so. There were clear gains in their knowledge and understanding, while their speaking and analytical skills were reinforced. Students are very productive in their work as they know exactly what to do. Tasks are generally stimulating and strict deadlines are set. Learning is less effective where the questioning is less rigorous, both by the

teacher and by students, and when they are not left to themselves to work out their own broad, conclusions to key issues.

262. This good learning is also promoted by the very good relationship with the students, based on the teachers' readiness to give time to plan lessons and to monitor and guide the students' progress. Marking is done very thoroughly with very helpful review sheets so that students know their weaknesses and how to improve. Students respond well, and most have the confidence to work independently. They also collaborate very well with each other and listen respectfully to each other's views. Their attitude to work is very good. They are highly motivated and the proportion of students who complete their courses is very high. Students use time well and most are productive in their work. Students expressed strong appreciation for the enthusiastic support and guidance given by staff, for instance in providing extra lessons in the lead up to the AS examination.

263. The effective leadership and management of the subject also promote the good teaching and learning. In displaying good organisation and strong commitment to the subject, the head of department sets high expectations of standards and effort. Both students and staff respect this and respond well. Schemes of work are clear and challenging in their tasks. The setting of clear targets for students after assessments provides well-focused direction for improvement, to which the students readily respond. A wide range of resources, including Internet access for research, provides the students with stimulus and support for detailed, private study. The department has effected a good level of improvement since the previous inspection.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English language and literature. There are currently no courses in modern language.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English language and literature is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Excellent recruitment and completion rate.
- Effective teaching of students who start with below average standards.
- Good development of independent research skills in course work.
- Good team work and collaboration among the teachers.

Areas for improvement

- Better and more frequent use of assessment to help raise standards.
- Ensuring more consistent challenge for the higher attainers.
- Improve opportunities for teachers' professional development.

264. In 2001, the GCE A-level examination results were below average. The AS results were well below average. In previous years, results have fluctuated: average in 1998 and 2000; well below average in 1999. Standards have tended to fall as the department has increased its recruitment, admitting some students whose standards on entry are well below average for admission to an A-level course. In the AS examination the proportions at A-B and A-E were below average. In the A-level examination the proportion at A-B was below average; at A-E broadly average. The results represent satisfactory achievement by the students. However, in terms of completing the course, the students achieved well, given the well below average starting point of a significant number. In 2002 the AS results improved significantly by nearly one whole grade. In A-level there was a slight improvement.

265. The standards of the current Year 13 students are below average. There are clear strengths in the students' course submissions. Their work revealed an accomplished creation of an appropriate tone, voice, register and convincing perspectives. These were apparent in a variety of contexts: newspaper features on places of historical interests; poetry and listening texts on behalf of organisations such as the RSPCA. There is a wider range of quality in the students' critical response. A few reach well above standards, for example, one student effectively linked the deliberate irregular rhythm of her verse to the lack of security in relationships that she was trying to convey. In Year 12 the students were experiencing the first few lessons of their AS course. Their attitudes were positive during a lesson that was introducing them, appropriately, to some of the subject's key terminology.

266. Many students have a secure general knowledge of the features of language they need to analyse but fail to use consistently and effectively the technical terms of the subject. This lack of application of a consistent linguistic framework undermines the standards of many lower and middle attainers. Many students do not consistently support their opinions with a detailed analysis of the impact of the language, both in literary and linguistic pieces. Because of the lack of this required attention to detail, students are not consistently reaching average and above average standards. The work of students of all attainments is also undermined by inaccuracies in expression and spelling. Some of the misspellings are also of the terms needed to discuss language such as 'repetition', 'reference' and 'pertinant'.

267. Despite the below average standards, the quality of teaching and learning is good and students of all levels of attainment are achieving satisfactorily; many are achieving well. The good teaching is a major factor in so many students successfully completing the course from a low starting point. A few do better than would have been anticipated: one student, whose average grade at GCSE was a D, gained a B in the AS examination. Strengths in teaching include planning that meets the objectives of the course; a range of methods that provide the students with the opportunity to develop their own independence; and high expectations of the weaker students. However, some students do not consistently rise to the challenge of working with initiative and independence. Although the course work demonstrates some effective research activities well-supported by the teacher fulfilling an appropriate consultancy role, many students tend to be too reticent in lessons. During two lessons on text transformation, many students showed a reliance on further explanations from the teacher before they started their work. Consequently, teaching tended to address the needs of those whose confidence was low and this overlooked the needs of the potentially higher attainers who could respond to the challenge of more open-ended tasks.

268. Course work and trial examination marking is informative and grade-related. Students found other assessment techniques used for their course work, such as peer assessment, very informative. However, not enough use is made of assessment procedures to help improve standards. Students do not receive their target grades early enough in the course. Although they undertake formal assessment tasks, students do not find that the assessment of other work and essays consistently refers specifically enough to their target grades or grade criteria. They would value more frequent guidance on how to achieve their targets grades.

269. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Development of the subject has been hindered by some resource deficiencies, albeit recently rectified. Some teachers have a good grounding in language teaching, but there has not been enough training for those whose background is literary. The teachers have worked well together during a time of some disruption to staffing to provide good in-house support for newly appointed teachers. Some disruption in teaching

provision and new timetabling arrangements caused some dismay to students in Year 12 last year, but the students have enjoyed the course and valued the help they receive from their teachers. They are particularly proud of their course work. Completion rates on English courses are very high.