

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **LORD LAWSON OF BEAMISH COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

Birtley, Chester-le-Street

LEA area: Gateshead

Unique reference number: 108403

Headteacher: Mr D. Grigg

Reporting inspector: Mrs G. Salter-Smith  
8329

Dates of inspection: 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> September 2002

Inspection number: 249758

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Birtley Lane  
Birtley  
Chester-le-Street  
County Durham

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs M. Robson

Date of previous inspection: 21<sup>st</sup> April 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Lord Lawson of Beamish community school is a large mixed comprehensive school with 1450 pupils on roll and a larger than average sixth form. It is popular with parents and oversubscribed. Pupils come to the school from the immediate area and further afield. At fourteen per cent, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is around average, although there are pupils from a wide range of social and economic circumstances, including those less advantaged. Pupils are mostly from white UK ethnic backgrounds with a small number of pupils from other backgrounds that include Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and Japanese. There are a small number of Kosovan refugees. Twenty-three pupils speak English as an additional language and just four pupils are in the early stages of learning the language. The number of pupils with special educational needs or having a statement is lower than is found in most schools. Most of these pupils have specific learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties or hearing impairment. The school also provides support for pupils with a wide range of individual needs including physical disabilities. The vast majority of pupils join the school with average standards although the full range of ability is represented. There is little variation between the intake of pupils from year to year. Since June 1998 the school has benefited from specialist Arts College status. The school receives funding from the Excellence in Cities initiative.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Lord Lawson of Beamish is a very good school with some excellent features and a good sixth form. Pupils achieve above expected standards as the result of very good teaching and their very positive attitudes. The school is very well led and managed and it provides very good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Examination results for pupils aged 16 are well above average and very high compared with similar schools.
- Very good teaching helps pupils to learn at a rapid rate and achieve better than expected standards.
- The school's very good care and support encourages pupils to be keen to learn, behave very well and have positive relationships with each other and staff.
- The school is very well led and managed.
- The breadth of courses offered meets all pupils' needs and interests very well.
- Many areas of the school have benefited from the excellent work associated with Arts College status.

#### **What could be improved**

- The poor quality of the limited accommodation in many areas of the school is a restraint on improvement.
- There are areas for improvement in the sixth form.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

Improvement since the previous inspection in April 1997 has been good. Standards have improved significantly, particularly for boys. The quality of teaching and pupils' learning has improved. Rates of attendance have improved. The school has made progress in improving most of the issues identified by the last inspection. However, the quality of the tutorial sessions, although improved, is not yet consistent.



## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and 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	C	A	A	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	B	

**Key**

well above average      A

above average          B

average                    C

below average          D

well below average      E

Results in national tests taken at the age of 14 have improved since the last inspection and are improving at a faster rate than most schools. In 2001, overall results in core subjects were above the average for all schools and well above average when compared with similar schools. The school exceeded its targets. Results in English were well above average and results in mathematics and science were above average. In English and mathematics a well above average proportion of pupils reached the higher levels. There was no significant difference between the results of girls and boys. In tests taken in 2002, provisional results improved in mathematics and science but in English they were not as good as in 2001.

Results in examinations taken at age 16 have improved significantly since the last inspection and they are improving at a faster rate than most schools. The gap between the attainment of girls and boys has narrowed. In 2001, when compared with similar schools, results were among the highest five per cent in the country and pupils achieved particularly well in art and design, drama and psychology. Provisional results for 2002 have improved further and the school gained its best results ever, meeting most of its ambitious targets. Results in vocational courses, including art and design, business and information and communication technology (ICT) taken by high numbers of pupils, were outstanding.

Standards of work seen in Year 9 and in Year 11 are above average. These standards indicate that pupils are achieving well in relation to the average standards they started from in Year 7. In Year 9 and Year 11 standards of work seen in English and science are average and in mathematics are above average. Examples of particularly high standards of work were seen in art and design, in food technology in Year 11 and in higher attaining groups in English and mathematics.

Results in sixth form examinations were above average in 2001 and in 2002 provisional results indicate that they have improved further. These results and the average standards of work seen show that students are achieving better than expected standards.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils and students work hard and this helps them to achieve well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The school is a very calm and orderly community. Pupils are courteous and well mannered. They behave very well in classrooms and there is a good atmosphere for learning.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Very positive relationships between pupils and staff give pupils the confidence to ask for help when it is needed. Pupils respond very well to the opportunity to take responsibility and show initiative.
Attendance	Above average. Rates of attendance have improved and the amount of unauthorised absence has declined significantly. Attendance in the sixth form is above average.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Very good teaching in Years 7 to 11 helps pupils to learn at a very good rate. Teaching observed in English and mathematics in Years 7 to 9 is very good and in science it is good. In Years 10 and 11 the teaching observed in English, mathematics and science is good. Examples of excellent teaching were observed in English, design and technology, psychology and guidance lessons. Very good teaching was observed in almost all subjects. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Excellent lessons are characterised by a buzz of lively activity in which the pupils are totally absorbed. In these lessons teachers continually challenge all pupils to think more deeply around subjects and pupils give thoughtful responses. In response to teachers' very high expectations pupils present their views and opinions in a mature manner and they work very well in groups.

Lessons are well planned, many following a common approach arising from the work of the school's involvement in the national project to raise standards in Years 7 to 9. Lessons start with clear introductions and pupils know what they are trying to achieve. Pupils concentrate well and work diligently because lessons include a good range of short activities which have a clear purpose. Many lessons are lively, interesting and move on at a good pace. Teachers expect a great deal of pupils and make demands of them. They support pupils' personal development very well and relationships are very good. Work is marked regularly so pupils know how well they are doing and their comments give pupils a clear idea of what to do to improve. Homework is set regularly and supports progress. Literacy and numeracy skills are well taught and this has helped lower attaining pupils, particularly boys, to achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs and the small number of pupils who are learning English as an additional language are taught very well and make very good progress.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. A broad range of courses meets the needs and interests of pupils and students. A wide range of vocational opportunities has contributed to the rising standards.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. The high quality support pupils receive enables them to make very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes and are interested in their work.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. Pupils are monitored and are well supported by specialists. Pupils make good progress with language development and are fully included in the curriculum.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall with particular strengths in pupils' moral and social development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The very well organised 'House' system uses high quality consistent methods of monitoring behaviour and attendance and provides good continuity of care.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The recently appointed head teacher provides clear educational direction. Management at all levels effectively raises standards and improves the quality of teaching and learning. The school development plan provides a clear focus for improvement. The aims and values of the school are clear to all.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are well informed of how the school is performing. They are very supportive of the work of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Analysis of individual pupils' performance helps to raise pupils' and teachers' expectations and guide teaching. Performance management is used effectively to raise standards.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Funding associated with Arts College status is used very effectively to raise standards and improve the quality of the environment. The cost of educating pupils in different parts of the school does not always match the income provided and there are no clear reasons for the differences.
The extent to which the school applies the principles of best value.	Good. The school seeks parents' views regularly and pupils' views from time to time. Targets are ambitious. The school's performance is compared to that of other schools. The best value is actively sought in major purchases.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The school has high expectations of their children.</li><li>• Their children make good progress.</li><li>• The teaching is good.</li><li>• Parents feel comfortable in approaching the staff in school with questions or problems.</li><li>• The school helps their children to become mature and responsible and the behaviour is good.</li><li>• The school is well led and managed.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The amount of homework pupils receive.</li><li>• The information they receive about their children's progress.</li><li>• The way the school works with parents.</li></ul>

These are based on the views of a comparatively small number of parents. Seventeen parents attended the meeting held for parents and 77 questionnaires were received (5.3 per cent return rate).

Inspectors agree with parents' positive comments. Inspectors agree that some of the annual reports to parents can be improved but find that homework is used regularly and supports pupils' progress. Inspectors are satisfied with the way the school works with parents.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form is taught within the main school and shares many teaching areas with it. Following rapid expansion a few years ago, there are now 205 students, making it significantly larger than average. There are similar numbers of male and female students. A very small proportion of students are from a range of minority ethnic groups. Almost all students were pupils in the main school; around fifty per cent of Year 11 pupils enter Year 12. Almost all students continue their studies from Year 12 into Year 13 and finish them. Entry into the sixth form is relatively open, though courses do specify standards in GCSE examinations which are desirable. The average attainment of students on entry to this sixth form is below that for most sixth forms; obviously the attainment of individual students varies considerably. A good range of vocational courses is offered alongside a wide choice of 'AS' and 'A' level; students can mix and match courses to meet their interests and career aspirations.

## **HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

This is a good sixth form with significant strengths. Students achieve well and attain overall above average examination results. Provision for students is made comparatively cheaply; the sixth form is very cost-effective. Standards are generally rising though comparisons are not simple, as the increase in student numbers, with many following new vocational courses, has altered the academic profile of the sixth form. Overall standards of work seen during the inspection are average. The good quality of teaching and learning enables students to achieve better standards than expected based on their prior attainment. The sixth form meets the needs of students well. The range of academic courses offered is very good. Better provision for personal and social education and for careers education has recently been developed and is just starting to have a beneficial effect. Leadership and management are good overall; the day-to-day running of the sixth form and the analysis of attainment data to help subjects improve are very good.

### **Strengths**

- Overall, students do better than might be expected and get better than average examination results.
- Teaching is good. Teachers' knowledge of their subjects and their relationships with students are particularly strong features.
- The attitudes of students are very good and they enjoy being in the sixth form.
- Provision is excellent in photography.
- The range of subjects offered is very good and encourages students to join the sixth form.
- Day to day management is very good.

### **What could be improved**

- Opportunities and encouragement for students to think and learn for themselves and participate better in lessons.
- The consistency with which assessment information about students is used to help them do better
- The quantity and quality of accommodation available for teaching, study and recreation.

*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	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Students' very good attitudes and sound teaching and learning lead to satisfactory achievement and average standards. Opportunities for independent learning and using ICT are limited.
Biology	<b>Very good.</b> Teaching and learning are very good; there are many opportunities for independent learning. Recently improved standards of work are above average and students achieve very well.
Chemistry	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Teaching and learning are satisfactory and achievement is in line with expectations. Standards are below average.
Business education AVCE	<b>Good.</b> Standards are average. Good teaching and learning help students reach better than expected standards.
Economics	<b>Very good.</b> Skills and concepts are very well taught and students achieve well. Standards are above average.
ICT AVCE	<b>Good.</b> Students achieve well and develop independent learning skills due to effective teaching. Standards are average.
Health and Social Care AVCE	<b>Very good.</b> Students reach average standards from a low starting point. This good achievement is due to very good teaching.
Art and design	<b>Very good.</b> Students' achievement in reaching well above average standards is very good. They develop well as independent artists and very good teaching provides a wide range of experiences.
Media studies	<b>Excellent.</b> Teachers' high expectations and the very well planned course support very good progress by students and high standards of work. The quality of the leadership and management is excellent.
Geography	<b>Good.</b> A wide variety of good teaching and learning techniques ensure students achieve well. Standards are average.
History	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Sound teaching helps students to make steady progress overall. Standards are below average.
English	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Sound teaching and learning lead to satisfactory achievement. Standards of work are average, and do not reflect the most recent provisional examination results which are better.
German	<b>Good.</b> Students make good progress due to good teaching which uses the language extensively. Standards of work are average, and are much improved on recent examination results.

Other subjects were looked at but not fully inspected; one or two lessons were observed and these judgements are based on that evidence. Physics is satisfactory though the numeracy skills of some students do not appear to be up to the demands of the courses. Textiles is good and the enthusiasm of the teacher balances, to an extent, limited opportunities for ideas to be shared in such a small group. Standards in leisure and tourism are above average. Teaching in

psychology is inspirational and undoubtedly contributes to its popularity and large class sizes. General studies is taught well one lesson each week and fosters some independent work by students, as much work has to be done through their own efforts. English literature is taught satisfactorily and standards are average. French is taught well and students' accents are good; they benefit from having a native speaker teach them. Drama is taught very well and students' work is above average; extra-curricular work helps students' learning.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good overall. There is room for improvement in the way assessment information is analysed in some subjects and used to raise achievement further. Careers and personal education are recently improved and new programmes are underway.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good overall. Numbers in the sixth form have risen largely as a consequence of a wider range of examination courses and improving overall standards at the age of 16. Better use is now made of examination data analysis to ensure many students make better progress. Accommodation is unsatisfactory and books insufficient in the library. The sixth form brings in more money than it costs to run and the excess is used elsewhere in the school.

## 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"> <li>• Choices of courses</li> <li>• The quality of teaching.</li> <li>• Printed information.</li> <li>• Computer access and the recently improved library organisation.</li> <li>• They enjoy being part of it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About a third would like more support and advice about a variety of issues, including future options.</li> <li>• More than a third would like a better range of activities other than subjects.</li> <li>• Around a quarter feel they need better information about their progress.</li> <li>• About a third would like more responsibility.</li> <li>• The accommodation; it is too cramped and tatty.</li> <li>• Dining arrangements are poor.</li> </ul>

At the time of completing the questionnaire, around half of the students were in the first few days of their experience of the sixth form. Students' views are well supported by inspectors' judgements. The school has recognised the issues in earlier questionnaires and is moving forwards to address some of them, for example careers advice and guidance and the setting up of a sixth form council. Accommodation problems are acknowledged but require substantial funds to address effectively.

## COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

*Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.*

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

**Examination results for pupils aged 16 are well above average and very high when compared with similar schools.**

1. Results for pupils taking examinations at age 16 have improved significantly since the last inspection and they are improving at a faster rate than most schools. In 2002 the school achieved its best results ever with sixty-seven per cent of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes. Pupils were particularly successful in GNVQ courses. The school has recognised that vocational courses meet their pupils' needs and interests well and consequently they have extended the range of courses open to pupils. In 2002, high numbers of pupils took the GNVQ art and design and ICT courses and almost all gained the equivalent of two A\*-C passes in each of these subjects. Pupils taking GNVQ business, health and social care, leisure and tourism and manufacturing courses all gained A\*-C passes. Music was another subject where all fourteen pupils following the course gained A\*-C passes. In 2002, the school met its ambitious target for pupils' average points score of fifty-two but it did not meet its target of seventy-five per cent for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*-C passes. The school recognises that some of their targets have been over ambitious and are not always based on the most reliable data available. Results in mathematics and science were similar to the previous year but in English language a slightly lower proportion gained higher grades. This is in part accounted for by the long-term absence of a number of staff. Despite the school managing the situation well, there was an effect on pupils' achievement.

2. The results of examinations taken over a year ago in summer 2001 are the most recent results with which it is possible to make a comparison with national averages and other schools. The school's results were well above average compared with all schools and very high when compared with schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, based on the average points scored by each pupil and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*-C grades. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*-G grades was average when compared with other schools and the proportion gaining one A\*-G grade was well below average. Not content with this, the school has reviewed the courses it offers to pupils in Years 10 and 11 and its arrangements for entering pupils for examinations. Pupils now follow a broader range of courses designed to meet their interests and learning needs. They include vocational courses in which they are successful. A small number of pupils, who are in danger of losing interest in school, are offered vocational courses outside the school and are prepared for and entered for English and mathematics GCSE in Year 10. In this way the school is finding ways of ensuring that all pupils, whatever their needs and interests, gain worthwhile accreditation during their time in school.

3. In 2001, GCSE results in art and design, business studies, drama, English language, English literature, German and psychology were significantly above the national average. Compared to the average of their performance in other subjects, pupils did particularly well in art and design, drama and psychology and boys did well in chemistry. Although girls still gain better results than boys, the gap between the attainment of girls and boys has narrowed considerably since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining A\*-C grades in English and science was above the average for all maintained schools and average in mathematics.





**Very good teaching helps pupils to learn at a rapid rate and achieve better than expected standards.**

4. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Of the fifty-six lessons observed across the range of subjects taught in Years 7 to 11 around one quarter of lessons were very good or better and around two-thirds of lessons were good or better. Very good teaching was observed in almost all subjects and no unsatisfactory lessons were seen.
5. Examples of excellent teaching were observed in English, design and technology, psychology and guidance lessons. The pace, challenge and interest in these lessons totally engage pupils and help them to reach outstanding depths of understanding and to work successfully and sensitively with one another.
6. In an excellent Year 9 English lesson the teacher very skilfully developed pupils' ability to know and use terms for analysing language using Shakespearean 'insults' as the context. Pupils had a great deal of fun and became totally engrossed as 'insults' were flung between teachers and pupils in Shakespearean language. This activity was one of a variety, all introduced clearly and at a rapid pace. The teacher questioned pupils skilfully, probing their understanding at each stage and leading them into close analysis of how they were using the language. As a consequence of this effective teaching they gained new skills and understanding in identifying parts of speech and manipulating Shakespearean language to a desired effect, all at a level above that expected for their age.
7. In an excellent GNVQ manufacturing and food technology lesson in Year 11, the teacher set up the lessons imaginatively in the style of 'Ready Steady Cook'. The pupils responded exceptionally well to the competitive element and in a spirit of fairness. Consequently they worked together in a team extremely well. The room buzzed with activity and enjoyment. The teacher was highly skilled, not only in motivating the pupils, but also in encouraging an analysis of their own work. Through excellent use of questioning she teased out what went well and why. As a result, pupils identified qualities of good leadership, and learnt how the materials they were using are utilised in the production of food products and how materials are used for manufacture.
8. In an excellent Year 9 guidance lesson on sex and relationships, the teacher's very skilful and sensitive management of the lesson and its content encouraged pupils to develop very mature and thoughtful attitudes towards relationships. The excellent relationship established between the teacher and the pupils, based on trust and respect, enabled pupils to express their points of view and concerns openly and with confidence. The excellent choice of resources and skilful handling of discussion ensured that pupils remained well focused and gave the topic considerable depth of thought.
9. In an excellent Year 10 psychology lesson, the teacher challenged pupils to think deeply and analyse what is meant by conformity and obedience. Using local examples and situations within their own experience, the teacher demonstrated the concepts extremely well. The teacher ensured that the correct terminology was understood and used and so pupils improved their literacy skills. The teacher skilfully related the work to current political situations and various groups in society and so pupils gained a greater depth of understanding

of social, moral and cultural issues. Throughout the lesson pupils were attentive, deeply engaged and clearly respectful of a very knowledgeable teacher.

10. The school has benefited from taking part in the pilot project for the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, a national initiative designed to raise standards in Year 7 to 9. A great deal of work has been carried out across subjects on how to improve pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy and on improving approaches to teaching and learning. As a consequence the school has adopted many effective approaches to learning and teaching which can be recognised across the school, not only in Years 7 to 9.

11. Across the school, teachers plan lessons carefully, following a common approach that has arisen from the work carried out on the national project. Lessons start with clear introductions and teachers make good use of the whiteboards displayed in every classroom and working area to set out the purpose of the lesson and discuss this with pupils at the start. As a result, pupils know what they are trying to achieve. In most lessons, these aims are referred to throughout the lesson and, at the end, teachers use questioning well to find out what pupils have learnt. Pupils appreciate and understand this clear structure. In a small number of lessons the common structure for lessons is used but not as effectively as it could be. For example, the aims for lessons are very general and not helpful to pupils in focusing on what they should learn; occasionally the final part of a lesson is not well used because the teacher asks generalised questions such as 'What have you learned?' rather than asking specific questions to check what pupils know, understand and can do.

12. Most lessons include a good range of well-paced activities which interest pupils and have a clear purpose and as a result pupils concentrate well and work diligently and achieve better standards than expected. For example, in a Year 10 religious education lesson about the events and symbolism of a Jewish wedding, after a brief recap of the previous lesson, pupils worked in groups and responded to a series of prepared questions displayed about the room. Shared learning took place and they went on to consider a variety of artefacts alongside texts which stimulated questions from pupils. During this rapid series of different activities the teacher took every opportunity to extend their learning and help them to appreciate the links between another culture and their own.

13. Teachers expect a great deal of their pupils, make demands of them and consequently pupils develop confidence through learning and achievement. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, due to regular assessment and a good knowledge of individuals, the teacher was able to include all the pupils and challenge them at their own level. A good pace, variety of activities and very good questioning also helped pupils to reach above expected standards in understanding number sequences.

14. A further example of the success of the teaching and the high expectation teachers have of pupils is the quality of the work higher attaining pupils produce in English in Year 9. Pupils' work on Pat Barker's 'Regeneration' reflects GCSE qualities and standards. It is sensitive, perceptive and analytical. Pupils' response to Shakespeare is detailed, thorough and demonstrates an empathy with characters. Likewise, high standards were achieved in a Year 10 physical education lesson where pupils worked independently of the teacher on leading planned skill drills. The pupils demonstrated a good level of understanding of the skills and of how to coach them.

15. The excellent standards of art and design displayed around the school, particularly of Year 9 and Year 11 pupils, are a further reflection of the high expectations teachers have of pupils. Not only is the work they produce of a high standard but pupils' ability to reflect on their work and relate how they have been influenced by other artists is outstanding.
16. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and pupils appreciate the individual support teachers give them. Teachers manage classes very well and take a firm but warm and friendly approach to which pupils relate well. As a result, most pupils behave well in lessons and are keen to learn. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics class, the very good rapport established between teacher and pupils enabled individuals to take an active part in the lesson. They suggested their own ideas verbally or by writing on the board without fear of failure.
17. In many lessons teachers are not afraid to tackle social, moral and cultural issues. For example, lessons in psychology tackle cultural and social issues when discussing conformity and obedience; guidance lessons on sex education effectively address social and moral issues; and religious education lessons discuss cultural differences. However there are missed opportunities to raise pupils' spiritual awareness. For example, the wonder of mathematics with its logic and predictability is not often brought to pupils' attention.
18. Pupils know how well they are doing because teachers mark the work regularly. Pupils appreciate the comments teachers make on their work and the advice they receive in lessons which give them a clear idea of how well they are doing and what to do to improve. Parents expressed some concern about the amount of homework given, some considering too much is set and others not enough. However, inspectors found that in most classes homework is set regularly. It is relevant to the work in class and helps pupils to make progress. Pupils are encouraged to carry out their own research using computers and the library. Some lower attaining groups do not appear to receive as much homework as other classes and the days on which it is given do not always follow the plan. Consequently pupils find themselves with more to do on some nights than others.
19. Literacy skills are well taught across the school and this has helped lower attaining pupils, particularly boys, to achieve well. The school's policy for improving pupils' literacy skills across subjects is well developed. Most subjects have identified key language and there is a good focus on pupils using the language correctly both in their writing and in their speaking and listening. For example, in art and design lessons pupils learn the language associated with craft skills and techniques and are encouraged to use this language during their evaluation of their work, both in whole class discussion and in their individual writing. Workbooks of an excellent standard, which support the courses, help to set out the key language of the subject. Excellent workbooks are a common feature of the GNVQ courses and have helped to structure pupils' learning. In many areas of the school, excellent display not only stimulates interest and provides a vibrant working atmosphere but it also helps to focus pupils on the key language of the subject.
20. The school has a policy for teaching numeracy skills across subjects and they are well taught. In science lessons pupils are frequently required to make numerical calculations. In a Year 10 physical education lesson, pupils were encouraged to calculate the distance from which a penalty should be taken on a small football pitch, knowing the width of the goal and the distance used on a full pitch.

21. Pupils with special educational needs are taught very well and make very good progress. Specialist teachers provide a very good quality of support on a one-to-one basis, in small groups or in classrooms. Close monitoring of pupils' progress and very good links with local agencies ensure that pupils receive appropriate support, for example, for visual impairment and behavioural support. The small number of pupils who are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language learn at a very good rate and are taught very well by a teacher from the local authority service.

**The school's very good care and support encourages pupils to be keen to learn, behave very well and have positive relationships with each other and staff.**

22. Very well organised pastoral care, based on a house system, employs high quality consistent methods of monitoring behaviour, attendance and personal development. The well-established house system ensures that pupils receive very good continuity of care and it is valued highly by parents, pupils and staff. Tutors and heads of house know pupils extremely well and they provide very effective personal support. In response to the support and care they receive, not only from pastoral staff but also from their class teachers, pupils have very good attitudes to school. Pupils of all ages and attainment levels work hard and this helps them to achieve well. Relationships between pupils, and between teachers and pupils are very good and this gives pupils the confidence to speak out and to ask for help when it is needed. Pupils of all ages join in school activities enthusiastically, for example, sporting events, dramatic performances and the school brass band.

23. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour with equal involvement of senior staff, subject and pastoral staff. Pupils and parents are confident that any issues involving bullying or harassment are dealt with promptly and appropriately. Pupils' behaviour is very good and the school is a very calm orderly community. Pupils behave very well in the classroom and they get on with their work. The school does not tolerate violent behaviour, bullying or racism and will exclude pupils when necessary.

24. The house system promotes responsibility especially in Year 11 where pupils fulfil the roles of house captains, prefects and sports captains. Pupils are proud of these roles and try their best to do a good job. The houses are very involved in supporting and collecting for various national and local charities. Much of the initiative comes from pupils, and they are starting to understand the needs of others. During the week of the inspection two senior pupils led assemblies across the school during which they described their visit to Rumania in the summer holidays. During the visit they helped to prepare the orphanage for the young children and they met and played with them. Pupils in the school had raised considerable funds for this project during the previous year.

25. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance. The introduction of a computerised registration system has allowed the school to identify exactly which lessons pupils attend during the school day. The system provides very accurate information about attendance. Parents are now contacted by phone on the first day that their children are absent. These improvements have resulted in increased attendance rates and fewer instances of unauthorised absence. Attendance rates are good and have improved since the previous inspection.

26. The school has well-established systems for monitoring pupils' academic progress which help form tutors and subject staff to check underachievement quickly. Formal assessment is frequent and parents are informed of their children's progress regularly, at least three times per year. The school has made recent changes to its system of reporting and, in these early days of the new system, the quality of some reports needs improving. They do not identify clearly what individual pupils know, understand and can do, nor do they identify clearly enough what pupils need to do to improve.

27. Learning 'mentors', funded by the Excellence in Cities initiative, play a role in the school's systems. They offer support to pupils who may be underachieving and to those who may be losing interest in education. Arrangements for child protection are very good and the school is very aware of the needs of children in the care of the local authorities.

### **The school is very well led and managed.**

28. Leadership and management at all levels are effective in raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. The very good leadership is reflected in a common sense of purpose and community in the school underpinned by very clear school aims. The school's by-words of 'Caring, confident and capable' can be readily quoted by pupils and are seen in action throughout the work of the school. The high quality of care provided by the school both through the house system and through teaching in classrooms means that pupils feel secure in all areas of their life in school. Pupils grow in confidence and capability as teachers throughout the school expect the most of them and give them the support they need to succeed.

29. A feature of the very good management is the effectiveness of the school's development plan which provides a clear route to improvement. It is implemented and reviewed rigorously by senior managers. The focus is on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. It arises from a review of the previous plans and an understanding of how well pupils are achieving across subjects. Managers at all levels are involved in drawing up plans and implementing them and throughout the school the strong sense of purpose and commitment to improve is steered by the plan. A recent example of the effectiveness of the plan is the implementation of a system of target setting and assessment for every pupil in all subjects every ten weeks. All staff have been involved in developing and using the system and it has helped heads of subject and class teachers to recognise where pupils are underachieving. Each department has then developed their own ways of tackling underachievement. For example, the art and design department have recognised pupils who are not achieving the grades expected of them and they give those pupils additional support beyond the school day. The next stage for senior managers is to ensure that underachievement is being tackled appropriately across all departments and that the action is successful in improving pupils' achievement.

30. A further example of action taken to raise standards is the policy successfully adopted towards 'fast tracking', a system of moving pupils quickly through examinations. Pupils are encouraged to take examinations when they are ready to take them rather than in the year when pupils are usually expected to take them. The art and design department pioneered the 'fast tracking' of GCSE and GNVQ art and design so that pupils in Year 9 start on the GNVQ or GCSE course and some pupils move on to AS level in Year 9 and A2 level in Year 10. As

a result of the success in art and design, fast tracking is being considered across other subjects across the school.

31. The piloting of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy has been an integral part of the school's plans for improvement and there is no doubt that the key elements of the strategy have been ably implemented by managers and their teams. As a result, all sections of the school have embraced the methods and this can be seen in the high standard of teaching which includes effective teaching of literacy and numeracy skills across subjects, well structured lessons and a broadening of approaches to teaching and learning.

32. The recently appointed head teacher provides clear educational direction. He is determined to build on the many strengths of the school, which include the high standards of pupils' achievement and the high quality of the teaching, and promote further its role in the community as a place where relevant learning can take place for all its members. After a very short time in the school the head teacher not only recognised the many strengths in the work of the school but he also quickly recognised where there were shortcomings which needed immediate attention. In consequence, the day-to-day handling of the school's finances has undergone a rigorous review and a greater number of administrative staff have been appointed to ensure increased efficiency in day to day management. At this early stage in his role, he has gained a good overview of the school's strength and areas for improvement.

33. The senior managers all have a clear role and undertake their duties with a professionalism that inspires trust, confidence and the highest standards among staff. Their oversight of the work of departments is supportive yet rigorous and has led to significant changes, for example, in improvements to the range of courses offered to pupils. Heads of department are very effective and many are energetic in promoting improvements. They systematically keep a check on pupils' work and the quality of the teaching across their department. They are ready to support and help improve teaching and much good practice in teaching and learning is shared within departments and across departments, especially since the pilot for the Key Stage 3 Strategy has been undertaken.

34. Performance management is embedded into the school's systems to promote improvement and is used effectively to raise standards. Teachers in many departments share a common objective related to their department's improvement plan. The programme of professional development is carefully planned to support improvements in the school and individual teachers.

35. Heads of subject and heads of house share a common aim to raise standards and they work well in conjunction with each other to monitor pupils' progress, recognise underachievement and give the right sort of support where it is needed. The analysis of the performance of individual pupils has helped to raise pupils' and teachers' expectations and guide teaching. An example of the effectiveness of the pastoral staff is the improved rate of attendance. This has come about through more rigorous monitoring and follow-up of absences.

36. Governors are very supportive of the work of the school and are keen to encourage high standards. A number bring considerable experience and relevant expertise to the role. Governors are well informed of the pupils' results and achievements and they regularly hear presentations from staff in the school on major developments. They are regularly informed of

how the budget is being spent but they are less clear of the rationale for the way the resources are allocated across the school. On occasions they critically review spending decisions, for example there have been recent discussions on how best to fund support for pupils with special educational needs, but they do not take a major strategic role in shaping the development of the school's future. Although supportive of the school's work, few spend a great deal of time in school seeing for themselves how the school functions.

**The breadth of courses offered meets all pupils' needs and interests very well.**

37. The quality and range of the learning opportunities offered in the school's curriculum is very good. In response to recognising what suits pupils' learning needs and interests the school has considerably broadened the range of courses on offer. As one parent commented during the meeting with inspectors, 'There is something for everybody'. The wide range of recently introduced vocational opportunities has contributed to the rising standards. These courses have given the opportunity for more pupils to succeed and achieve worthwhile accreditation.

38. All pupils from Year 9 follow a course in GNVQ art and design. Year 9 pupils start a GNVQ course in ICT and many go on to complete the course in Years 10 and 11. This gives pupils an early opportunity to gain accreditation equivalent to two or four GCSE grades by the time they reach Year 11. Pupils have been successful in these courses. Further vocational courses are offered in business, health and social care, leisure and tourism, and, more recently, GNVQ manufacturing has been introduced for all pupils as an alternative to GCSE design and technology. Many staff have received considerable training in teaching and assessing in these courses which has contributed to their success. The school is aware of the need to ensure that those teaching on more recently introduced courses receive equivalent training.

39. Pupils who no longer have to follow a modern foreign language course, often lower attaining pupils or those in danger of losing interest in their education, follow a good range of work-related courses and placements. The school has arranged for these pupils to enter their GCSE English and mathematics examinations early in Year 10 to ensure that they gain these important qualifications as a minimum. In Year 11 they go on to follow various courses which include NVQ courses at the local further education college, courses in key skills run by the YMCA and an outward bound-type course called 'Reach Out'.

40. The school is very conscious of the need to provide continuity of courses from Years 10 and 11 into the sixth form if pupils are to be encouraged to continue with their education. The school has succeeded in broadening the range of courses offered in Years 10 and 11 which can be continued into the sixth form. For example, GCSE psychology and drama and the range of GNVQ subjects can be taken in Years 10 and 11 and continued into the sixth form. The school also offers a good choice of science subjects and this prepares pupils well for the rigours of the AS and A2 course in the separate sciences.

41. In addition to the courses taught during lesson time the school offers a rich variety of learning opportunities outside lesson time. Music, sport and drama activities are well attended by pupils and they contribute to pupils' success and achievement. Additional study time is supervised in the library and teachers willingly give their time to support individuals. A number of extra lessons take place out of school hours, for example, the Year 8 fast-track



group in art and design is taught out of lesson hours and is well attended by Year 8 pupils voluntarily.

**Many areas of the school have benefited from the excellent work associated with Arts College status.**

42. Since the school gained Arts College status in 1998 the excellent management of this initiative has resulted in numerous improvements which have had a major impact on raising standards and the quality of the education. Many of the initiatives have begun in the art and design department and have spread into other areas of the school.

43. There is a significant impact on the overall ethos of the school. Through being continually surrounded by the highest expectations in the arts, pupils learn to appreciate the arts and their own culture in its broadest sense. For example, the school displays pupils' art work and the work of other artists in its many forms throughout the school. There are sculptures in outdoor areas, large murals and collages and a great deal of very well displayed fine art work. Local influences on pupils' artwork is strong. For example, 'The Angel of the North' has been a focus for much of the work as has 'The Baltic Centre'. The appreciation of other artists is brought to life for pupils by the practice of every teacher displaying their favourite piece of art on the door to their room together with the reasons they have chosen the piece. These pieces of art are often points for discussion between staff and pupils. This brings art appreciation right into pupils' everyday lives and they can understand for themselves how art influences people that they know emotionally, spiritually and socially. Pupils appreciate the various exhibitions throughout the school and they help to develop among pupils a commonly held pride in their own and other's achievements.

44. A further positive influence across the school is the exceptional quality of the display. An impression of colour, vibrancy and high expectations is created in many areas of the school where the staff in departments have worked alongside the art and design department to help improve the quality and relevance of the display.

45. Since the school gained Arts College status there has been a significant improvement in the range of courses offered to pupils and the opportunities for pupils to take examinations early, where it is appropriate for them to do so. The introduction of GNVQ art and design for all pupils has helped to ensure that all pupils gain arts based accreditation equivalent to two GCSE higher grade passes. The success of this well structured course has been an impetus for the school to develop GNVQ courses more broadly. Almost all pupils now take GNVQ ICT and from this year GNVQ manufacturing has been introduced in Years 10 and 11. The art and design and ICT courses are started in Year 9 giving pupils the opportunity to gain accreditation earlier than is expected. This gives pupils who are able the chance to move on to higher level accreditation so there are pupils working on AS level in Year 9 and A2 in Year 10. Again the success of these initiatives has been influential in other parts of the school and there are plans to give pupils the chance to 'fast track' in other subjects. Overall, the high standards reached in art and design and vocational courses have had a major influence on improving the school's examination results. The outstanding standards in art and design evident across the school are inspirational to many pupils and students. The high number of students who are welcomed onto art and design related courses in higher education reflects these high standards.

46. The art and design department has led the way in developing the school as a centre in the community for lifelong learning and extending the influence of the arts out into the community. For example, daytime art, design and ICT courses are run for adults in the community. On many occasions pupils, students and adults work alongside each other and it is not unusual to have sixteen year olds working alongside eighty year olds with a common purpose. These situations have an enormous influence on pupils' personal and emotional development as they come to appreciate each other's generation. In addition to courses run in the school there are arts related sessions taken in several care centres in the community.

47. Links with other schools are very well established. Staff from the school have close relationships with the main feeder primary schools. Workshops in the primary schools are frequent and they share the work of visiting specialist artists. Pupils in these schools are consequently well prepared for the rapid rates of progress expected of them when they arrive at Lord Lawson of Beamish School.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

**The poor quality of the limited accommodation in many areas of the school is a restraint on improvement.**

48. The school has grown rapidly in size and nature in recent years, particularly the sixth form, and this has led to pressures on dated accommodation. There is very little spare or underused accommodation. The space in the library and space in which to study independently is restricted. There is very little recreational space for sixth form students. Many classrooms are very small for the size of the classes and this is a restriction on the type of teaching and learning that goes on. It is difficult for teachers to move around some classrooms to check on pupils' progress and group work becomes very difficult to organise. Ventilation and lighting is poor in many rooms. Workshops in design and technology are very old and have not been updated recently and a number of health and safety matters were drawn to the attention of the school. Not all subjects are taught in specialist rooms and this limits the best use of display and resources. Subject rooms are spread about in different parts of the

building and this places pressures on the use of resources. It is necessary to duplicate sets of books, and equipment and some equipment, for example, overhead projectors, has to be carried from one part of the site to another.

49. The dining area is too small for the number of pupils who stay for school meals. Pupils have to queue for much of their lunch break before they can eat and many are discouraged from using the facility. Some of the temporary buildings are in poor condition. Despite these restrictions the school makes the very most of display and exhibition of art to enliven the environment. It is a testament to the efforts of the staff in the school that high standards are maintained despite the condition of the accommodation.

50. Outdoors there are many open spaces between buildings with no covered walkways. There are many uneven paving stones on walkways and some unprotected drops off courtyard areas. Although much effort is put into maintaining a litter free site, litter does accumulate in corners and under steps and around netted areas. Although the school has provided some ramps to enable pupils using wheelchairs to have access to parts of the building there remain many inaccessible areas.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

51. In order to further improve the quality of the education provided by the school, and the standards achieved, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) improve the overall quality of the accommodation by:
  - working with the appropriate agencies to raise the quality of the accommodation and ensure a safe and accessible environment;
  - ensuring that day to day cleaning is of a consistently high standard in all areas indoors and out, particularly where litter accumulates.
  - seeking all possible sources of funding to support the regeneration of the accommodation.

(Paragraphs: 48-50)

## **Sixth form**

- (1) ensure all subjects plan opportunities for students to learn independently by:
  - providing sufficient advice and guidance in techniques to foster successful independent study and
  - supporting students' oral contributions in class;

(Paragraphs: 69, 70, 71, 83, 86, 138, 139)

- (2) ensure all subjects use ICT appropriately and have adequate software to support students' independent learning;

(Paragraphs: 56, 70, 71, 83, 86, 91, 96, 138)

- (3) ensure there are adequate books in the library or available to students to support and broaden students' learning in every subject area;

(Paragraphs: 83, 92, 97, 125, 145)

- (4) ensure that all departments use assessment information to guide and support students' learning, set targets for students to achieve, and tell students clearly how well they are doing and what they still need to do;  
(Paragraphs: 74, 102, 135, 140, 146)
- (5) urgently seek to improve current sixth form academic and social accommodation.  
(Paragraphs: 48-50, 62, 83)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	56
	Sixth form	67
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		49

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	4	10	21	21	0	0	0
Percentage	7	24	38	38	0	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	2	20	27	18	0	0	0
Percentage	3	30	40	27	0	0	0

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

### *Information about the school's pupils*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1243	207
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	167	11

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	20	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	163	0

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	23

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	30

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.3
National comparative data	8.1

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	124	118	242

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	98	90	90
	Girls	97	77	74
	Total	195	167	164
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	81 (63)	69 (66)	68 (61)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	48 (25)	55 (42)	40 (31)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	78	90	92
	Girls	84	81	77
	Total	162	171	169
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	67 (70)	71 (65)	70 (63)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (27)	54 (37)	43 (38)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	128	120	248

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	72	115	119
	Girls	83	111	114
	Total	155	226	233
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	63 (62)	91 (90)	94 (92)
	National	48 (47)	91 (90)	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	49.1 (45.0)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

*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 2001 ('00)	Number of candidates	38	53	91
	Average point score per candidate	15.2 (19.6)	18 (21.6)	16.8 (20.7)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.1)	18 (18)	17.5 (17.6)

		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	27	39	66	12	22	34
	Average point score per candidate	16.5	17.2	16.9	15.2	12.8	12.2
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

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

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1425	21	8
0	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
4	0	0
2	0	0
12	0	0
0	0	0

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	86.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.9

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	296

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.7
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	22.6
Key Stage 4	22.0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	3 709 434
Total expenditure	3 709 304
Expenditure per pupil	2 556
Balance brought forward from previous year	173 831
Balance carried forward to next year	173 961



### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	18.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	23.3

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0.2

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## ***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1451
Number of questionnaires returned	77

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	45	6	6	1
My child is making good progress in school.	35	58	4	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	23	65	6	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	49	22	3	4
The teaching is good.	23	68	5	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	42	18	3	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	49	1	3	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	39	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	25	45	18	4	8
The school is well led and managed.	30	57	4	3	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	27	64	6	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	44	6	3	17

## **PART D: THE SIXTH FORM**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and students' achievements**

52. Examination results in 2001 were above average. As the attainment of the student body on starting in the sixth form was, overall, below average, examination results indicate students did better than might have been expected of them. This conclusion is supported through an independent analysis of students' performance; students did indeed do well. Examination results in 2002 are better than those in 2001 but so are results across the country; it is possible to say students achieved at least well again but not how well they did compared to the national average. Male and female students attained and achieved similarly; both genders did well.

53. In the 2001 results the proportion of students that attained A and B grades was well below average overall, reflecting the below average attainment on entry to the sixth form. However, the proportion of students attaining grades between A and E was above average; in many subjects all students passed the examination. It is this success that leads to the good achievement mentioned above and this success is related to very high retention rates; well over ninety percent of students finish their courses and this year only one student, who entered their chosen career, did not continue from AS to A2 courses. This continuity of study follows through as about eighty percent of students go on to further or higher education, and the rest gain employment. High retention in this school is undoubtedly linked to the wide variety of courses offered, the mix and match that students are permitted, and the careful guidance students receive prior to starting courses. Students' very good attitudes to work and their desire to do well also give them 'staying power' on courses.

54. Some post-16 subject results are better than others and this may reflect the academic standard of the students in teaching groups when they entered the sixth form; some classes are made up of students with much better GCSE results and class sizes vary significantly. In 2001, results in business, economics and psychology were above average; those in biology, chemistry, English language, English literature, general studies, and geography and vocational art and design average. German and mathematics results were below average; art and design A level, history, French and physics well below average. Results in art and design do not truly reflect standards because many students take advanced courses and gain advanced level accreditation earlier in their school lives.

55. The standards of work seen at this early point in the academic year are, overall, average. The progress pupils are making over time is good overall. Standards are well above average in photography where students achieve very well. Standards are above average in biology, economics, and art and design. They are average in mathematics, business, ICT, health and social care, geography and German. Standards are below average in English language, chemistry and history. Generally, the progress students are making in each subject is better than the standards of their work may suggest. There is no unsatisfactory progress; students' achievements in chemistry and history are satisfactory. In English language, staff absence and insecure course planning have led to lower standards.

56. Key skills, for example literacy, numeracy and ICT are not taught as a distinct course but are features of many. Students are able to repeat GCSE English and mathematics examinations in the sixth form if they did not get a minimum C grade but not all choose to do so. Many students, particularly in Year 12, are following an ICT course and achieve well but students not following such a course may have limited opportunities to use computers and their skills are not extended beyond any gained by the age of sixteen. Inadequate literacy skills make it harder for some students to participate in groups, for example in art and design, photography, business education and history, or express themselves in writing, for example in biology. Some students taking physics do not appear sufficiently numerate to adequately support their work; their GCSE results in mathematics were not all good and a significant number are not taking A level mathematics.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

57. Students are keen and eager to come to school. They rarely take time off school and attendance rates are good. This helps them to achieve well. Students make good use of the opportunities available to them and they try to be involved in school life. For example, a high proportion of students volunteer to help younger pupils with reading or provide support in lessons.

58. Students work very hard and want to do well. They listen well and respond eagerly to the teachers' questions. They make valuable contributions to lessons. They prepare themselves well for lessons, especially when they are asked to make presentations for example in GNVQ travel and tourism and in Year 13 general studies. Most speak clearly and confidently. Students are extremely well behaved. They have mature attitudes, are courteous, trustworthy and show respect for property.

59. Relationships are very good both between students, and between teachers and students. This gives students the confidence to speak out. For example, during a general studies lesson where sensitive issues such as euthanasia were discussed, there was rigorous debate but students always respected opposing viewpoints. Students work well together, for example, in English literature students were able to extend each other's ideas about Anthony and Cleopatra.

60. Students are developing the attitudes and skills to enable them to continue learning in adult life and some subject areas, such as art and design and German, are very good at fostering independent learning skills but others, such as English and economics, are weaker.

61. Pupils mature into very responsible young people. They raise issues of concern to them in a sensible measured manner, and a newly formed student council provides a forum for their views. A number of students work with younger pupils to support their learning in a paired reading scheme and considerable numbers undertake the Duke of Edinburgh Award. A reflection of students' mature attitudes is the number in Year 13 who attend the general studies lessons even though some of them are not taking the exam. They find the lessons stimulating and valuable and a number have carried out very thorough research on topics such as war and euthanasia.

### **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

62. The quality of teaching is good and so students learn at a good rate in lessons. Teaching and learning are very good in art and design, biology, economics, health and social care and photography. They are good in business, geography, German and ICT and satisfactory in chemistry, English language, history and mathematics. Around one third of lessons were very good or better, nearly three quarters were good or better and there were no unsatisfactory lessons seen. Excellent lessons were seen in psychology and business education and examples of very good teaching are found in many subjects.

63. The excellent teaching in AVCE health and social care was characterised by a lively pace, expert introduction and explanation, well planned use of a wide range of resources, good and varied learning activities and skilful questioning. These helped to totally engage students and they drew on their own experiences to analyse body language and communication in depth.
64. Excellent teaching in psychology is lively, dynamic with very good practical demonstrations that involve the students. Positive relationships mean that the teacher is not afraid to tackle controversial issues and challenge students' thinking. Technical terms and new concepts are expertly explained and related to students' own experience to help develop understanding.
65. Teaching across the sixth form has many strengths. Relationships between staff and students are good and students have great confidence in their teachers. They value the support offered by teachers and respond positively to the high expectations and demands their teachers make of them.
66. Students benefit from the teachers' very secure knowledge of their subjects and of how to teach them. Expert demonstrations and explanations are a feature of practical subjects such as art and design, chemistry and photography. In most subjects students know exactly what is expected of them in lessons and in relation to exam requirements and this instils confidence. Across most subjects students enjoy a good range of stimulating activities in lessons that move at a good pace. In the most effective lessons teachers succeed in creating a sense of urgency and a strong work ethic through short bursts of well-paced activity. In photography, teachers quickly capture the interest and attention of students. In biology, well-planned stages in learning help progress. In chemistry, practical skills are taught well and explanations are very clear. In geography, a lively pace ensures that no time is lost.
67. In a number of subjects students are encouraged to manage their own learning and they benefit from collaborative learning in pairs or groups. Biology, geography, German, and ICT are all subjects where students are encouraged to work independently of the teacher. Teachers give them good guidance on how to carry out their own research and further reading, often making good use of ICT. Students respond well to these opportunities, growing in confidence and coming to lessons well prepared to have their thinking challenged. However, there are other subjects when not enough activities are planned to encourage students to manage their own work.
68. The high quality of material designed to support students' learning is a feature in most subjects and well supported by the school's Photocopy Shop. Booklets, handouts and task sheets are expertly reproduced and in English and health and social care especially they are particularly supportive of lower attaining students where learning is set out in easy stages. However, there is a danger in English of the vast number of worksheets inhibiting more original thought.
69. In most subjects students are well informed of how well they are doing by teachers' regular and careful marking which makes clear to them what to do to improve.
70. Key skills are satisfactorily taught across subjects. In photography good attention is paid to numeracy in practical activities in the darkroom where careful measuring and

proportions are required. In some lessons although writing is well supported there are not enough opportunities for students to discuss topics and express their own points of view. In physics, not enough attention is paid to improving the numeracy skills of some students. ICT is not used often enough to encourage independent study in a number of subjects including biology, chemistry, economics, history and mathematics.

71. Some teaching has features that can be improved. In a number of subjects including business, chemistry, economics, history and mathematics, not enough is done to encourage students to manage their own learning and study. Students passively receive knowledge in lessons, are dependent on the teacher and the pace of learning slows. Some students do not take the initiative to take notes or analyse their reading and research carefully. This approach can lead to less challenge and demand for critical and analytical thinking. In some subjects not enough is done to support lower attaining students, some of whom need help in organising their work systematically, or making spoken contributions in lessons to help consolidate what they know and understand.

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

72. The school provides a good curriculum for its post-16 students that includes all statutory requirements. The curriculum offered includes a good breadth of opportunities, including courses that lead both to traditional advanced level qualifications as well as vocational courses. Students spoke warmly of the range of opportunities they had which include the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, the Community Sport Leader Award and other sporting activities. Careers advice and aspects of citizenship have previously not been well developed, but are due to take place more rigorously this year. The inspection took place at the beginning of the academic year and these aspects were due to begin shortly after the inspection ended. The school is committed to ensuring all students leave the sixth form with the key skills they will need for adult life. In terms of literacy and numeracy, any student who has not been successful in achieving at least a grade C at GCSE is offered resit classes to improve this situation. In ICT, students are encouraged to attempt ICT at least at advanced supplementary level, and the school is now identifying those students who will require extra classes.

73. The school has the policy that all sixth form courses should follow on from a similar course in Years 10 and 11. As such, it can be confident that courses will match the aspirations of students well, as well as building effectively on their prior attainment. There is good provision for the very small number of students who have a special educational need. The flexibility that this close attention to individuals' circumstances and needs provides ensures that all students have very good opportunities to develop their own interests and strengths. This indicates a sixth form that is responsive to individuals and that is very inclusive in outlook.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

### **Assessment**

74. The marking of students' work seen is often very good, thorough and helpful and students interviewed agreed with these judgements. One student made it clear that teachers

are willing to provide extra time to go over assessed work and explain how it may be improved. However, almost forty students, through the questionnaire, indicated work is not sufficiently assessed and about the same number believe that they are not well enough informed about their progress. Inspectors found that students do have targets based on GCSE performance and later assessments and that examination performance has been well analysed for some years in order to help subject leaders improve their work. There are opportunities in tutorial time to discuss progress. Many subjects use the systems of regular assessment to monitor students' progress and identify where students are not doing as well as they should. However, procedures are not used effectively across all subjects and underachievement is not always picked up quickly enough. For example, the independent analysis that demonstrates students achieve well also indicates students who are more able to begin with, make the best progress, whilst the relatively least able sometimes do not do as well as they should, for example in mathematics. In English the performance of some students declined last year and, partly due to staff absence, this was not picked up early enough. Assessment practice across subject departments is inconsistent and there is scope for improving it in business education, English language, geography and history.

### **Advice, support and guidance**

75. Students receive good quality guidance prior to joining the sixth form. A senior member of staff interviews each pupil and there is clear guidance about the demands of individual subjects. The vast majority of courses are designed to build upon knowledge and experience gained in Years 10 and 11. This, together with good advice, ensures that very few students have any major difficulties with their courses and very few abandon their studies. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and find that their individual academic needs are well supported.

76. The school is in the early stages of implementing a formal programme of careers education and personal guidance for students. Also the tutorial programme has been improved recently. Although formal careers advice has been limited, each student has had the opportunity to discuss important decisions with a careers officer. Many students find that individual teachers generously offer support and advice which helps them make sensible decisions about their futures.

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

77. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form. They appreciate the good teaching and the high level of support that they get from individual subject teachers. Students recognised that there needed to be improvements to formal careers education and guidance. They would appreciate a wider variety of enrichment opportunity especially sport and more formal opportunities to enable them to express their views and concerns. They recognise the limitation in the accommodation.

78. The school has sought the views of parents of sixth form pupils. Parents feel that pupils are well supported but are unsure about the provision for careers guidance. Generally they show a high level of satisfaction with sixth form provision.



## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

### **Leadership and management**

79. Overall the leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The day-to-day management of the sixth form is very good and features very good relationships with students. This management has been given a recent lift through 'Excellence Challenge', a national initiative to encourage more students to participate in higher education. This work should quickly lead to better careers and pastoral guidance. Strategic leadership and management of the sixth form by the school and governors is good overall.

80. Performance management is used to develop teaching and learning; lesson observations and the scrutiny of students' work are used to identify development issues. Analysis of examination results is now used effectively to establish how well teaching groups have done. The reasons for good or weaker performance are explored; for example it became clear that a new revision programme had benefited chemistry so it was adopted across the other sciences. Many teachers take the opportunity to teach in the sixth form and students considered this beneficial as they had a better range of support. Young teachers can therefore gain experience of sixth form teaching and bring their enthusiasm, recent knowledge, and energy to it. Teachers have received training in the requirements for new courses and lesson content and students' work assessments meet examination board requirements.

81. The school monitors students' achievements and examination standards through an independent agency and uses the information provided to see whether results meet expectations and to identify where concerns might be. Subject and sixth form development plans also take on board this information. Planning for the 11-16 school is also linked to sixth form development, for example the successful introduction of more options in Years 10 and 11 to feed into appropriate courses post 16. However, there is inconsistent assessment practice between different subjects and best practice is not always followed. No subjects are judged to have unsatisfactory leadership and management but some are run distinctly better than others; monitoring is via the senior management of the school; the head of sixth form is not involved.

82. The sixth form is very cost effective as the average cost of each student within it is low and achievement is good. However, this is achieved by a significant number of over large groups, for example psychology (though there are some very small ones, for example textiles) a low spend on accommodation, and some shortage of resources, particularly ICT and books. The sixth form does bring in more than it spends and historical decisions have led to this money being spent in Years 7-9. There is no rationale claimed for this imbalance and a review of spending needs to be made to ensure best value is being achieved for students and pupils. Otherwise, the school does challenge its provision and this has led to an increasing range of vocational courses, more students and high retention rates. It is also considering how best to offer other vocational courses that need specialist accommodation and tutors. The new head teacher has moved quickly to identify students' views on the sixth form and is initiating a sixth form council so that students can take on more responsibility for decisions about it. Embracing 'Excellence Challenge' should guide students better towards employment or higher education.

## Resources

83. Teachers are well qualified and most often well experienced. Some class sizes are larger than generally experienced in sixth forms; they are well over twenty in psychology, ICT, English, and mathematics. Though this makes courses economically efficient, it creates significant marking burdens and makes teaching harder as the spread of ability of students is generally wider; this may contribute to some apparent under-performance by weaker students. The provision of learning resources such as books and equipment is generally good in class but there are shortages which reduce opportunities for independent learning; the sixth form section in the library is generally inadequate and ICT equipment and software appropriate for students is limited within some subject areas. So many students wish to follow an ICT course that a significant number have to do it after school to ensure they have both teachers and machines. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Many rooms are small and restrict teaching and learning styles, as in one option group for history. The students' common room is poorly equipped and the long queue students have to join for lunch prevents them making the best use of lunch times for private study or extra-curricular pursuits.

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

In the inspection, eleven 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 tables below show 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
Chemistry	3	100	43	0	5	2.7	0.8
German	1	100	82	0	13	2	1.8

***GCE A level and AVCE courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	18	89	87	22	43	4.3	5.8
Chemistry	8	100	90	13	43	5.3	5.9
Biology	11	100	88	27	34	5.3	5.3
Physics	8	75	88	0	40	2.8	5.7
Business Studies AVCE	22	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	12.0	10.5
Economics	21	100	89	38	36	5.9	5.5
Art and design A level	20	75	96	30	46	4.7	6.6
Art and design AVCE	11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	12.6	12.2
Music	3	100	93	33	35	5.3	5.7
Geography	15	100	92	20	38	5.6	5.7
History	12	83	88	17	35	3.5	5.4
Psychology	21	95	87	29	34	5.9	5.3
English Language	8	100	91	38	30	5.0	5.3
English Literature	17	100	95	29	37	5.4	5.9
French	7	43	89	0	38	2.3	5.6
German	7	86	91	0	40	4.0	5.8
General Studies	47	94	85	15	30	4.6	4.9

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, biology and chemistry.

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- Results in advanced level examinations in 2002 have improved over those in 2001.
- Students with the potential for higher attainment are provided for well.
- When given the opportunity, students work very well collaboratively.

##### Areas for improvement

- The schemes of work do not give enough guidance to new or inexperienced teachers.
- ICT is not used enough to support learning.
- The pace of learning is slower where pupils do not take an active enough part in their own learning.

84. Standards of work observed in lessons and completed work are average, and students achieve satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment. These standards are achieved because of satisfactory teaching and students' very positive attitudes, which together promote satisfactory rates of learning.

85. Results in advanced level examinations in 2001 were below national averages. Between 1998 and 2001, there was no secure trend to results, and no clear difference between standards achieved by male and female students. National comparisons cannot yet be made with the 2002 results, but the average grade achieved has improved over 2001. Overall, this group performed as expected, based on their prior attainment but not all students made equally good progress. Higher attaining students exceeded their predictions, producing a healthy crop of A grades from students expected to achieve B and C grades. However, their weaker peers did less well, in that those who were predicted a D grade actually achieved an E. The department explains that weaker candidates were affected disproportionately by staff illness and the disruption it caused.

86. An analysis of the work completed by students currently in Year 13 shows that they have made satisfactory progress in their studies and are now working at the expected levels. There was little evidence of ICT being used to support learning. However, in a Year 12 lesson observed, the teacher used a class set of graphical calculators well to show how graphs react when their equations are changed. This enjoyable activity was well organised so that students had to compare their displays with those of their peers, promoting independent learning as they noted the transformations. Indeed, the most effective teaching seen was that which promoted collaboration and independence in learning. This was also seen in a Year 13 mechanics lesson. In this lesson, students worked in groups of four or five to plan and carry out simple experiments. They showed very good attitudes as they amicably shared out tasks and worked solidly, learning well. Whilst no unsatisfactory teaching was

observed, less effective teaching does not involve students in their own learning, so that they passively receive knowledge, and the pace of learning is slower as a result.

87. The department is effectively led overall. Students' work is thoroughly and accurately assessed to guide future learning. Apart from ICT, the department is well resourced. However, schemes of work consist mainly of lists of topics without stating explicit learning objectives or giving clear guidance on possible teaching strategies or styles to ensure all teaching is as good as the best.

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is consistently very good and challenges all students.
- Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies which encourage independent learning.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students help to motivate students.
- Teachers give very effective support to students.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

### Areas for improvement

- ICT is not used enough during lessons to help students to work independently.

88. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. Student achievement in relation to their standards when they began the course is very good particularly at this early stage in the year. These standards are achieved because teaching is very good, it interests and motivates students whose attitudes to the subjects are, as a result, very good. As a consequence of these positive features the quality of students' learning is very good.

89. The results of the A level examinations in 2001 were very close to the national average and students gained similar grades in biology to those that they obtained in other subjects: in 1998 results were above average but have been about average since then. Some students always gain the highest grades and few fail to get a pass grade. In 2002 results in both AS and A level examinations were similar to 2001 when they were average. Overall, students gained the grades expected based on their performance in their GCSE examinations. However, the A level results of the higher attaining students were better than predicted and those of lower attaining students were worse. In both Year 12 and 13 a large majority of students complete their courses and almost all continue from the AS course to A2 level. Males and females do equally well.

90. Standards of work seen are better than results in examinations suggest because new and effective teaching methods have been introduced by a new teaching team. In Year 13 in a lesson about energy release standards were well above average. During a lesson about diets in Year 12 attainment was above average and students gained a good understanding of ideas about deficiencies. In Years 12 and 13 both higher and lower attaining students are reaching a standard that is above what can be expected from their GCSE results.

91. Teaching and students' achievements in lessons are both very good. Teachers have high expectations and planning includes skilful use of models and paired activities so that students make very good progress in their learning of difficult ideas about energy release and

diets. Clear instructions, good pace and very good relationships engage students' interest in learning, raise their morale and ensure that they work hard. As a result students' attitudes to biology are very good; they are interested in explanations and co-operation and behaviour are very good. Male and female students do equally well in both Years 12 and 13. Students are taught how to organise their learning well. However, little use is made of ICT during lessons and students do not benefit from the opportunities for research and decision-making offered by this equipment. Some students are a little hesitant when they have to use scientific terms but plans exist to address this and to improve writing skills.

92. Management of the department is very good. The recently arrived head of the department has made an immediate positive impact on teaching methods and standards in the department. A wider range of teaching methods that include many opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills has been introduced and a team to teach sixth form students established. Plans include a new commitment to field work and equipment is needed to do this. Other laboratory equipment is sufficient but the supply of books to support private study needs to be improved. Assessment procedures are effective, work is regularly marked and students are given very effective support that they clearly appreciated.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Teachers use clear instructions so that students know what to do and make good use of their time.
- Practical skills are well taught so that students are confident in the laboratory.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good and help to motivate students.
- Teachers give very good support to students and inform them about grades and targets.

### Areas for improvement

- There are not enough opportunities for students to manage their own learning.
- Opportunities to use ICT for research and decision-making are limited.

93. In chemistry the standards of work seen during the inspection are below average. However the achievement of students in relation to their standards when they began the course is satisfactory. This is so because teaching is satisfactory. Support provided for students in and out of lessons is very good so that their attitudes to the subject are good and they learn at a satisfactory rate.

94. The results of the A level examinations in 2001 were very close to the national average and students gained similar grades in chemistry to those that they obtained in other subjects. In 2000 results were high. Some students always gain the highest grades and few fail to gain a pass grade. In 2002 A level results were similar to 2001 when they were close to the national average and at AS level they were a little better than 2001. Overall students gained the grades that could be predicted from their performance in their GCSE examinations although in both the AS and A level examinations results of the higher attaining students were better than predicted and those of lower attaining students were worse. In both Years 12

and 13 a large majority of students complete their courses and many continue from the AS course to A level. Male and female students do equally well.

95. In both Years 12 and 13 practical skills are above average and they are often well above average, however their understanding of chemical principles is not as strong and is below average. In a Year 12 class about organic acids, students' understanding of the reactions they were carrying out was limited and below that expected at this level. In a Year 13 lesson about chemical equilibria, not all students understood the principles involved. Standards are below those seen in examinations because the prior attainment of students choosing chemistry courses is now lower.



96. Overall teaching is satisfactory. It has some good features and no lessons are unsatisfactory. Practical skills are taught very well and students make good progress in learning them. Instructions are always clear so that students always know what to do and as a result they work hard and productively particularly during practical lessons: students are confident and their morale is good. The attitudes and behaviour of students are good but sometimes they are not critical enough. Explanations of difficult ideas about chemical reactions are good so that students make good progress in their understanding. In other lessons students are not given opportunities to plan or research their work and the progress that they make is restricted so that, overall, learning in chemistry is satisfactory. Little use is made of ICT during lessons and students do not benefit from the opportunities for research and decision-making offered by this equipment.

97. Management of the department is satisfactory. The curriculum and teaching, including practical work, are well organised, but teaching methods are not reviewed and opportunities for students to learn independently are not used often enough. This contributes to the underachievement of some lower attaining pupils. Work is marked regularly, students know what grades they have gained and what their targets are. They receive very good support through extra classes and information sheets when they have difficulties and are very appreciative of it. Students are not clear about what is available in the school library and the stock of books needs improving either in laboratory libraries or in the school library.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

The focus of the inspection was on AVCE courses in business education and economics courses. The school offers GNVQ intermediate award in business, the single and double awards in AVCE business plus AS and A2 level economics.

### **Business education**

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

#### **Strengths**

- The quality of teaching is good and well matched to the needs of students.
- The department provides a range of courses that is suitable for students of all abilities.
- The quality and range of learning resources is very good.
- The work of the department is well managed.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Not all students are involved in answering questions in class discussion.
- Students are not always given a clear picture of their achievements and subsequent targets for improvement.
- Accommodation is limited and discussion in lessons is sometimes inhibited by the arrangement of ICT equipment.

98. Standards of work seen are broadly average and this represents good achievement from a modest starting point for most students at the start of the course. Teaching is consistently good; relationships and attitudes are good and students learn well as a result.

99. In 2001, examination results were above average, and students were awarded pass, merit or distinction grades. Many of these students achieved well by reaching these levels and thus improving on their average standards at GCSE. Overall results for 2002 are not so high. In the double award AVCE, grades were generally lower than in 2001 and in the single award, lower still with no A or B grades. Many of these students achieved well however, having started from a lower level of attainment on entry to the sixth form.

100. Work in Year 13 student folders shows a range of attainment though many have already achieved grade E criteria in coursework assignments, some have reached grade C and one or two are moving towards grade A. This represents good achievement over time. Much of the work is thorough, accurate and detailed and shows clearly a good grasp of the principles of business organisation, for example. Year 12 students, starting from a similarly low base, have made a sound start with clear progress being made by the majority of students in a lesson devoted to improving their understanding of the complexities of 'demand theory'.

101. Lessons are well planned and the resources for learning are of high quality and well suited to the needs of all students. All teachers have very well developed knowledge and understanding of the subject and this enables them to draw expertly on the students' own experiences to provide a better level of knowledge and understanding, of competition amongst businesses, for example. In Year 12, teachers are working hard to establish a sound understanding of basic principles and understandably this has a clear effect on the work in the classroom. Tasks are simple and straightforward worksheets are used effectively in encouraging students to make a response; in so doing many students gain in self-confidence. In Year 13, some students continue to rely on the teacher in the classroom and some work tasks are not sufficiently challenging. Many students use skills already acquired to advance their learning in business. For example, students' ICT skills are well developed and teachers are skilled in devising learning activities that utilise these skills to help accelerate learning. In some lessons, time is not used productively for all students because teachers rely on willing students to answer questions rather than draw every student into discussion. There are some classrooms where the nature and arrangement of specialist ICT equipment can cause conflict in learning. On the one hand this enables individual learning at ICT workstations, conversely, it inhibits discussions and dialogue because of the noise and physical barrier created by the machines.

102. Assessment procedures are well established within the department. Marking is thorough, regular and accurate though students are not always given a full and clear picture of what they have achieved. For example, in classwork tasks, errors are repeated and there is no clear indication of what to do in order to be successful.

103. The department is well led and managed. Documentation is in good order and provides a strong base for the successful and smooth running of business education on a daily basis. The variety of courses provided now shows a clear sense of direction for this area of study and ensures that there is a flexible range of opportunities for all students. There is no written evidence on business education from the time of the last report but it is clear that there has been improvement. ICT skills amongst both teachers and students are much better developed. This has led to a higher standard of learning resources with special emphasis on the needs of lower attaining students and on activities to help students work more independently.

## Economics

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

### Strengths

- Very good teaching gives students a good grasp of new theories and concepts.
- Students' attitudes are very good.
- Students achieve better than expected standards.
- High quality information gives students a clear picture of what is expected of them.

### Areas for improvement

- Students' management of their own learning is variable.
- Opportunities for students to use ICT in their learning are limited.
- Students' first hand experiences and understanding of economics in real situations is variable.

104. Standards of work seen are above average and students' achievement overall is good. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good. Students' very good attitudes and the high quality resources available to them also cause the quality of learning in lessons to be very good. However, students' skills in managing their own work are variable and this has an impact on achievement overall.

105. A level results in economics have been consistently above average. In 1999 they were well above average and in 2000 and 2001 they were above average. The 2001 results showed students achieving well in relation to their GCSE grades. No consistent difference was seen in the performance of males and females. Results in 2002 were similar to 2001. The pass rate has been 100% in the past four years. AS results were average in 2001 with similar results achieved in 2002. Students use supply and demand analysis very well to analyse theoretical changes in market conditions. Numeracy skills are sound and students use graphical analysis confidently. They are able, subsequently, to apply their knowledge to the real economy such as explaining fluctuations in the housing market and how sustainable economic growth is achieved. Their own general knowledge of the local and national economy is variable. Higher attaining students in particular use a full range of literacy skills in their extended writing. They analyse and evaluate the limitations of different policies for reducing unemployment. Lower attaining students understand alternative policies well but are more descriptive in their writing and less analytical and evaluative.

106. Teaching is very good. Teachers' knowledge of the subject is very secure and there is a high level of challenge in class discussion with students constantly encouraged to use correct terminology and apply their theoretical knowledge to economic problems. In one lesson, a very lively but focused discussion on items that represent typical spending enabled students to learn very well the difference between accurate and inaccurate measures of inflation. Planning is very well matched to course requirements and students know what they have to achieve for each topic. Resources reinforce learning very well. Handouts have a very clear structure with up to date information on topical issues. In one lesson, students built up a very clear picture of a perfectly competitive market through completing tasks at each stage and assessment was used very well to check understanding. Occasionally the pace and challenge in oral work is not consolidated sufficiently to meet the needs of lower attaining

students. In some work seen students showed very good initiative in summarising errors in marked pieces of work although they display less initiative in highlighting key points in handouts and making their own notes during discussion. Some files of work seen were not well organised and did not provide a clear picture of learning from previous lessons.

107. Leadership and management are very good. The course is very well planned and gives students a very clear structure for their learning. The progress of students is monitored closely and prompt action taken when under-performance is identified.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The focus of the inspection was on ICT. The school has recently introduced the AVCE course in ICT.

### **Information and communication technology**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Students gain results higher than they might expect based on their GCSE results.
- Teachers give students very useful information so that they know how well they are doing and how to improve their work.
- Very good leadership makes sure that the course is well taught.
- Students have access to a good range of reference materials to help them learn.

#### **Area for improvement**

- The school did not plan in detail for the large number of students choosing the course.

108. Standards of work seen during the inspection are at the national average. Students' achievement overall in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form is good. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Students' good attitudes, the good range of resources and the very good quality of the subject's leadership also cause the quality of learning in ICT to be good.

109. This course started in September 2001. It has been very well chosen to match students' needs and interests. Students enjoy the strong practical emphasis of the work. Good links with companies and universities support the course. One good example is when students design multimedia productions for clients of a local university. Teachers have written very good booklets for each unit in the course. These are on the school's computer network. Students use these booklets regularly, to help them learn.

110. Teachers give students very good information about their learning. Students know exactly what they have to do to reach each grade. This detailed information tells them how to improve their work. By entering a password, students can look at this information on the school's computer network, from school or elsewhere. The students greatly value being able to do this.

111. Students are well taught. They are encouraged to work on their own. They are skilled at using the Internet for research. Students are developing the skill of being able to evaluate their own work. Higher attaining students are good at describing the strengths of their work. Other students know what is good about what they have done but have more difficulty putting this into words, especially in writing. Teachers know the next step for each student and give good quality individual advice when the need arises. Teachers know that it is important that students have many opportunities to learn for themselves. The head of department has ensured that all of the teachers work in this way. She monitors the work of her team to make sure this happens.

112. Virtually every student in Year 13 gained higher grades on the units than they could have expected, based on their GCSE results. There is no difference between the achievements of male and female students.

113. The course has proved very popular. Many more students in Year 12 chose the course than the school expected. This has led to large groups. Last minute arrangements had to be made so that no student was turned away from the course.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

The school offers an AVCE course in travel and tourism. This course was not inspected in depth but a Year 12 lesson was visited. The teaching was lively, supportive and expected a great deal of students. Students carried out research using the Internet and worked well in groups to pull together a presentation which reflected a good level of understanding of the topic.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

The focus of the inspection was on health and social care. The AVCE course in health and social care is newly introduced into the school.

### **Health and social care**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Most students achieve well from a very modest starting point.
- Teaching is very good.
- Students have a most positive attitude to the subject.
- The department is very well managed.
- Assessment procedures and practice are very good.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Arrangements for work placements in the wider local community are not extensive enough.

114. Standards of work seen are average and these represent good achievement when the below average starting point of the students is taken into account. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good, stimulating a very good rate of learning in lessons and promoting positive attitudes among students.

115. There are no results to report on because this is a new course in the school. The students' knowledge and understanding of current topics reflect average standards as do their written answers. The work seen in most folders is well detailed, accurate and properly completed; the standards of communication and presentation are high. Many Year 13 students have already reached the 'E' grade level in course work assignments and are moving on to higher levels. They demonstrate a good understanding of the principles of care and present a mature and valid viewpoint on contemporary moral issues. Year 12 students have made a good start and their work shows a commitment to success. Already their answers in class are thoughtful and demonstrate growing self-confidence and a mature and sensitive approach to the subject.

116. Teaching overall is very good. The planning and preparation of the lessons is very well organised and almost all lessons showed a very accurate and sensitive assessment of student needs and consequently a responsive approach to meeting those needs. Most lessons have a variety of learning activities within them and students value the regular reference to people, places and events known to them. Teachers draw expertly on the students' own experiences in making clear important principles. The explanations of complex processes are very well detailed and demonstrated, for example, the growth and development of a human embryo in the earliest days of pregnancy. All of these features enable the students to watch, listen and discuss with a degree of knowledge and understanding drawn and developed from a range of sources. They become well engaged in their work and are eager to be involved and make progress. The AVCE course in health and social care is constantly contributing to students' personal development and particularly through its sensitive approach.

117. The assessment of students' work is regular and thorough. Marking is informative and makes clear what needs to be done in order to improve. Regular checks on knowledge and understanding are made in class and all this enables students to have a clear picture of their own progress and targets. The department is very well led and managed. Good practice relating to the tracking of student progress is shared regularly. This complements regular observations of the teachers' work in classrooms and provides a broad-based check on the overall effectiveness of the department. Resources for learning are very good and range from well produced and constructed work sheets, designed to meet a range of student needs, to 'games', again produced 'in-house', that enable students to experience problem-solving and decision making in their course. Most students have the opportunity to take up a 'work placement' though there is scope for this feature to be extended beyond local primary schools and care centres for the elderly.

118. The subject has been very successfully introduced over the last two years. It provides a valuable opportunity for students to gain experience and qualifications in the area of health and social care building on their experiences in Year 10 and 11.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

The focus of the inspection was on art and design and photography, an aspect of media studies. Drama, music and textiles were sampled. The school offers an extensive range of courses in art and design, offering AS and A2, GNVQ intermediate and the AVCE single and double awards. In addition AS and A2 photography, textiles, fine art, drama and music are offered.

Drama has been introduced recently and this year is the first year at A2 level. In the most recent AS examinations almost half the students gained B grades and no student gained less than a D grade. This represents good achievement. In the Year 13 lesson seen, very good teaching kept students working practically at a good pace. In-depth analysis of performance drawn from the students themselves helped them to make rapid progress in achieving their aims.

A small number of students follow advanced music courses. The numbers are too small to make satisfactory comparison with national averages. However, in 2001, of the three candidates, one gained a higher A/B grade and the other two passed. In 2002, the results were not quite as good with students gaining a 'B', a 'C' and a 'U' grade. In the one lesson observed, the teaching was very good. A well-structured lesson helped them develop compositional skills and work collaboratively. The teacher's very good questioning checked their understanding and guided them in developing their own ideas within the required structure.

In a Year 13 textiles lesson involving two students, teaching was very good and stimulated excellent attitudes and very good learning. A wide range of resources was used to provide stimulus and starting points.

## **Art and design**

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

### Strengths

- The quality of the teaching is very good.
- Lessons are very well planned.
- Teachers provide very good materials to help students learn.
- The standard of the extensive display of art work is very high.

### Areas for improvement

- Students do not express opinions and judgements frequently enough when speaking and writing about art and design.
- Provision for art and design in the library is inadequate.

119. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average and students achievement overall in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form is very good. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good. The students' very good attitudes to their work and the very high quality of learning support material produced by the department also causes the quality of their learning in art and design to be very good.

120. Art and design, in many forms, permeates the school. Teachers know their subject very well and consistently demonstrate craft skills well to groups and individuals. This results in students quickly learning how to use essential craft techniques of drawing and painting to a high standard. In lessons, teachers very effectively use planned short bursts of timed activities to create a sense of urgency and a strong work ethic is established in which male and female students achieve equally well. Every lesson's purpose is made clear and students are provided with exceptionally good support sheets for each module with the result that they understand what is required of them to succeed as artists and to meet examination requirements.

121. Students demonstrate very good formal analytical studies as the starting point for projects. This work is refined and developed in a wide range of two and three dimensional forms with the support of lively experimental sketchbook work. Students clearly enjoy the variety provided in their lessons, such as when they make their own brushes out of available materials and experiment with different impasto paint treatments.

122. Students are prompt to lessons and keen to work. Students confidently use computers to support their written work but much of this is restricted to describing what they have done and does not yet adequately express what they think.

123. Studios provide stimulating work environments, packed full of students' creative work and different forms of art from across the world. This gives students a very wide exposure to a breadth of art and design and an understanding of art of different cultures. This has a positive impact on their original work much of which shows distinctive flair.



124. In the most recent AS examination, most students achieved A to C grades. In the most recent A level examination, most students achieved A to C grades. Generally students achieve grades above those expected when they started. When compared to national statistics these results may appear to be well below the average but it should be noted that, with the provision of Arts College status, many higher attaining students successfully pass these examinations with high grades at a considerably younger age. Standards are such that many students from this course go directly to art degree courses, which is rare.

125. Students benefit from the use of university art libraries for research and there are some suitable books in studios but the school library provision is poor. Visits to local and national art galleries and artists-in-residence expose students to the best of contemporary and historical art. Students make productive use of the small art and design studio set aside exclusively for independent work in their own time but storage space is restricted. Leadership and management of the course are very good. Since the previous report the number of students taking the course has significantly increased.

### Media studies

Overall, the quality of provision in media studies is **excellent**.

#### Strengths

- The quality of the teaching is very good.
- The subject is exceptionally well led and managed.
- The range and quality of resources for learning are excellent.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students do not express personal opinions and judgements when speaking and writing about photography often enough.
- The darkroom does not have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of the growing numbers of students.

126. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average and students' achievement overall in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form is very good. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good and management of the subject is excellent. The positive attitude of students and the very high quality of resources also causes the quality of their learning in photography to be very good.

127. Teachers know their subject very well and update their knowledge of new technologies regularly. Even though the course is scattered across the site, management and organisation is excellent. Teachers are enthusiastic, work hard and know how to grab and hold the attention of their students. Students respond very well to the high expectations of their teachers, they make very good progress and demonstrate a mature approach to their study. For every module each student is provided with high quality information sheets that are illustrated with visual examples. This results in students having a good understanding of their task. They know what they need to do to carry out research, and what they have to produce. In combination with clear completion deadlines and regular assessment meetings, this results in students having a good understanding of each task. This understanding expresses itself

exceptionally well in their practical work. Students know how to use the small darkroom to develop and print traditional black and white photographs accurately, due to clear teacher guidance. They know how to use new digital camera technology and how to exploit sophisticated computer programs to creatively manipulate their work as a result of teachers' own expertise being effectively demonstrated. From Internet and university library research they develop a good awareness of how artists and photographers use the camera. This knowledge is used in work which shows an appreciation of the natural world and in recording aspects of local community life. From analysis of photographs in the media they develop an awareness of how professional photographers plan their compositions and they are then able to successfully apply this to their own original work.

128. This is a popular course with growing numbers and a very high retention rate. In the most recent AS examination all students achieved A to B grades. In the most recent A level examination all students achieved A to C grades which is broadly in line with similar specialist courses nationally. This is a continuation of similar results achieved in previous years. Female and male students achieve equally well due to the equal attention all receive.

129. Most students are confident speakers and express themselves well but the department's attempt to ensure that all express personal opinion or judgement is not yet fully effective. Darkroom tasks enable students to apply their number skills when measuring out chemicals and when timing different print processes. All confidently maintain technical notes and show skill in using computers to present their written work.

130. The quality of the leadership and management of the course is excellent. Since the previous report this has resulted in the achievement of Arts College status, in relation to which this course is a reflection of the high quality of creative, expressive, technological and vocational experience provided for students. Resources for photography have improved to professional standards and the number of students choosing photography has grown.

## **HUMANITIES**

The focus of the inspection was on geography and history and psychology was sampled. Excellent teaching and learning were observed in a Year 12 psychology lesson when the teacher's dynamic approach developed confidence in students. Very good practical demonstrations involving students helped secure understanding. Results in the A level examination in 2001 were above average with all students gaining a grade.

### **Geography**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Standards have improved since the last inspection.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Fieldwork makes a significant contribution to student's knowledge and understanding.
- Very good relationships within the department contribute positively towards students' achievement.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- There is no formal monitoring or evaluation of teaching.
- Clearly defined systems for recording students' progress and establishing targets for improvement are not yet fully developed.

131. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average. As a result of good teaching, students' achievement in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form is good. Students' positive attitudes, their very good relationships with teachers and the dynamic leadership of the geography department also contribute to good learning in this subject.

132. In 2001, results at A level were in line with the national average but with a lower than average proportion of passes at grades A and B. In the previous two years, A level results were above the national average. Results achieved by Year 13 students in 2002 indicate a return to these better results, with over half of a large group obtaining A or B grades. This group of students did equally well in their AS modules in the previous year. Recently there has been no significant difference in the performance of females and compared with males. Almost all students who begin the course in Year 12 continue their studies for the full two years.

133. Students in the current Year 12, although in the early stages of sixth form work, are adjusting well to its demands. In one very good lesson on wave activity and coastal landforms, all students used the correct technical vocabulary to describe the processes at work. The teacher provided sensitive help to those who found the work difficult so that they could complete the task successfully. Students in Year 13 complete statistical exercises then use the information accurately, for example in the analysis of tropical cyclone patterns. They are aware of the importance of extending their own learning, for example by using ICT to provide accurate case studies and through the wide range of resources available within the department. Some lower attaining students have difficulty in writing accurately, in applying their knowledge to written examination questions and in organising their work systematically. They are helped to reach an appropriate standard because of the thorough marking of their work and the continuous encouragement that they receive from their teachers.

134. Teaching is good overall and has improved since the last inspection. Of the four lessons observed, all were at least satisfactory, one was good and one was very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, a lively approach to lessons and work well together as a team. All of these attributes have a positive impact on students' achievement. Very good planning and organisation was a common feature of the lessons seen, resulting in a clear identification of the expected learning and no loss of valuable time for this to take place. Where learning is most effective, teachers introduce challenging activities that stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm but also demand a great deal from them, for example in identifying their own difficulties and seeking solutions to them. Students respond to these challenges very well, maintaining their concentration and effort throughout. A long tradition of using local and more distant landscapes for fieldwork activities enhances students' first hand knowledge and enjoyment of the subject.

135. The leadership and management of the department in the sixth form are good. Although there are no formal systems for setting targets and recording students' progress, or for ensuring consistency in the quality of teaching through a programme of lesson observations, there have been many recent improvements in policies and practices. These positive changes are meeting the challenges of new examination requirements and helping to maintain the popularity of geography despite increased competition from other subjects. There has been significant improvement since the last inspection.

## History

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

### Strengths

- Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject.

- The quality of marking is very good and teachers give students detailed feedback on performance and what to improve.
- Students' skills in essay writing are improving.

#### Areas for improvement

- Results at A level have been well below national averages for the past three years.
- The monitoring and tracking of students' progress are inconsistent.
- Students' skills in source analysis are underdeveloped and they are not offered enough opportunities to use ICT.

136. Standards of work are below average but students' progress over time, from a below average starting point, is satisfactory. The satisfactory quality of the teaching and students' positive attitudes ensure a steady rate of learning and their achievement overall is satisfactory.

137. Attainment at A level has been well below average over the past three years and there were no A grades during this period. Results in 2001 were better than those in 2000 and there was a large increase in the percentage of grades B and C. In comparison to prior attainment and subsequent target grades, the majority of students performed at least as well as expected.

138. Standards of work are below average because many students do not have the necessary skills of source analysis and lack the confidence to express their own views at any length. Considering that the majority of students begin their sixth-form studies with only average GCSE grades, however, achievement is satisfactory and a minority of students are beginning to write essays of increasing length, which display a greater depth of thought. Although students have sound background knowledge of the topics under consideration, the end of Tsarism in Russia and also the rise of Hitler for example, they do not analyse historical sources critically. They are generally quite knowledgeable about the meaning of relevant historical terminology, in relation to Bismarck's domestic policy, for example, but do not have sufficient opportunities to evaluate a wide range of evidence. Furthermore, students do not benefit from the use of ICT to enhance their research skills and thus support their learning.

139. Teaching is satisfactory overall and in a quarter of lessons it is very good. Teachers display good subject knowledge and offer detailed feedback to students on how to improve their skills in essay writing. However, there is generally too much teacher talk, insufficient opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and, as a consequence, a paucity of extended answers to teachers' questions. Relationships are good and students adopt a mature approach to their studies. They speak highly of their teachers and are grateful for their support.

140. Management of the department is satisfactory and teachers have made sound improvement since the last inspection in introducing a new examination syllabus in an attempt to bring about higher levels of attainment. Although the department has recognised and discussed relevant strategies for future development, it has not yet established effective systems to bring about an improvement in students' skills of critical analysis. In addition, the tracking of students' progress is inconsistent.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English language and German. English literature and French were sampled. Results in A level English literature were average in 2000 and 2001 and students achieved similar grades to their other subjects. Teaching was good overall with some very good features. In a very well prepared Year 12 lesson students benefited from tightly focused teaching which expected a great deal of them. As a result students made some excellent interpretations of characters in Chaucer's work and made very good progress. In 2001, results in advanced level French were well below average and in 2000 they were average. In the one lesson observed, Year 13 pupils made good progress in response to demanding teaching which encouraged pupils to use practised language structures in a class discussion. Students spoke with good pronunciation and have benefited from the teaching of a native speaker of French.

### English language

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

#### Strengths

- The course has good leadership.
- Students have very positive relationships with and value the work of their teachers.
- Students' writing is of a high standard.

#### Areas for improvement

- The AS module does not include enough support to help students systematically analyse language.
- Students' underachievement is not always identified early enough.
- Students are not encouraged to manage their own study and learning well enough.
- A lack of continuity in teaching and learning has held back some students' achievement.
- Rooms are cramped and restrict learning and teaching approaches.

141. Standards of work in Year 13 are average. When students' average standards when they started the course are taken into account then these standards represent satisfactory achievement. Overall satisfactory quality of teaching and students' positive attitudes result in a steady rate of learning, although staff absence has caused some difficulties in continuity of teaching and learning.

142. Results in GCSE 'AS' and 'A' level examinations in 2001 were average. In 2002 results have improved; however, since 2000, fewer students have achieved the highest grades. More females achieved the higher grades than males in 2001. These results reflect satisfactory or better achievement and they are in line with predicted grades based on their prior attainment. This course is open to students of all academic abilities.

143. Standards of work seen are average and not as high as the most recent results in 2002 would suggest. This is confirmed by the disappointingly low results in the 'AS' examinations. The lower standards observed have two main causes. One is directly linked to staff absence during the last academic year which has resulted in a lack of continuity in teaching and some modules remain uncompleted. The other contributory factor is the underdevelopment of the

early part of the course which results in a slow transition from GCSE into the 'AS' course. Students are less assured when dealing with the systematic study of language which also incorporates concepts and terminology. Standards in writing are good. By the end of Year 12 students are writing well, producing original texts which incorporate critical self evaluation. In a Year 13 lesson, students explored the relationship between spoken and written language and how the use of language changes according to audience and purpose. In another lesson using the media text 'Friends', higher attaining students identified how language had changed over a decade. Lower attaining students were unable to analyse beyond genre and characterisation.

144. The teaching of 'A' level English language is satisfactory. Teachers have been trained in course requirements and use a wide range of resources to extend the learning. In some groups this plethora of materials has inhibited independent research by students and has encouraged over-reliance on teaching. Planning is carefully structured and enables lower attaining students to access the content of the lessons via easy stages. However the planning for the AS course is not cohesive across teaching groups and this has led to a variable quality of learning. Higher attaining students are taught at Newcastle University, where the teaching complements and extends their courses, but links between the work in school and at the university need reinforcing to provide a holistic curriculum. Teachers mark work thoroughly and leave students with clear guidelines on what they need to do in order to improve. However, although the students' progress is monitored, it is too infrequent to identify early underachievement and has resulted in some students in Year 13 failing a module which was taught in the first term of the course.

145. Students are very positive about English; they feel well supported and value the work of their teachers. This is evidenced in the high attendance rate in classes and the fact that all students completed the course last year. Students have very good access to ICT and have been provided with Internet accounts. Since the last inspection the learning resource area has been improved by the addition to the staff of a full time librarian but still does not provide enough resources to sufficiently enrich the 'A' level course and meet the demands of the syllabus.

146. The quality of the leadership and management of English is good. The head of department has managed to effectively minimise the disruption of three teachers on long term absence during last year; nevertheless there has still been a significant impact on standards in some teaching groups. Although regular briefings and team meetings discuss new developments which ensure updates of information from the examination board, they do not focus sufficiently on individual student progress and achievement, which would have avoided students failing modules. Teachers are well qualified and although there are sufficient rooms these are frequently too cramped to facilitate seminar style teaching.

## German

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is good and there are many opportunities for students to work together and take responsibility for their own learning.
- Teachers have a very secure command of German and use it extensively during lessons.

- The quality of marking is very good and feedback to students on their performance is detailed and regular.
- There is a wide range of resources and ICT is used very well as a learning tool.

#### Areas for improvement

- Although improving, some students are insecure in their knowledge of vocabulary and of basic German grammar.

147. Standards of work seen are average and students are doing better than expected when their prior attainment is taken into account. The good teaching and warm relationships encourage positive attitudes and lead to a good rate of learning in lessons.

148. Results at A level over the past three years do not demonstrate a consistent picture and, although all students in 2000 reached a B grade, performance was below average in 2001. In comparison to prior attainment, these results reflect satisfactory achievement. There were no higher grades because not all students had sufficient grounding in the basic tenets of German grammar.

149. Teachers now place greater emphasis on a grammatical coverage and, because they have introduced new course books to motivate their students to a higher degree, standards seen during the inspection were better than previous results suggest. Moreover, students' use of the Internet to read contemporary German texts and the well-written support materials prepared by teachers are resulting in the majority of students making good progress in understanding and using the language. Although a minority still lack sufficient vocabulary and demonstrate only a basic grammatical knowledge, there are examples of most students beginning to master quite complex material.

150. Students understand instructions and explanations quite easily and their pronunciation is improving at a rapid rate because teachers use German extensively during lessons. Furthermore, teachers encourage students to work in pairs, experiment with the language and learn from each other. These opportunities, coupled with warm relationships and utmost support from their teachers lead to students adopting a very mature approach to their studies and a willingness to think independently. Students have the utmost confidence in their teachers, of whom they speak very highly.

151. The subject is well managed and, following a sophisticated analysis of performance, teachers have established relevant strategies to enhance attainment. The area has made good improvement since the last inspection in the provision of new teaching and learning materials, the use of ICT and the increased emphasis on the preparation for students for the rigours of sixth-form study. The department is staffed by talented and well-qualified teachers who are aware of their students' learning needs. It is, therefore, well placed for future development.