

INSPECTION REPORT

RAINHILL HIGH SCHOOL

St. Helens

LEA area: St. Helens

Unique reference number: 104830

Headteacher: Mr. D. Atkin

Reporting inspector: David Klemm

2049

Dates of inspection: 24th –28th February 2003

Inspection number: 249765

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Warrington Road Rainhill Merseyside
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Councillor M.J. Doyle J.P.
Date of previous inspection:	17 th – 21 st March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2049	D Klemm	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well are students taught? How well the school is led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9649	J Smith	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
11044	J Hedge	Sixth form co-ordinator	English (sixth form) Educational inclusion Provision for students with English as an additional language	
30702	P A Bowyer	Team inspector	Mathematics	
12356	R G Dickason	Team inspector	Science (11-16) Biology (sixth form)	
4355	F Earle	Team Inspector	Citizenship Religious education (11-16)	
31981	E Forster	Team inspector	Art and design (11-16) Media studies (sixth form)	
12470	B Greasley	Team inspector	Geography Provision for students with special educational needs	
23480	M J Harding	Team inspector	History (11-16)	
11969	J Hardy	Team inspector	Economics (sixth form) Business studies (sixth form)	
20287	D S Harris	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages (11-16) German (sixth form)	
22906	B Hodgson	Team inspector	Physical education (11-16)	
19056	G W Leech	Team inspector	English	
27665	A Lees	Team inspector	Music (11-16)	

31096	J Thornhill	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
23418	R Yates	Team inspector	Design and technology (11-16)	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Rainhill High School is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 16 and sixth-form students. It is bigger than most secondary schools with 1404 pupils including a sixth form of 196. There is a balance of boys and girls. The school is part of the St. Helens local education authority and is regularly over subscribed. There are two per cent of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds which is below the national average and no pupils who have English as a second language. Census information suggests that the number of parents who have experience of higher education is below average. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is below average as is the percentage of pupils with statements for learning or behavioural needs. When pupils enter the school in Year 7 their attainment is average. The school has on its site a City Learning Centre which is a community resource with state of the art information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. The school has been awarded a Sportsmark award.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Rainhill High School is a good school with a number of very good and some excellent features. Results in national tests at 14 are well above average and are above average at GCSE. In the sixth form standards are about average. Pupils achieve well in the main school and satisfactorily in the sixth form. Teaching is good. The school's senior team evaluates carefully the school's attainments and achieves some success in improving standards. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Results in national tests at 14 have improved faster than in most schools and are well above average. At GCSE results are above average.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 11.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is providing very good leadership in shaping a clear future direction for the school. He is held in high regard by all members of the school community and is well supported by his senior team.
- The quality of care and support for pupils is very good.
- Pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to school. Attendance is very good.

What could be improved

- Satisfactory teaching could be improved if the school focused more on teaching and learning.
- There are not enough vocational courses on offer in Years 10 and 11.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum.
- The attainment of a minority of boys in Years 10 and 11 is not as good as it should be.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Standards in national tests have improved significantly in Years 7 to 9 and have improved at GCSE in line with the national improvement. In the sixth form standards have varied but were above average in 2002. Teaching is now consistently good. The City Learning Centre is an exciting new resource which provides teachers and pupils with opportunities to improve further teaching and learning.

There is now a vision for the school which is realistic and costed. There are good systems in place for checking the school's performance although regular observations of teaching and

learning are not part of the day to day life of the school. Punctuality has improved and there is much greater consistency in the care provided for pupils and students. Pupil behaviour is good but some boys continue to underachieve. Standards of cleaning have improved but litter remains a problem. The school still does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship although it provides well for pupils' spiritual development.

Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	B	C	B	B
A-levels/AS-levels	D	C	B	

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

In national tests in 2002 at the age of 14 in English, mathematics and science:

- results in mathematics and science were well above average and in English above average;
- in comparison with similar schools (schools where a similar proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals) results were well above average;
- considering their average attainment on entry to the school pupils achieved well;
- boys do better than girls in mathematics and equally well in science. In English girls do better than boys in line with the national difference;
- over the last three years, results improved faster than they did nationally.

In 2002, results in GCSE examinations:

- results improved in 2002 and were above average;
- in comparison with similar schools, results were above average;
- the percentages of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades and 5 A*-G grades were above average;
- girls did better than boys but the difference was less marked than in many schools nationally;
- the governors' sensible targets for the percentages of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades and one or more A*-C grade were met, but results on average performance for all pupils were just short of the target;
- results in mathematics, science, media studies, drama, geography, French and sociology were above average and very high in German and music. They were below average in design and technology, history and religious education;
- in Years 10 and 11 there was evidence of boys underachieving in English, science, geography, history, and physical education;
- over the last five years results have improved in line with the national improvement.

In 2001 (national comparisons not yet available for 2002), results in A level examinations:

- results were average at A level;
- results were best in media studies;
- there was significant improvement in the 2002 results;
- students achieve satisfactorily at A level in relation to GCSE grades.

Standards seen during the inspection:

- overall above average in Years 7 to 11 and average in the sixth form;
- well above average in mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 and in German in Years 10 and 11;
- well above average in art and design through Years 7 to 11;
- below average in design technology in Years 10 and 11;
- numeracy skills are above average and literacy skills are average across the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Students are positive about school and want to learn. They enjoy the many extra-curricular activities it offers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The school is an orderly community which provides a safe learning environment. In a few lessons a minority of students, mainly boys, interrupt learning by their immature behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Good relationships amongst all members of the school community are a strength. Students are very ready to take on responsibility.
Attendance	Very good. The attendance rate is well above the national average and punctuality has improved.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

- a quarter of all teaching is very good and occasionally excellent; there is a very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching;
- teaching is good throughout the school but is strongest in Years 7 to 9 where lesson planning is especially effective and the pace of learning is brisk;
- in Years 7 to 11 teaching and learning are good in English and mathematics and in science in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is very strong in science in Years 7 to 9 where teachers have very high expectations and pupils work hard and enjoy their lessons;
- teaching in art and design is very good; lessons are very well planned and pupils are attentive and enthusiastic and improve their skills; there is less effective teaching and learning in some design and technology lessons;
- pupils with special educational needs are taught well and make good progress particularly in science;
- the school is starting to implement plans to enhance the present satisfactory learning of gifted and talented pupils;
- literacy and numeracy are taught well in most subjects but the use of ICT across all subjects to support learning is unsatisfactory;
- the quality of teaching and learning are good in the sixth form.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. There is not enough use of ICT in subjects and provision for practical and vocational education is weak in Years 10 and 11. The school provides a wide range of good academic courses.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. The quality of support ensures pupils make good progress and do well in examinations. Their progress would be even better if there was more support in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Religious education lessons make a significant contribution to spiritual development. Moral provision is very good. Pupils are clearly taught about right and wrong and respond generously to the school's extensive support for charities. The school has a rich cultural life and celebrates cultural diversity.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. There is good continuity of support for pupils' welfare and guidance. Members of staff know pupils well and provide firm yet sympathetic care. Progress is being made in developing the system for monitoring pupils' academic progress but more work is still needed.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Very good. Parents consider the school to be very approachable and value the education it provides for their children.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership in shaping a clear direction for the school and he has the confidence of all members of the school community. He is well supported by his senior team. Senior staff perform their responsibilities well but need to spend more time in shaping the future direction of the school. Heads of year are very effective and most heads of department are good. The school runs very well on a daily basis.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. They know the school well, check its performance and help to shape its future direction.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The school keeps track of every aspect of school life in detail and is well aware of its strengths and weaknesses. Its planning is very good although it has not yet implemented regular monitoring of teaching and learning and this is a weakness, especially in the sixth form.
The strategic use of resources	Good in the main school but unsatisfactory in the sixth form because there are some small uneconomic groups which are not cost effective. This needs to be tackled. In the main school resources are managed well within a tight budget. Staff are deployed well and the school works hard to get best value in its purchase of goods and services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>Most parents believe that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their children make good progress and work hard; • teaching is good; • the school is approachable, and • the school is well led and managed. 	<p>A minority of parents believe that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is too much or too little homework; • they don't know enough about how their children are getting on; • the school does not work closely enough with them.

Inspectors agree with all the positive comments made by parents. They believe the school works closely with parents and welcomes their involvement. They consider that the school is very responsive to parents' concerns and that it keeps them well informed both when their children achieve particularly well and when there are causes for concern. Parents' evenings and school reports provide satisfactory information about pupils' progress. The newsletters could be presented in a more attractive way to fully reflect the activities and achievements of the school and its pupils and students. Inspectors feel the right amount of homework is usually set and that it has purpose.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Rainhill sixth form is larger than most with nearly 200 students. There are a few more girls than boys in Year 12 and more boys than girls in Year 13. Less than half of students in Year 11 choose to stay into the sixth. A wide range of academic subjects is offered at AS (Advanced Subsidiary) and A2 (Advanced) level as well as a broad choice of enrichment activities. Only one vocational course is offered. Small numbers of students join from other schools. Most students begin advanced courses with five GCSE C passes or better. A number of students stay for only one year in the sixth. Last year about 80 per cent of students went on to further and higher education. This number has been consistent over recent years. A very high proportion of students have part-time jobs. There are no students with special educational needs and none who have English as an additional language. There are few students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Standards at the start of Year 12 are average overall.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides a satisfactory standard of education. Results in advanced examinations declined in 2000 and 2001 but improved in 2002. In 2001 students achieved well in relationship to their attainment at GCSE. Standards of work are average and students' achievements overall are satisfactory. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and sometimes excellent. Most students complete their courses and a high proportion go on to higher education. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The sixth form tailors its academic curriculum to meet the needs of students and offers several subjects which attract only small numbers. As a consequence expenditure on the sixth form is subsidised by about 3 per cent of the school's budget.

Strengths

- Results have improved in 2002.
- Teaching is good so students learn well in lessons.
- Students are positive about the sixth form.
- A wide range of academic courses and enrichment opportunities are offered.
- Arrangements for the pastoral care of students are good.
- Teachers and students have access to good assessment data.
- Day to day running of the sixth form is very effectively managed.

What could be improved

- There are no procedures for checking the quality of teaching and ensuring that courses are properly planned.
- The curriculum does not offer a range of vocational courses.
- Students in Year 13 have too much time for private study.
- The tutorial programme does not cater well for students' needs.
- There are too few scheduled opportunities for students to review their progress with tutors.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Students' achievement is satisfactory.
Biology	Satisfactory. There has been a measure of underachievement over some years. There is some unsatisfactory teaching now but new staff have improved the quality of teaching which is now satisfactory overall.
Business Studies	Good. All A2 students passed last year. Students achieved better grades than were predicted in the AS examination. Teaching is good and is based on very good knowledge of the subject.
Economics	Good. All students were successful at AS level achieving higher grades than were predicted. There were no A2 entrants last year. Teaching and learning are good.
Media Studies	Excellent. Teaching and learning are excellent. Students achieve better grades than are predicted for them. They do better in media studies than in their other subjects.
Geography	Satisfactory. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Girls achieve higher standards than boys. Attainment at A2 improved in 2002.
English Literature	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good. Achievement in examinations is satisfactory and in line with predictions based on prior attainment. Standards are average. Students did well in the 2002 A2 examination.
English Language	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good and students' achievement is satisfactory. Examination results have been well below average but were much improved in 2002.
German	Good. Students achieve well as a result of strong teaching. They have achieved above average results and have fulfilled expectations of them, given their prior attainment.

Teaching and learning in subjects that were sampled were at least satisfactory. Very good teaching was seen in a number of areas. Students generally achieve the grades predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. There has been, however, a measure of underachievement for a number of years in some subject areas.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good. Students receive some good support. Their tutors know them very well and relationships are very positive. There are too few scheduled opportunities for tutors and students to review academic progress in one-to-one discussion. Students have to make an appointment to see the careers adviser, which places limitations on access.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory. Students' achievement is satisfactory by the end of the course and large numbers go on to higher and further education. Leadership reviews sixth form issues thoroughly but is less effective at taking action to bring about improvements, particularly to tackle consistent underachievement in a number of subject areas. There is no system for checking the quality of teaching and learning or overall planning to improve standards. Day-to-day management is good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They feel comfortable and enjoy the social context. • Teaching is good and teachers are approachable for help. • Students are satisfied with the range of courses. • They are helped to study independently. • The information and advice they are given is clear and constructive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students feel they are not well advised about future career options. • Some feel they are not well informed about their progress. • Some students feel they are not treated as responsible young adults. • Some feel the school does not respond well to their views. • Recreational opportunities are too few.

Overall students' views are positive. The inspection team agreed with some of the students' views. The inspection found:

- students are well supported when they apply to university but have to use their own initiative to get good access to a careers advisor;
- students receive good feedback about their academic performance from teachers but there are too few scheduled opportunities for in-depth review and counselling;
- the range of enrichment activities is wide and includes opportunities for recreation;
- students are generally treated as responsible young people;
- there are many ways in which the school listens to the views of students.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Results in the Year 9 national tests in 2002 in mathematics and science were well above both the national average and those for similar schools and in English they were above average. Boys do better than girls in mathematics and in science they attain equally well. In English girls do better than boys in line with the national picture although boys' standards over the last 3 years have improved and are above the national average. Improvement by all pupils has been more rapid than in most schools.

Results in tests at the age of 14 in 2002

Subject	School results in relation to national results	Trend over last three years
English	Above average	Improving faster than most schools
Mathematics	Well above average	Improving faster than most schools
Science	Well above average	Improving faster than most schools

Examinations at GCSE level in 2002

2. GCSE results have been above average in two out of the last three years. In 2002 there was a significant improvement in results. Girls do better than boys but the difference is less than in many schools nationally. There are a small number of boys who do not achieve as well they should. The average point score has improved since 1997 with the exception of results in 1998 and 2001. The percentages of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades and 5 A*-G grades in 2002 were significantly higher than national averages.

GCSE results for all pupils in 2002

Subject	School results in 2002 compared with national results	Trend over recent years	Comments
English	Average	No significant improvement	Boys' attainment is an issue
English literature	Average	No significant improvement	Most pupils are entered for the examination
Mathematics	Above average	Steady	Consistent
Science	Above average	Steady improvement	A high performing department
Art and design	Above average	Steady	Improvement in 2002
Media studies	Above average	Well above average	Consistent
Business studies	Average	Just above national average	Increasingly popular subject
Design and technology	Below average	Below average	No signs of improvement
Home Economics	Just below average	Around national average and in some years well above	Few boys take the subject.
Drama	Above average	Second year of examinations	Relatively small numbers take the exam
Geography	Above average	Improving	Girls are doing significantly better than boys

Subject	School results in 2002 compared with national results	Trend over recent years	Comments
History	Below average	Slight decline. Results usually at or just above national average	Boys underachieve in one course
ICT	Just below average	In line with national average	In Year 11 only pupils taking the examination course receive sufficient provision in ICT
Modern languages French	Above average	Considerable improvement	In both subjects boys are doing as well as girls
German	Very high	Consistently very high standards	
Music	Very high	Consistently high	Small numbers entered
Physical education	Around average	Above average in 2000 and 2001	For many boys it is their best subject
Religious education	Below average	Significant improvement on 2001 results	Small numbers entered
Sociology	Above average	Average and above	Subject taken mainly by girls

Standards of work seen during the inspection

Standards	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Well above average	Mathematics, science, art and design	German, art and design
Above average	English, geography, French, German, music	Mathematics, science, geography, French, music
Average	History, ICT, physical education, religious education, design and technology, citizenship	English, history, physical education, religious education, ICT, citizenship
Below average		Design and technology

3. Standards overall are above average in most subjects and are stronger in Years 7 to 9 than in Year 11. Standards are very high in science and mathematics in the lower school and in German at GCSE. Standards in English are improving in Years 7 to 9. Boys are not doing well as girls but the differences have not been as great as in many schools nationally. The gap between girls' and boys' attainment becomes more marked in Years 10 and 11 with evidence of under achievement by some boys in English, science, design and technology, history, geography, ICT and physical education.

4. Standards overall in literacy are average but stronger in Years 7 to 9 than in 10 and 11. Numeracy standards are above average and very high in the lower school. ICT skills are average but need to be developed further within subject areas especially in Years 10 and 11.

5. Many pupils with special educational needs achieve five or more A*-G grades. They are taught in small groups for English and mathematics and make good progress in numeracy and literacy. Their progress would be further enhanced if they received more individual support. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress.

Pupils' achievements

Achievement	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Very good	Mathematics, science, art and design	Art and design
Good	English, geography, French, German, music, religious education	Mathematics, science, geography, French, German, music, religious education
Satisfactory	ICT, history, physical education, and design and technology	English, history, ICT, physical education, and design and technology.

6. On entry to the school pupils' attainment is about average. Pupils achieve well in most subjects by the end of Year 9. At the end of Year 11 pupils achieve well in relationship to their attainment on entry.

7. Overall, pupils with special educational needs make good progress as the support they receive is matched effectively to their individual needs. In all subjects achievement is at least satisfactory and is good in most subjects. Their achievements are very good in science and art and design.

8. Overall, talented and gifted pupils make satisfactory progress which teachers could improve if they paid more attention in lessons to their special needs. In music, modern foreign languages, history, art and design, science and maths they make good progress and in other subjects it is satisfactory. In design and technology their progress is unsatisfactory.

Sixth form

9. Advanced level results improved in 2002 and were significantly better than in the previous two years.

- The total average points score for each student rose from 15 to 18
- 30 per cent of the passes were at the higher A and B grades
- The overall pass rate rose from 88 to 94 per cent

In 2000 results were below average and in 2001 average. Over the last two years the results of female students have been considerably stronger than the results of males.

Results in the 9 focus subjects:

Subject	Trend over the last three years up to and including 2001	Result in 2001 compared with national results	Comments about unvalidated 2002 results
Mathematics	Above average except for 2001	Below average	Improved results
Biology	Below average	Below average	Students do not do as well in biology as in their other subjects
Business studies	Fluctuating	Average	Not as good as 2001 results
Economics	No entries in 2000 and 2001. In 1999 above average	No entries	No entries
Media studies	Improving	Well above average	Strong performance
Geography	Improving	Average	Much improved with a large percentage of higher grades
English language	Well below average	Well below average	Much improved results
English literature	Fluctuating	Average	Much better results

German	Above average in 1999 and 2000	Well below average	Much improved results
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10. In other subjects results in 2001 were above average in art and design and chemistry. They were average in French, psychology, sociology and sports studies. Results were below average in physics and religious studies and well below average in design and technology and history.

11. Results in the new AS examination result at the end of Year 12 were stronger in 2001 than 2002.

Standards of work seen during the inspection

12. Standards are **average overall** but could be improved in biology if all teaching was at least satisfactory. In English literature more focused teaching would help to improve standards. Standards are high in media studies and are above average in German because in the best lessons German teaching is intellectually challenging and in media studies the pace of learning is brisk.

Standards	Subjects
High	Media studies
Above average	German
Average	English literature, geography, economics, business studies, mathematics
Below average	English language, biology

13. Achievement overall is satisfactory. In relationship to their attainment at GCSE students over the last four years have done well in sociology, chemistry and geography. They have under achieved in biology, history and French (numbers entered for French have been small).

Achievement	Subjects
High	Media studies
Good	German, economics, mathematics, business studies
Satisfactory	English literature, English language, geography, biology

14. Course completion rates are very high and in 2002 83 per cent of students went on to further and higher education.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

- Relationships throughout the school are good and there is a friendly atmosphere.
- Students have positive attitudes to work and behaviour is generally good.
- Attendance is very good.

15. Pupils have positive attitudes to school and to learning. The majority make good use of all the opportunities the school offers.

16. In a school band practice about forty pupils from throughout the school who had recently returned from a performance trip to Majorca were enthused by the encouragement they received. They played with enthusiasm and made music of high quality.

17. Most pupils want to do well in lessons. They are good listeners and are keen to participate by answering questions. When working in groups and pairs most pupils concentrate on their tasks and behave sensibly.

18. In a challenging but supportive mathematics lesson Year 7 pupils showed impressive commitment to their work. They were interested, involved and keen to do well and as a result they made very good progress.

19. Behaviour in lessons is generally good and contributes to the positive learning atmosphere in the school. However, in a few lessons a minority of pupils, mainly boys, behave in an immature and inconsiderate manner and slow progress for all. This poor behaviour usually occurs when teaching is unchallenging or inappropriate to students' needs. Around the school and at lunch-time movement and behaviour are orderly. Pupils are friendly and polite to visitors. In lessons pupils show good respect for school property but too many drop litter around the school.

20. There have been no permanent exclusions for the last four years. There were 75 short fixed term exclusions mainly of boys, and usually for fighting or for verbal abuse and defiance of staff. The use of fixed term exclusions over time is monitored closely and analysed by the school. The analysis shows that the number of fixed term exclusions has increased in recent years.

21. In discussions with pupils they recognise that bullying does occur occasionally, but they all agree that members of staff are very ready to listen to their concerns and deal firmly with incidents. Many pupils have the habit of calling each other names and do not always realise that this can cause offence. The school is working to make pupils aware of the effect name-calling can have on the feelings of others. Sixth-form students are being trained as peer mentors and hopefully they will have a positive influence.

22. Relationships are good. Although this is a large school it has a friendly atmosphere. Pupils say that teachers, particularly pastoral staff, are friendly and helpful. Most pupils show great respect for the feelings and beliefs of others.

23. In a food technology class Year 8 pupils were very supportive to a pupil from a special school who sometimes joins them and made her feel thoroughly included.

24. In a very good religious education lesson about Buddhism Year 9 pupils showed great interest in what Buddhism has to teach about suffering and were able to express clearly their own views.

25. Pupils' personal development is good. They are given the opportunity to reflect upon moral and social issues in many lessons. The school council is valued by pupils and its representatives, with the help of their form groups, organise a wide range of fund-raising activities for charity. Some Year 11 boys give up a lot of their free time to help younger pupils in the library and a group of Year 9 boys do a good job of recycling refuse.

26. Over fifty Year 10 pupils are "reading buddies" for Year 7 pupils and hear them read once a week during tutorial time. This is a well-organised scheme and is evidence of pupils' readiness to take on responsibility and serve their community.

Sixth form

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

27. Students' views about the sixth form are positive. They have positive attitudes to their studies and say that they enjoy their time in the sixth form. Relationships with teachers and amongst themselves are very good. Most students are learning to become mature and independent learners. Students enjoy the friendly and social ambience provided by the common room and more are to be found working there than in the library and study areas. In

lessons they respond well to the challenges with which they are presented. In an excellent sociology lesson Year 13 students participated in mature discussion and debate with each other. Students showed respect for each other's views.

28. There is a strong sense of community in the sixth form. However, the amount of litter in the sixth form common room shows that students lack pride in their environment and do not organise themselves to tackle this problem.

29. Students' personal development is good. They take part in a wide range of activities outside lessons, including the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, Young Enterprise and the Community Sports Leader Award. They serve the school community well, for example by helping younger pupils as reading buddies and mentors.

30. Attendance at school is very good even though most students have part-time employment. Punctuality at the start of day is not as good and latecomers interrupt any planned activities in tutorial time.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Overall quality of teaching	Good	Good

31. Teaching and learning have improved since the previous inspection and are now consistently good. Over 95 per cent of teaching was satisfactory or better and in nearly 70 per cent of lessons good or better. In a quarter of lessons teaching and learning were very good and, occasionally, excellent.

32. Teaching and learning have improved in Years 7 to 9 because more lessons have specific objectives and the pace of learning is brisk. There are few unsatisfactory lessons but in order to improve learning further the school should implement its plans to monitor teaching and learning and develop more good teaching. The use of ICT in lessons is limited and in some lessons pupils are not provided with enough opportunities to learn from each other using a range of resources. There has not been enough emphasis on spreading some of the excellent teaching in departments across the school. In some satisfactory lessons pupils learned the key points of the lesson but connections with other aspects of learning were not always made explicit by the teacher. Pupils were not always sure about the purpose of the learning activities and were not encouraged to evaluate what they had learned at the end of lessons. A small number of Year 10 and 11 boys under-achieve because they are insufficiently engaged in lessons and do not concentrate or work as hard as girls.

33. Examples of excellent practice are:

- In a Year 7 art and design lesson the aim was to identify the main features of different styles of architecture and involved group work leading to a video presentation. The teacher had planned the lesson carefully with a range of timed activities and the pace of learning was brisk, not a moment was wasted. By the end of the lesson all pupils had improved their analytical and drawing skills.
- In a Year 8 low attaining science group pupils enjoyed the lesson on understanding acids and alkalis because the teacher related the work to everyday experiences. There was a good balance of practical, group and individual work and the pupils learned well because they knew what to do.
- In history Year 10 students really enjoyed their lesson about the Elizabethan theatre because the teacher used role-play exercises and a wide range of imaginative strategies to help pupils understand the period. There were "gales of laughter and brilliant learning".

34. The quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good. When pupils are withdrawn from lessons to work in small groups a wide variety of well-structured work is planned effectively to meet their specific needs so they are well motivated, work hard and make good progress. They receive good support from the teachers and learning support assistants. In most subjects teachers match work closely to pupils' individual needs so they are fully included in the lesson, maintain concentration, and successfully complete the work. Provision for these pupils in science is particularly good, because lessons are planned very carefully with activities pitched at the appropriate level to gain pupils' interest. Talented and gifted pupils are taught satisfactorily although the setting of more demanding work would further enhance their progress.

Sixth form

35. Teaching is good. As a result, students learn well and make good progress in lessons. Much teaching is directed to the specific requirements of the AS or A level courses. Teachers' own command of their subjects is good. In German, for example, there is good and consistent use of the language, which ensures that students are constantly improving their own levels of skill and knowledge. Teachers of English language have good knowledge both of their subject and of students' learning needs. There is suitable attention to advancing key skills, particularly in mathematics and English lessons.

36. Lessons are usually planned well and meet students' learning needs. In biology, however, there is some unsatisfactory planning of the content of lessons. As a result, in some classes, there are too few opportunities for students to develop as independent learners and few probing questions to extend students' understanding. In economics, although teaching is good overall, it could be improved further if teachers used a wider range of teaching methods. In English there is considerable opportunity for discussion and teachers often pose stimulating questions but most lessons follow a similar format so that students only experience a narrow range of approaches.

37. Expectations of what students might achieve are generally good. Many lessons are demanding and teachers set a brisk pace. In mathematics, for example, levels of intellectual challenge are good and teachers use demanding questions to ensure progress in understanding. Some lessons fail to challenge the highest attainers. In geography, for example, although teaching is satisfactory overall, teachers sometimes dominate the lesson, allowing too few opportunities for students to explore their own ideas.

38. Students are managed well and relationships amongst students and their teachers are very good. In economics these good relationships arise from teachers' good understanding of students' learning needs and clearly contribute to their progress. In English literature good relationships enable teachers to help reticent students to participate fully in lessons. There is some excellent teaching in media studies. Very challenging lessons are based on brisk pace, and carefully chosen tasks. Students are encouraged to think for themselves.

39. As a result of this generally good teaching, students learn well. They are productive in lessons and make good progress, developing sound levels of independence. Marking is good and students develop a good understanding of how well they are doing.

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

- The curriculum addresses the needs of most pupils but could be improved in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form if there were more vocational courses.
- The curriculum meets requirements although there is insufficient coverage of ICT in Year 11 and religious education is not provided in the sixth form.

40. In Years 7 to 9 all pupils, including those with special educational needs, have equal access to the curriculum. All national curriculum subjects and religious education are taught and provision is enhanced by a programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education. The curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs. Higher attaining pupils begin German as a second foreign language in Year 8. Implementation of the government's strategy is having an impact on improving standards. The curriculum has satisfactory breadth and balance.

41. In Years 10 and 11 most pupils follow an extensive and good quality range of GCSE courses. However, provision for ICT does not meet statutory requirements and its use in mathematics, science and design and technology is unsatisfactory. At present, there is insufficient provision for lower attaining or demotivated pupils, especially boys. The school should check carefully the numbers of boys in low attaining groups in order to ensure that they do not under-achieve. There is good provision for religious education and a chaplaincy service is available for pupils of all ages.

42. There have been improvements made in the provision of ICT since the previous inspection. All pupils in Years 7 – 9 experience ICT, but only pupils taking examination courses experience ICT in Year 11. Some subjects make productive use of the City Learning Centre and the school facilities, but others have not yet fully developed their ICT use. There is no strategic plan or working group to map cross-curricular provision.

43. The school meets all statutory requirements for pupils with special educational needs. Individual education plans fully reflect the requirements of individual pupils including those with statements of need. They are discussed fully with each pupil so they know exactly what targets they are trying to achieve, and are appropriately reviewed twice each year. Teachers do not consistently modify targets to reflect the opportunities available in their subject, so they do not always reflect the targets fully in their teaching.

44. Curriculum support for pupils with special educational needs is sound. Learning support assistants work effectively with pupils in the classroom. The support they provide is of good quality, but they are not required to maintain a record of pupils' progress. There are not enough learning support assistants to provide the level of support required by subject departments, and provide fully effective support in key subject areas. The use of information technology to give further help is not fully exploited. The provision in Years 10-11 is less effective than in Years 7-9 as less support is provided.

45. The school has good links with its contributory primary schools. Very good curricular liaison between English, mathematics and science staff ensures that there is good continuity of learning for students in these subjects. Curriculum links in other subjects are, as yet, undeveloped.

46. The personal, health and social education programme is well structured and is taught effectively. Discrete lessons of personal, health and social education are timetabled for all year groups, apart from Year 8 where form tutors have insufficient time to cover the course in form periods. The personal, health and social education programme is comprehensive, and

covers well a wide range of issues including sex and drugs education, relationships and careers.

47. Careers education is well organised. From Year 9 there is an increasing amount of good quality careers education in the personal, health and social education programme. Pupils have the opportunity for two weeks work experience. Mock interviews are held in Year 11 with local employers. The Connexions service provide good support and pupils can find out more about careers options from the small but good quality careers library and through the KUDOS computer programme.

48. The school has a good range of links with the community which enriches pupils' education. The City Learning Centre is well used by local schools and the community. Business competitions, fund-raising for charity, Young Enterprise and the annual "One World Day" all help to extend pupils' horizons.

Sixth form

49. There are satisfactory curriculum arrangements for the sixth form, which provides a wide range of academic courses at AS and A2 levels but there is no provision for religious education. At present the range of vocational courses is very limited so students who wish to follow such courses continue their education at the local further education college. The proportion of students completing programmes in the sixth form is high. The sixth form has a flexible approach to entry requirements so that access to the courses offered is good and there is good equality of opportunity.

50. Almost all students do four AS levels in Year 12 and 3 A2 courses in Year 13. This leaves Year 13 students with as many as ten free periods each week. Many students use this time for social activity instead of study. As a result, the common room is usually full and study areas are often empty.

51. In addition to examination courses students may choose from a range of enrichment experiences. The programme is broad, well organised, and offers students a range of options including the Sports Leadership Award, Young Enterprise, European Parliament and visits to universities. There are visits abroad to Eastern Europe, and the school band, to which many sixth formers belong, regularly visits Spain. Sixth formers also belong to the choir, which performs regularly at concerts in and out of school. Nine students are currently taking the Gold Award of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme: some are using this as one of their practical activities for A level physical education coursework. Sports activities are extensive. Although the range of activities offered is very good, arrangements are not formally timetabled which leads some students to undervalue these opportunities. Most students are involved in some enrichment activity.

52. Students meet daily with their tutors. This time is used to provide individual counselling as well as a programme of careers guidance and support for applications to higher education. Students value these opportunities. Less highly valued are opportunities to develop key skills in numeracy, literacy and ICT during tutorial time although the school has made considerable effort to provide a good programme. Some tutors arrange activities aimed at fostering positive attitudes towards citizenship through discussion about current affairs but the tutorial programme has some important omissions, for example in study and life skills. Overall, the planning for and provision of tutorial time are patchy. There is not enough time for careers advice. A careers adviser is available for a half day each week, and although students are able to make appointments, there is little direct help and advice for pupils who do not take this opportunity. The careers library is well used and stocked.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and sixth-form students

- The school leaders have worked hard to improve this with some success. Overall the provision is good and is very good for moral development
- The school does not meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship. However, spirituality is well provided for in many subjects
- The very high quality of displays in corridors and classes help to provide a lively and stimulating environment which enhances personal development.

53. The religious education department provides good opportunities in lessons for consideration of different beliefs and values. It also organises the ecumenical chaplaincy which supports the school in assemblies, festivals and at times of bereavement. The department organises the extensive charity programme which is well embedded across the school and shows pupils how to put beliefs and values into action. Other departments such as science and music provide good opportunities to be inspired by the natural world and human achievements. In some assemblies spiritual themes are explored.

54. In a Year 9 assembly, pupils were encouraged to aspire to fulfil their potential in life, which was compared to a journey. In a Year 10 assembly, pupils heard about coping with the crises of life through developing inner strength.

55. Pupils are taught clearly about right and wrong. The behaviour policy is well thought out and the school is an orderly community, distinguished by good relationships. Staff set a good example. Good work in citizenship lessons on responsibilities has strengthened moral provision, and in many lessons teachers take the opportunity of drawing out well the moral aspects of topics.

56. In a Year 10 child care lesson there was mature discussion of ethical issues related to the development of the foetus, and in a Year 7 history lesson on medieval crime and punishments, pupils showed a strong sense of justice when they compared the past to the present.

57. Provision is also strong in science and geography. The school takes a strong and effective line on racism and other harassing behaviour. Care for the school environment has improved. The small, dedicated group of 'recyclers' do commendable work but too many other pupils drop litter thoughtlessly.

58. Arrangements to encourage pupils' social development are good. Many lessons, including personal social, health and careers education, provide good opportunities for pupils to work co-operatively. There are a wide range of extra-curricular activities, visits, and chances to represent the school, in which many pupils participate. Although the school council, year councils and form councils, organise activities to raise money for charity, students would benefit from more opportunities to take responsibilities. The corporate ethos is stronger than at the last inspection and year heads work hard to build a sense of community in their year groups and in the whole school. Most parents think that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible young people.

59. Cultural development is well provided for across a range of subjects and extra-curricular activities, notably in English, drama and music, where the school band is excellent, and also through history, art and design and religious education field trips, exchange visits to Germany, and theatre and concert visits.

60. At a school band rehearsal there was an excellent atmosphere, very good music, and real enthusiasm and commitment from all members. The band had just returned from a performing trip to Majorca and the players were animated by their experiences.

61. The school has tried to ensure that there is sufficient education for cultural diversity. The annual 'One World Day' brings in outside speakers and pupils recall this with interest. Pupils experience different cultures such as Aboriginal art, contrasting lifestyles in Brazil and the history of native Americans in religious education, art and design, geography and English literature.

Sixth form

62. There is good provision for students' personal development. Although the requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met, some assemblies do have good spiritual content. Opportunities to develop students' spiritual education are lost because there is no religious education in the sixth form. To this extent, statutory curriculum requirements are not met. However, students do encounter reflective, inspiring and aesthetic opportunities in a number of subjects where they are able to explore issues of belief and values.

63. This was well done in a lesson where religious education and sociology students questioned two members of the Chaplaincy Team on such matters as whether war with Iraq was justified and whether 'gay marriage' was acceptable in society.

64. There is good provision for students' social and moral education through the many opportunities provided to support and work for others. Sixth-form students are involved in the sixth-form committee and the school council. There are opportunities for charitable and community work and many students provide very good support for younger pupils through the paired-reading scheme. Year 12 students are currently being trained to act as mentors. These activities make a good contribution to students' personal development and provide some opportunity for reflection on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues.

65. Most students have a strong moral sense and want to help and to give service. The large number of applications to be a 'peer mentor' with younger pupils provides powerful evidence of this.

66. They are also generous with their support for fund-raising but there are not enough opportunities for the students to take responsibility. They need more direction, including how to use 'free time' and take responsibility for managing the sixth-form environment. There are many chances for enrichment but they do not have to participate and there is no taught programme for personal development.

67. Culturally students are well provided for and they do encounter global diversity in a number of subjects. In physical education students discussed cultural differences in attitudes to sport in France, Australia, the USA and Great Britain. There are cultural visits in art and design, music, drama and English literature which students appreciate.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

- There is regular monitoring and review of pastoral policies and procedures
- There are very good procedures for tackling bullying.

68. The school provides very good care and support for its pupils and this is a strength of the school. This has improved since the previous inspection. There is a committed and experienced team of year heads who remain with their teams of form tutors and their students as they move up the school. This ensures continuity and enables strong relationships to be built up. Good communication between heads of years and parents is a strength of the pastoral provision and is highly valued by parents. The lack of consistency in pastoral procedures and approaches between different years which was noted at the previous inspection is no longer a problem. Good communication, a shared philosophy and well-monitored policies ensure evenness of provision. The two deputy heads for Years 7 to 9 and for Years 10 and 11 have a good overview of these two key stages and they ensure that the crucial transition stages in students' careers such as their transition from primary school and their choice of options at age 14 and 16 are supervised very effectively. Parents commented very positively about the school's care for their children.

69. Overall the school pays good attention to the physical care and well-being of students. There is an effective child protection policy which follows local authority guidance. The designated person is an experienced deputy head who has very good links with outside agencies. There are good health and safety procedures and risk assessments are carried out properly. At lunchtime the large premises is well supervised by senior staff and is an orderly environment. However, lunchtime is not a particularly civilising experience for students who spend a considerable amount of their time queuing for lunch or else buy snacks and cans at the tuck shop. This does not encourage healthy eating.

70. The learning mentor programme is an effective and well-run scheme which is helping many pupils to learn about themselves and how they can become better learners. The thrust of the strategy is to remove barriers to learning and is a very constructive way of tackling, not just misbehaviour, but other problems which limit pupils', particularly boys', achievement. The school should seek to strengthen this approach to behaviour management and learning problems so that more students can benefit.

71. The school has a "zero tolerance" policy towards bullying and works very hard to counteract it. Evidence from students, staff and parents confirm that incidents are always dealt with firmly when brought to the attention of staff. The school has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of bullying in the school and following this has strengthened the programme of work done on bullying in Year 7 and is also in the process of introducing a peer mentoring scheme. There is a clear and appropriate policy for tackling racism. Racist incidents are infrequent but when they do occur the school deals with them firmly and follows the correct recording and reporting procedures.

Assessment

72. The quality and use of assessment is good in most departments except for ICT and design and technology where it is satisfactory. Assessment of pupils' work is generally accurate and many departments have good procedures for reviewing pupils' progress. The setting and checking of targets for individual pupils is good in some departments but overall it is under-developed. Marking is helpful in English, physical education and history but in other subjects it tends to be uneven and teachers do not make enough diagnostic comments about how students can improve their work.

73. Assessment is generally used effectively to identify when more work needs to be done on a particular topic; it is also used on a regular basis to move students between sets. Assessment has been used to identify under-achievement by boys and in some subjects, such as English and history, has helped teachers to plan more appropriate lessons for them. This needs to be developed across all subjects so that lessons are planned to meet the needs of pupils with varying levels of attainment.

74. The monitoring of pupils' academic progress from Years 7 to 10 has been improved by the introduction of a whole-school electronic system. This enables pupils' achievements in individual subjects to be compared against their predicted levels and grades in order to identify where there is under-achievement or particularly good achievement. The system is also used to identify causes of under-achievement such as problems with writing, organisation and concentration. Pupils who under-achieve in a number of subjects receive pastoral counselling and are put on report cards. This system has identified a significant number of boys who are under-achieving because of poor concentration and lack of motivation. The placing of pupils on report cards can help to remind them of their targets but it does not tackle any underlying problems in learning which exist. The school recognises that pupil monitoring and target-setting needs further development. It would benefit from closer liaison and coordination between the academic and pastoral sides of the school, so that both the diagnosis of under-achievement and the setting of targets can be more sharply defined and intervention can be more focused.

75. The setting of targets is most developed in Years 10 and 11. Form tutors involve pupils in monitoring their own progress. Lower down the school the quality of tutor time at the beginning of the day is uneven. It is often used for silent reading and administrative tasks. Some form tutors lead interesting discussions but in the Year 8 tutorials observed during the inspection pupils were given low level tasks to do.

76. During the inspection form tutors showed Year 10 pupils how to work out their estimated GCSE grades and in Year 11 tutor time they helped them to keep track of their progress.

Sixth form

Assessment

77. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good. Assessment is closely linked to examination requirements. Work is regularly and accurately assessed and students are given good feedback on their progress and advice on how to improve. Students' progress is checked through coursework and examination questions and teachers have extremely useful data to predict the grades students should achieve at both AS and A2 levels given their performance at GCSE. Students' work is well marked: they value the feedback they are given and feel comfortable to approach teachers for additional help. They feel that teachers know whether they are working and that action is taken promptly if they fall behind. Nonetheless formal opportunities for individual review of academic progress with subject teachers and tutors are too few. A one-to-one review of progress by students and their subject teachers is held towards the end of the first term in Year 12 and targets are set for students who are not performing well. Although this works well there is no further formal opportunity for individual review to ensure students are on track, to identify problems, set targets and provide encouragement.

Advice, support and guidance

78. Students value the very good informal support and advice they receive from teachers who know them well and have a genuine interest in their welfare. They are provided with very good information and helpful advice about course opportunities before they join the sixth form. Information contained in the electronic prospectus is excellent. They are well advised about alternative provision in St Helens. As a result of effective guidance procedures only a small number of students renegotiate their course programmes in the early stages of sixth form work and very large numbers follow the course through to examination. Most students agreed

that they were helped to settle well in the sixth form. In discussion Year 12 students said they felt that their post-16 options had been presented to them fairly.

79. Students spend twenty-five minutes daily with their tutor. This time is used mainly for registration, routine business and as an opportunity for tutors to check on both the academic progress and pastoral welfare of students. The tutorial programme covers key skills as well as careers guidance and research. A number of outside speakers make valuable contributions about issues such as drink-driving, AIDS and HIV, but time constraints limit its impact on students' personal development. During the inspection, Year 12 began an awareness-raising programme about higher education and realised how little they knew about it. The support and guidance available to students from form tutors, subject tutors and year heads is helpful and constructive, but specific advice and guidance with university applications could be improved. Year 13 students said that if they were resourceful they obtained the guidance they needed about future options. The overall programme, however, is not fully developed or properly timetabled and much depends on the enthusiasm of tutors to provide students with opportunities to learn about and discuss issues of concern. Some Year 13 students said they did not value tutorial time because they were often kept waiting for latecomers or while tutors talked to individuals, but other students think that the time is well spent.

80. Attendance is monitored very carefully and is good. Punctuality is unsatisfactory. Heads of year keep records of study-leave and if there are concerns that students are under-achieving because they are not using their free time sensibly, directed study time is given.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- Parents have very positive views of the school.
- The school is welcoming to parents and readily responds to any concerns they have.
- There is good communication between pastoral staff and parents, both when there are problems and when there is cause for celebration.

81. Parents are appreciative of the efforts made by the school to educate their children. The school works closely with them and teachers are always ready to meet parents if there is a need to discuss their children's welfare and progress.

82. Parents' contributions to the work of the school are satisfactory. They help the school by ensuring their children attend regularly. A small group of parents helps the school through the Parent Teacher Association and parents support well their children's musical activities. Parents' interest in their children's progress appears to lessen as their children move through the school; Year 7 parents' evenings are well-attended but only about half of parents come to the Year 11 parents' evenings.

83. The quality of documentation provided for parents is uneven. There is a well-presented prospectus and an informative annual governors' report. Newsletters are regular but are in an uninteresting format. They contain details of Parent Teacher Association events but do not do justice to the school by keeping parents well-informed about the school and its activities. Annual reports on pupils' progress contain clear information on attainment and effort but the quality of comments on students' progress is uneven. Some teachers give helpful suggestions about how students can improve their performance in their subject, but overall there is inconsistency.

84. A significant minority of parents consider the school does not keep them well informed about their children's progress. The school recognises this concern. It agrees that when the electronic scheme for student monitoring has been developed further, it would be possible to keep parents better informed about their children's progress without placing a big extra burden on staff.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- The headteacher and his senior team provide good leadership and management. There is a clear school improvement plan which has the support of teachers and governors.
- The governors perform their duties well and are actively involved in shaping the school's future.
- New initiatives are monitored and evaluated although insufficient attention has been paid to developing teaching and learning.

85. The headteacher and his senior team provide good leadership and management which is valued by all members of the school community. The headteacher is a considerable presence around the school and as one pupil commented, he "seems to know what is going to happen before we do". He is very well supported by a talented and experienced team of senior managers. The school runs very well on a day to day to basis and both pupils and staff are well cared for.

86. The governors perform their duties conscientiously. They are well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and receive detailed information from the headteacher about local and national initiatives. They perform their duties in monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness well and play an active part in shaping the school's future.

87. The headteacher provides good leadership in shaping the future direction of the school. There is a clear vision for the future of the school which will involve considerable changes in both curricular provision and teaching and learning throughout the school. Senior staff need to be more involved in shaping this vision as well as harnessing their various skills to its implementation. The headteacher is taking a leading role in plans for the reshaping of post-16 provision across the local authority and is, therefore, well aware of the need to utilise all the considerable skills of his senior team to manage change within the school. The school provides training opportunities for a large number of student teachers.

88. The school's development planning is coherent, costed and evaluated. The school evaluates its strengths and weaknesses and does not attempt to hide any problems. It compares its performance with other schools both nationally and locally. In many areas the school has made good progress but there has been insufficient progress in establishing, as part of the school's culture, regular monitoring of teaching and learning. Some heads of department are reluctant to do this, others have insufficient time and some lack the confidence to evaluate classroom practice. There are interesting developments led by the senior team in promoting thinking skills, using ICT and improving provision for gifted and talented and low attaining pupils. Staff development is linked well to planning and performance management. The school is a confident and self-critical institution with the capacity to improve further.

89. Heads of year are very effective and provide very good support for pupils. There is much greater consistency in practice than at the previous inspection. Leadership of departments is generally good but there is room for improvement in design and technology. Heads of department are not sufficiently involved in monitoring teaching and learning.

90. Leadership and management of special educational needs are good. There is a clear sense of direction and purpose. The new Code of Practice has been fully implemented, planning is appropriate, records are up to date and annual reviews are carried out effectively. Links between the department of special educational needs and subjects are weak. There is no systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of the provision across subject departments and no effective co-ordination of the support they provide. The small teaching room provided for additional support work is inadequate.

Finance

91. The school's finances are very well managed. All plans are fully costed and the governors review income and expenditure on a regular basis. The school works hard to ensure that it gets best value from its purchases. Accounting systems are good. At present, the school sixth form is being subsidised from income generated from the main school. Although there are sound reasons for this, the viability of some very small teaching groups, both in terms of quality of learning as well as cost, should be examined.

Staffing

92. There are sufficient teachers to meet the needs of the curriculum. The match between qualifications and subjects taught is good although religious education is not always taught by specialist teachers. There is a shortage of support staff in some areas and there are insufficient technicians for such a large school with extensive ICT resources. New teachers and those recently qualified are provided with good support to ensure they extend their basic skills. Pupils with learning difficulties benefit from the support of learning assistants, although their deployment across the curriculum is not planned systematically.

Accommodation

93. The reception area is welcoming and provides a good impression of the school. The fabric of the school, however, is in need of some attention and although the layout of the site is attractive it is spoilt by excessive litter. Accommodation for subjects is satisfactory with good facilities in physical education. There is, however, no art studio and space is limited in modern foreign languages and geography. The ICT rooms have no more than 20 computers each, so pupils have to share. Practical lessons in science are sometimes taught in a classroom rather than a laboratory. Most rooms are well maintained with good displays, although this was not the case in design and technology. The caretaker and cleaning staff maintain a satisfactory standard of cleanliness in the school. Pupils complained to the team about difficulties of access to toilets.

Resources

94. The quality and range of learning resources are satisfactory although there is a serious lack of textbooks in history and ICT. There has been a considerable investment in ICT in recent years, but the ratio of computers to pupils of 10 to 1 is worse than in the majority of schools. There are 32 networked computers, which are heavily booked by a number of different departments. The school has access to the on site City Learning Centre for 50 per cent of its time. There is limited access to ICT in mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages and poor access to audio-visual equipment in design and technology.

95. The main school library is bright and attractive. A full time librarian has been in post only since September 2002 and has made some changes. Although there is a range of fiction and non-fiction books, numbers are low and not many pupils borrow books regularly. Pupils use the library during lunchtime but after school its use is limited.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

96. The leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards are average, students make good progress in lessons and achieve a satisfactory outcome by the end of their courses. Eight out of ten go on to higher or further education. Students are positive about their experiences. There are some areas for development. While there has been some very good review and evaluation of a range of issues in the sixth form and improvements have been made, there are still some areas where action has not been taken to bring about improvements. There is, for example, very good analysis of assessment data to illuminate strengths and weaknesses in provision. This analysis clearly identifies subjects where there has been a measure of underachievement for some years, some in subjects which were not subject to a detailed inspection, but not enough attention has been paid to improving the situation. There is a need to check the quality of teaching in order to support and encourage good practice and improve weak areas. Not all courses are planned at the necessary level of detail and there are not enough scheduled opportunities for students to discuss their progress with their tutors. Planning for the sixth form should focus now on developing the quality of provision and thereby improving standards.

97. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is good. The school's policy for tutors to remain with their groups as they move up the school ensures that students are well known to their tutor but also means that tutors are unfamiliar with the routines of the sixth form year. Year heads ensure that tutorial and pastoral arrangements run smoothly and meet regularly with their tutor teams to ensure that they are well briefed to advise and support students through the sixth form.

Resources

98. Sixth form accommodation is very good although the building is somewhat shabby. Students have a large, bright common room and dining area. The building houses small teaching rooms and a pleasant library. Access to reference books is good but many of the books are old. There is plenty of space for private study and a number of networked computers. Students do not take full advantage of the library facilities - only about a quarter use the computers and about half borrow books. Sixth form students also have access to computers in the Cyber Café. Departmental resources are satisfactory for teaching sixth-form courses.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

99. In order to help the school improve standards further, governors, headteacher and staff should strive to implement the school development plan. They should tackle as a priority:

- (1) improving achievement in the thirty per cent of lessons which are not as good as the best in the school. This should be done through:
 - regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning
 - planning a staff development programme which concentrates on developing a wider range of teaching strategies;(Paragraphs: 32, 89, 106, 142, 147, 150, 156, 171, 178, 186, 194)
- (2) providing more vocational courses in Years 10 and 11;
(Paragraphs: 41)
- (3) developing the use of ICT in lessons in line with the school development plan target;
(Paragraphs: 2, 4, 32, 41, 42, 130, 163, 215)
- (4) ensuring that under-achieving boys in Years 10 and 11 achieve their potential.
(Paragraphs: 2, 3, 32, 41, 101, 116, 128, 145, 146, 151, 158, 159, 161, 167, 185, 190)

Sixth form

- (1) checking on the quality of teaching and planning so that good practice can be shared and poor practice leading to under-achievement in some subjects is tackled;
(Paragraphs: 96, 201, 204, 206, 228, 234, 240, 245)
- (2) increasing the number of vocational courses, possibly in partnership with other institutions, in order to provide more effectively for the full range of potential students;
(Paragraphs: 49, 210)
- (3) ensuring that Year 13 students use their free time more productively;
(Paragraphs: 50, 66, 80)
- (4) improving the tutorial programme so that the time is better used and there are more opportunities for students to review their progress with their tutors.
(Paragraphs: 52, 66, 77, 79, 96)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	152
	Sixth form	56
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		53

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	6	33	63	45	4	1	0
Percentage	3.9	21.7	41.4	29.6	2.6	0.7	0
Sixth form							
Number	2	15	21	16	2	0	0
Percentage	3.6	26.8	38	28.6	3.6	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1208	196
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	107	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	26	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	141	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.3
National comparative data	7.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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	2002	125	120	245

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	84	100	110
	Girls	107	97	104
	Total	191	197	214
Percentage of pupils At NC level 5 or above	School	78 (77)	80 (80)	87 (76)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66(66)
Percentage of pupils At NC level 6 or above	School	35 (46)	60 (54)	51 (39)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	83	94	94
	Girls	102	93	87
	Total	185	187	181
Percentage of pupils At NC level 5 or above	School	76 (65)	76 (80)	74 (63)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils At NC level 6 or above	School	33 (28)	57 (53)	31 (31)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	119	123	242

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	57	115	117
	Girls	82	116	121
	Total	139	231	238
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	57 (50)	95 (93)	98 (96)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	41.6
	National	39.6

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

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13) 2002

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	39	60	99
	Average point score per candidate	16.4(13.5)	19.2(17)	18.1(15.4)
National	Average point score per candidate	*(16.9)	*(18.0)	*(17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	39	50	89	0	10	10
	Average point score per candidate	16.4	21.1	19.1	0	9.6	9.6
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

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

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

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

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1269	75	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	10	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	87	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)	88.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.7

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	514

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.72
Key Stage 4	20.23

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	4 346 113
Total expenditure	4 312 537
Expenditure per pupil	3 050
Balance brought forward from previous year	59 839
Balance carried forward to next year	93 415

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	14
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1404
Number of questionnaires returned	264

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	42	48	8	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	47	45	5	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	59	6	1	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	50	11	6	3
The teaching is good.	40	51	5	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	43	17	5	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem	51	43	3	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	38	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	24	53	16	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	45	47	3	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	47	6	1	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	47	6	2	8

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good so pupils learn well.
- Good relationships amongst pupils and teachers encourage pupils to work well.
- For the last three years results in the Year 9 national tests have been above average.
- The teachers work well as a team, sharing a commitment to improve standards.

Areas for improvement

- The difference between boys' and girls' results at GCSE is greater than the national difference, indicating under-achievement by many boys.
- Although the school identifies gifted and talented pupils and provides activities for them outside lessons, there is insufficient planning and presentation of work in lessons to meet their particular needs.
- Individual units of work are well planned but there is some inconsistency across the department in the programme offered to pupils, who consequently do not always share a common experience, particularly in Years 7 to 9.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Above average	Average
Achievement over time	Good	Satisfactory
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	Above average	Average
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Good	Good
Leadership of the subject		Good
Management of the subject		Good
Improvement since the previous inspection		Good

100. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average overall. Pupils are generally articulate and confident speakers, although lower-attaining pupils contribute relatively briefly and informally in class discussion. Pupils exchange ideas actively in pair and group talk and learn well from each other. Standards of reading are above average. Pupils extract information from and respond to a good variety of texts, although low attainers and pupils with special educational needs require a lot of support to do so. Many pupils are eager to read aloud. Good reading habits are encouraged through the silent reading time at the beginning of lessons. Writing skills are generally good, benefiting from the concentration on literacy development in Years 7 to 9. Pupils plan, write and revise their writing systematically. They produce a variety of interesting pieces, of increasing length. Low attaining pupils need the help of the frameworks they are given to develop their writing but higher attaining pupils respond perceptively and relatively independently. Work is generally presented with pride and care for accuracy. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are average overall. Higher attaining pupils show above average oral skills, exchanging ideas purposefully in group talk and contributing confidently, in mature language, to discussions. Lower attaining pupils, with assistance, make limited contributions. All pupils show understanding of the examination texts. Lower attaining pupils need the good frameworks and support materials provided to enable them to

respond, although the highest attainers show independent perception and sensitivity. Pupils complete a good range of lengthy pieces of writing. Lower attaining pupils write at some length but plainly, their work lacks vivid vocabulary, nevertheless the writing skills of many are above average. Many pupils take notes without prompting. Answers are thoroughly planned and some coursework pieces are impressively mature and sophisticated. Care is taken over correctness of expression, assisted in many cases by the good use of word processing.

101. Achievement from Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils' levels of attainment on entry to the school are average. By the end of Year 9 in 2002, attainment was above both the national average, and the average for similar schools. In lessons observed good teaching promoted good learning. Good attention is being paid to literacy development and the incorporation of the new strategies for teaching English is having a beneficial effect. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. In 2002, GCSE results reflected pupils' average attainment on entry to the school. They were broadly in line with the national average and above the average for similar schools. They did not, however, reflect pupils' above average attainment when they entered Year 10. There is a significant difference between the results of boys and girls, much greater than the national difference, which indicates boys' underachievement. Girls' results indicate good achievement, since they were well above the national average in English language and above in literature. Boys' results, however, were barely in line with the average in English language and below in literature. The department is well aware of the problem and is actively engaged in strategies to deal with it. All pupils are, however, entered for the GCSE in both English language and literature – above the national average entry - and almost all obtain grades. The evidence of inspection is that pupils are being thoroughly prepared for the requirements of examinations. In lessons, good teaching promoted good learning and there is a clear commitment to the raising of standards. Setting arrangements, good support in the classroom and materials and presentations are adapted to meet pupils' particular needs and aid achievement. The only pupils whose needs are not well met are the gifted and talented. They are identified on class lists but in practice their experience in lessons is generally only the same as that of their classmates.

102. Teaching and learning are good and could be even better if more attention was paid to the needs of the talented and gifted. Teachers plan well and prepare a good variety of support materials. Pupils respond well, encouraged by the good relationships established by teachers and stimulated by the good variety of activities in lessons. Pupils' work is thoroughly and helpfully marked, giving clear guidance for improvement.

103. In a very good Year 7 lesson exploring poetry, pupils were eager to read out the poems they had previously written, encouraged by the teacher's celebration of their efforts. They responded to the rhythm of a poem by John Agar by clicking their fingers to the reading and the teacher's good use of questioning enabled them to recognise the carnival feeling conveyed. A very well-managed session of imagining, with their eyes closed, views through a window stimulated them to compose their own window poems which they shared with the class, when, again, their efforts were celebrated. A very effective concluding question and answer session showed both what they had learned and how they had enjoyed it.

104. In a very good Year 9 lesson, pupils were challenged by a presentation on the use of punctuation and connectives in speaking and showed their understanding by using them in dialogue with the teacher about Lady Macbeth. In group work they showed interest and worked cooperatively to prepare studies of 'Macbeth' using the framework the teacher had provided, presenting their conclusions confidently and articulately to the class. The good variety of activity in the lesson was managed with energy and the pace and challenge stimulated the pupils.

105. Because lessons are well planned and confidently managed, with a firm but friendly approach to behaviour reinforced by a clear departmental policy, pupils' attitudes are good. They feel secure, respond with interest and most take a pride in their work.

106. The leadership and management of the department are good. The activities of a large group of teachers are coordinated well and a team has been built into which new teachers have been well integrated. There is good practice in the recording and use of information about pupils. The head of department has a clear view of future developments. The programme of study for pupils has been revised to take account of new requirements of the National Curriculum and GCSE. Individual units of work are well planned but there is some lack of consistency across the department in the programme offered to pupils, which needs to be remedied through a more rigorous approach to the monitoring of teaching and learning.

107. There has been good progress since the previous inspection. Attainment in the national tests for Year 9 has improved, as has the attainment of girls at the end of Year 11. The national strategy for teaching English in Years 7 to 9 has been successfully incorporated in the scheme of work.

Basic skills: contribution made by other subjects to pupils' competency in literacy.

108. The school has taken seriously its responsibility to develop pupils' literacy skills and has put in place a good framework to promote them in subjects across the curriculum. There is a coordinator responsible for oversight of the national strategy for pupils in Years 7 to 9, which is integrated in the school development plan, and a literacy coordinator. A thorough examination of activities in subjects initially identified areas for development in speaking and listening, spelling and writing. All staff have attended training sessions and representatives of all subject departments have attended a variety of further training opportunities, to enable them to assist their colleagues. Departmental schemes of work incorporate strategies for literacy development. The literacy coordinator, with the assistance of a LEA specialist, has provided good support for colleagues with models of good practice. Currently the various reading demands made in subject areas are under review.

109. The national strategy for teaching literacy skills is well incorporated in English lessons. In other subjects there is evidence of good practice. In science there is good attention to reading and writing, with a variety of writing tasks set. There is an emphasis on vocabulary development in history and geography and assistance in the organisation of writing. Speaking and listening is obviously promoted in modern foreign languages, although there is less emphasis on reading and writing. In religious education and art and design there are good opportunities for reading and writing development. All subjects promote speaking and listening through class question and answer sessions and there is pair and group work although few subjects go beyond that and offer formal speaking opportunities. Overall, as a result of the good attention paid to literacy development pupils are generally attentive listeners, willing speakers and are happy, particularly in the earlier years, to read aloud. Their reading and writing skills are above average.

Drama

110. The department offers drama as an examination option in Years 10 and 11. The subject is particularly popular with girls. Students did very well at GCSE in 2002. All students passed and nearly all achieved higher grades. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned with varied and challenging tasks so that students' interest is sustained as they develop their ideas. Lessons have good pace and students are kept busy. Pupils with special needs are very well integrated and make progress at the same rate as others.

111. Students enjoy lessons. Opportunities for personal development are good as students engage well in practical work and discuss productively in groups to develop

tableaux. They listen carefully, answer thoughtfully, and are able to organise themselves well. Standards are broadly average at this stage of Year 11.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good and pupils achieve well in the subject.
- The relationships amongst teachers and pupils are strong and this helps pupils work hard in lessons.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils are high, especially in Years 7 to 9, and this creates a good learning environment.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of computer facilities within the subject.
- There are insufficient learning assistants in Years 10 and 11.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Well above average	Above average
Achievement over time	Very good	Good
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	Well above average	Above average
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Good	Good
Leadership of the subject		Good
Management of the subject		Good
Improvement since the previous inspection		Good

112. In 2002 the Year 9 national test results were well above average with boys doing better than girls. The trend over the last three years has seen steady improvement with results always well above national averages. At the end of Year 11 the 2002 GCSE results were above average with girls outperforming boys. This reverses the situation in 2001 where boys did better than girls. The overall trend over the past three years in GCSE grades has been upwards, especially when the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A* to C is considered.

113. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is broadly average although there are differences from year to year between boys and girls. For the pupils who sat GCSE examinations in 2002 the girls' attainment on entry was slightly better than that of the boys. This gap was maintained in the GCSE examinations although achievement by both boys and girls was good and above national averages. Achievement overall is good but is particularly impressive in Years 7 to 9.

114. Teaching and learning are good. During the inspection no unsatisfactory lessons were seen; many lessons were good and some were very good. When teaching is very good lessons are well planned, delivered at a good pace and expectations of pupils are high. There are very good relationships amongst teachers and pupils because classroom organisation and management of pupils are so effective and all pupils are involved in purposeful learning. The effective use of question and answer sessions and a high challenge to pupils helps to maintain a positive working environment, resulting in high levels of interest in the subject.

115. In a Year 7 class containing 12 low attaining pupils, some with learning difficulties, the lesson started with an imaginative numeracy session where pupils had to contribute to a variety of arithmetical questions at the front of the classroom. In the main part of the lesson, run at a brisk pace, "flash cards" displaying various shapes were presented to the class, reinforcing the features and properties of geometrical shapes. This structure to the lesson had the effect of producing very high levels of involvement and interest, creating very good learning and high levels of concentration.

116. Pupils' positive attitudes to the subject result in pupils treating property and resources with respect. There is little graffiti on exercise books or on desks. Pupils behave maturely; they work well singly, in pairs or in small groups. There are some exceptions; the attitudes of a minority of boys in Years 10 and 11 are unsatisfactory and this can disrupt lessons.

117. The departmental practice of setting pupils by attainment is effective in allowing pupils with learning difficulties to work in small groups. Support from classroom assistants is adequate in Years 7 to 9 although such assistants could be better deployed as some lower sets currently have no support. There is no provision for learning support in Years 10 and 11 and this is unsatisfactory. Where classroom assistants are deployed they are effective. Learning by pupils with learning difficulties is good, especially in Years 7 to 9. Pupils who are talented at the subject make good progress in the top sets and are helped by extra-curricular activities such as the "UK Maths Challenge", a competition entered by twenty pupils in each year group.

118. In general, teachers use lessons well although low attainers sometimes find concentration a problem for whole periods. The government's initiatives to improve pupils' skills in using numbers are having an effect on improving learning. However, teachers do not always plan so that all parts of the lesson, especially the final checking of what has been learned, are given appropriate attention.

119. The routine marking of work, whilst usually done fully, lacks helpful comments and there are few references either to National Curriculum levels or to GCSE grades. There needs to be a greater consistency with marking across the department. The use of homework is appropriate and pupils' work is marked. To help learning and to develop literacy key subject words are displayed on classroom walls. However, little reference is made to them in lessons. The use of computers is unsatisfactory although calculators are used appropriately.

Basic skills: contribution made by other subjects to pupils' competency in numeracy

120. The school has appreciated the need for a common policy in teaching numeracy across the curriculum. There has been some in-service training provided by the mathematics department for other teachers and this has had a positive effect in some departments. In science, for example, the practice of teaching numeracy is excellent, especially in Years 7 to 9. Here pupils confidently use spreadsheets to display and analyse data. Older pupils make appropriate calculations of velocity and of angles of incidence and refraction. Numeracy is also developed well in geography and history where pupils display carefully different types of data. Numeracy teaching in other departments is less well developed, especially in design technology where some lessons fail to reinforce numeracy skills. Overall, the teaching of numeracy is being tackled appropriately and there is some good practice which needs further development.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The very good leadership and teamwork in the department has led to improvements in many areas of teaching especially in implementing the national strategy in Years 7 to 9 and developing literacy and numeracy skills.
- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9.
- The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good and they make very good progress.
- The monitoring of pupils' progress is good and they know what is expected of them.

Areas for improvement

- Progress in some lessons is affected when classrooms have to be used because there are insufficient laboratories.
- There is limited use of ICT to extend learning because the equipment is not available.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Well above average	Above average
Achievement over time	Very good	Good
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	Well above average	Above average
Quality of teaching	Very good	Good
Quality of learning	Very good	Good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Very Good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Very good
Management of the subject	Very good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

121. On entry to the school pupils' attainment is about average and by Year 9 their tests results are well above average. Recently science results have improved more quickly than results nationally. Boys and girls do equally well and a significant number have reached high standards.

122. In the 2002 GCSE examination the number gaining grades A* to C was well above average in comparison with similar schools. Pupils began the GCSE course with above average standards and gained results that were above average. Girls did better than boys and their results were significantly better than the national average for grades A* to C. The trend shown by GCSE results is one of improvement.

123. In Year 9 high attaining pupils calculate accurately pressure and average speed, accounts of experiments about chemical reactions are well written and their understanding of the differences between metals and non-metals is well above average. In a low attaining Year 9 group work about acids and alkalis is below average although the pupils are learning well and making good progress. Year 7 pupils' investigative skills are well above average in lessons about electrical conductivity and in data interpretation exercises in Year 9.

124. In a Year 11 low attaining group some pupils' understanding of electromagnetism was below average but they made very good progress including those with special educational needs. High achievers reached standards that are well above average in lessons about radiation and its medical use and also about plastics or sense cells. Investigative work about rates of reaction is well above average as are pupils' research skills in work about polythene.

125. In many lessons teaching is very good or excellent, no lessons were unsatisfactory. In the best lessons the purpose of the lesson is made clear to the pupils who work hard. Teachers have very good control and high expectations of behaviour so that in a lesson about sense cells pupils made excellent progress. Demanding questions and appropriate homework were used in this lesson and in lessons about iron and polymers pupils' writing was of high quality. Pupils with special educational needs are very well taught. In well-planned lessons about loudspeakers and chemical indicators clear and firm instructions and excellent understanding of the pupils' needs ensured enjoyment and progress.

126. The teaching of numeracy skills is well planned and pupils' numeracy skills are very good. Marking varies in the quality of the advice given to pupils and in the use of grades. Some activities need clearer instructions so that pupils can make quicker progress and inattention is not always checked. In a lesson in which practical science has to be taught in a classroom pupils' progress was affected by overcrowding and unsuitable furniture.

127. Teaching is effective and pupils behave very well; they listen carefully and work hard.

128. During practical activities pupils, including some with behavioural difficulties, are trustworthy and careful with the equipment they use. In a Year 11 lesson about polymers pupils were skilful learners making good use of the opportunities provided by their teacher. In this, and in other lessons, relationships were very good; pupils respected their teachers, cooperated well and their social skills were good. A minority of boys do not concentrate as well as they should.

129. Teaching programmes contain very good guidance about developing investigative skills, literacy and numeracy. Policies for raising standards achieved by boys are well designed and data about achievement is used well to monitor pupils' progress. Leadership of the department is very good, teamwork is good and many contribute to development work such as implementing the national strategy and work for gifted and talented pupils although introduction of the plans for these pupils have been delayed. Teaching plans address effectively moral issues such as the use of hormones to control fertility.

130. Since the previous inspection results in tests and examinations have improved, expectations of pupils' progress are higher and better use is made of assessment information to improve pupils' work. However, there is still not enough equipment for ICT or enough science laboratories, some of which are too small. Some teachers move frequently between rooms making lesson planning more difficult. These factors have a negative impact on pupils' progress.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning are very good.
- Results in the GCSE examination in 2002 were above average.
- Pupils' achievement through the school is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment does not sufficiently emphasise what pupils need to do to improve.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to work with artists-in-residence.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils in Year 7 to 9 to visit art galleries.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement over time	Very good	Very good
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	N/A	Above average
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good
Quality of learning	Very good	Very good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Very good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Management of the subject	Good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

131. Teaching and learning in art and design are very good and occasionally excellent. Teachers have a broad range of expertise which results in pupils being provided with a very good range of two and three dimensional experiences.

132. Pupils arrive with average abilities and experiences. They make very good progress in exceptionally well-planned lessons and by the end of Year 9 they are able to draw and paint to a better than average standard and produce delightful clay interpretations of the Spanish artist Antonio Gaudi's work. The introduction to the art of other cultures is a regular feature of lessons where pupils are encouraged to enrich their own original work. Pupils develop good craft skills because of the quality of the teachers' practical craft demonstrations to groups followed by individual guidance.

133. Pupils find their art and design lessons interesting and this results in them being very attentive and keen to learn. All lessons are well managed. Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour, in what are often very cramped working conditions. This results in busy, productive lessons. This very good teaching leads to very good learning and achievement by pupils. A better than average quantity of art and design work is completed because teachers regularly require pupils to complete tasks to deadlines. Both boys and girls achieve very good standards, although few boys choose art and design as a GCSE subject. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented achieve equally well because of the close attention to individual needs that all teachers provide.

134. Sketchbooks are now in place in all years and by Year 11 pupils demonstrate that they can use them to express their own individual ideas. Colour is understood particularly well and used with great vigour. In one lesson, pupils produced closely observed drawings of segments of oranges which they then developed as soft batik fabric sculpture while exploiting the many different colour values they observed in the surface texture of the fruit.

135. All studios display very good examples of pupils' art and design and this entuses them to achieve high standards. The display of exemplar GCSE examination work in every studio also enables pupils to know exactly what they have to achieve to gain a high grade, and this contributes to the better than average recent results at the higher grades.

136. The use of computers to research and produce creative art is good. In lessons pupils demonstrate that they can use the Internet to find out about different artists' paintings and then use this information to improve their understanding of art and design. A computer is available in all studios and pupils also use the well-equipped learning centre to learn how to produce computer-animated shapes found in their study of the paintings of Kandinski.

137. Effective extra lunchtime lessons are provided where pupils successfully work together on art and design activities to improve their social skills. Understanding of society is developed well in topics, for example when the effects of alcohol on society are explored in imaginative storyboard comic strip designs.

138. Pupils regularly write and talk about art and design and most are developing opinions and judgement. A new art vocabulary is quickly acquired in an imaginative 'fill in the missing letters' game. In one lesson, pupils worked in groups with their learning partners to analyse different architectural styles. Each pupil's presentation to the class was filmed and by looking at their own performances they improved their communication skills.

139. Pupils regularly assess their own work but they are not required to clearly identify and record the things that they need to do in order to improve to an even higher standard. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not regularly visit art galleries and this limits their knowledge of historical art. There are few opportunities for pupils to work with artists-in-residence and this limits their knowledge of contemporary art.

140. Leadership is good and examination results have regularly improved with more girls choosing art and design than boys. A satisfactory programme of monitoring of teaching and learning is in place. Art and design is popular and numbers have grown, although the proportion of boys choosing art and design is regularly below the national average. The head of department has effectively managed the issues raised in the previous report and funding for art and design has improved with pupils now having a wide range of different materials to use.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Specific teaching of the key elements of the programmes of study has been planned.
- There is a good range of opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility and initiative in the life of the school.

Areas for improvement

- A full review of how the content and skills of the course are being taught in all subjects needs to be completed.
- Planned teaching of citizenship is not provided for all year groups.
- Teachers do not sufficiently identify citizenship objectives in their teaching.
- All aspects of the programmes of study are not taught.
- There is insufficient involvement of pupils in citizenship lessons.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement over time	N/A	N/A
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	N/A	N/A
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Leadership of the subject	Satisfactory
Management of the subject	Satisfactory
Improvement since the previous inspection	New subject

141. Most pupils reach average levels of attainment in citizenship lessons. Pupils in Years 7, 9 and 10 understand some basic features of the legal and government system. They know how the current voting system works and can explain, in simple terms, some of the different ways in which elections may be organised. They have practical experience of elections through elections to year councils and the school council. They understand the importance of voluntary organisations and have good practical experience of a wide range of local and national charities. Specific provision does not yet cover all year groups and standards overall are not as high as they could be. Individual support for pupils with learning difficulties helps these pupils to make satisfactory progress and the achievement of a majority of pupils is satisfactory.

142. Teaching about citizenship is through the subjects of the curriculum and through specific provision in Years 7, 9 and 10. An audit of provision has identified those aspects of the programmes of study which are covered, in some degree, by the subjects. The taught courses largely deal with the legal and political systems. Teaching observed was satisfactory, with a clear emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge. There was less evidence from pupils' written work that they are given good opportunities to develop skills of enquiry and communication or are learning how to participate actively in the wider community beyond school. Where citizenship is taught through subjects, teachers are not always clear about the citizenship objectives in their lessons.

143. Pupils are given a good range of opportunities to be involved in the work of national and international voluntary groups through support of such organisations as Oxfam, the National Children's Home, Christian Aid and local hospices. The school's strong links with Romania also provide an international dimension to this experience. The personal, health and social education programme provides pupils with good opportunities to learn about the life of the wider community through contact with the police, road safety, the fire service and community theatre groups. The school council provides additional experience for participation.

144. Management and leadership of the subject are satisfactory. Planning for specific teaching about citizenship covers provision for Years 7, 9 and 10. There is currently no specific provision in Years 8 and 11. Development of the subject needs to ensure provision for all pupils and a clearer understanding of the actual contribution of curriculum subjects to the overall provision.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Relationships between staff and pupils are very good
- There is good and consistent health and safety advice
- The progress of pupils with learning difficulties is good in the majority of lessons
- Pupils' behaviour and attitude to the subject are very good

Areas for improvement

- Leadership of the department is unsatisfactory
- GCSE results in resistant materials, electronic products and graphic products are below average.
- The quality of designing and evaluations in all areas is below average
- There are insufficient rigorous lesson observations based on clear criteria
- There is limited provision for and use of ICT, especially in food technology
- Lesson planning does not focus on developing the use of literacy and numeracy skills.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Average	Below average
Achievement over time	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	N/A	Below average
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Very good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Unsatisfactory
Management of the subject	Satisfactory
Improvement since the previous inspection	Satisfactory

145. At the end of Year 9 in 2002 pupils' attainment was below the national average. Levels of attainment in designing and making skills are low on entry but many pupils reach standards in line with the national average as a result of some good teaching. At the end of Year 11 standards in resistant materials, graphic products and electronics are well below national averages, although pupils do significantly better in food technology and textiles, achieving results that are above the national average. Girls do better than boys in Years 10 and 11. Many girls achieve well, especially in food technology. Some pupils show good gains in skills, knowledge and understanding of the design and make process but there is a clear weakness in literacy skills, for example in written evaluations. In food technology pupils achieve well in relationship to prior attainment. Practical skills are developed systematically and pupils enthusiastically take part in lessons. Workshop facilities are outdated and inappropriate for a modern curriculum and have a significant effect on the standard and quality of work produced.

146. Results at GCSE were below the national average in 2002 with 49 per cent of pupils attaining A* to C grades. The percentage of A* to G grades is below the national average. In lessons and in work seen, attainment in Years 10 and 11 is below the national average, however as a result of good teaching attainment in food technology, textiles and child care is good and achievement is very good. However, in the other technology options results have declined over the last three years. Girls are doing better than boys. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress at all ages. A 15 year old pupil with special educational needs

used software well in electronics to model containers. Design folders are poorly presented with research evidence that relies too much on second hand material, Internet printouts and worksheets. Improved presentation skills are needed. Making is better than designing by most pupils in most areas, mainly due to the very good use made of demonstrations and group work. A Year 7 group achieved good results when making a fuse tester.

147. Although there are some shortcomings in lesson planning the majority of teaching is satisfactory. Pupils concentrate well on their work and the pace of lessons is good. Schemes of work are well prepared although lesson plans are not always clear. Learning objectives are often confused with aims. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress but lessons need to be planned to meet the needs of all pupils with varying levels of attainment including those who are gifted and talented who are not making sufficient progress. In Years 7 to 9 pupils develop practical skills well but are often limited by a lack of design awareness and the range of presentation techniques available. Consistent class management ensures that time is not wasted on maintaining order. Very good teaching of practical electronics ensures that skills of software navigation are taught systematically across all areas, for example using Pro-Desktop to model alarm systems. However, many pupils are let down by poor design and rendering skills.

148. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. This is particularly evident in the clean-down in food and in child care lessons when discussing risks that affect the development of the foetus. The social, moral and cultural aspects of vegetarianism and nutritional requirements were explored very well in a Year 10 lesson on special diets.

149. Management is satisfactory; the two heads of food and technology run the department well on a day- to- day basis but overall leadership is unsatisfactory. There is no strategic vision or joint planning. The two lead staff take individual but not collective responsibility. There have been considerable staffing difficulties in recent years and this will need to be resolved if standards are to improve. Assessment procedures are good as is the monitoring and tracking of pupils across year groups. Internal standardisation of levels and grades takes place ensuring that pupils are informed about their progress and levels of attainment. Accommodation is adequate but resources are unsatisfactory. All health and safety issues have been addressed.

150. Although results at GCSE in resistant materials, graphic products and electronics have declined overall improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Progress has been made in use of ICT and new courses have been developed. Very good use is made of the City Learning Centre and staff have undertaken training on the national strategies. This is starting to have an effect on teaching and learning. There has been long term staff absence and this has had a significant effect on standards. However, when pupils are taught by regular staff they make at least satisfactory progress. Lessons need to be planned more carefully in order to meet every pupil's needs as in textiles design work where many pupils struggled with observational drawing. Work needs to be done on developing speaking, reading and writing and improving the basic design skills of younger pupils. Shortcomings in the way that many pupils present and develop their folder work could be avoided by moving towards sketchbooks rather than a loose paper system. If progress is to be made on these key issues, the leadership and strategic vision of the department needs to be improved.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Teachers manage pupils skilfully and use their good knowledge to plan well.
- The scheme of work is good and includes a very good programme of fieldwork.
- Pupils' progress is assessed effectively.

Areas for improvement

- The standards achieved by boys in Years 10-11 are not good enough.
- The highest-attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently.
- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and marking?

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Above average	Above average
Achievement over time	Good	Good
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	N/A	Above average
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Good	Good
Leadership of the subject		Good
Management of the subject		Good
Improvement since the previous inspection		Satisfactory

151. By the end of Year 9 attainment is above average and achievement is good as a result of good teaching. Pupils have gained a good knowledge of how landscapes are formed, for example, by rivers and volcanoes. They understand clearly the effects of such phenomena as flooding and earthquakes on people and how they may be lessened. Pupils have a sound knowledge of geographical terms such as 'erosion' and 'deposition'. Higher attaining pupils complete investigations very well, using appropriate research methods, analysing data accurately, drawing conclusions and explaining the limitations of the study. Lower-attaining pupils have a satisfactory basic knowledge but find giving reasons difficult, as for instance for the shape of rivers. Throughout, written work is accurate and extended writing well structured. Boys answer questions in less depth and their work is less detailed than girls.

152. Attainment is above average and the achievement of those pupils who choose the subject is good in Years 10-11. GCSE results in 2002 improved and were above the national average. Girls gained significantly higher grades than boys because girls' coursework is completed more fully and in greater detail than boys, and they revise more thoroughly. Pupils have a sound knowledge of the main types of industry and use geographical models confidently to describe the land use in cities and how a factory works. They successfully continue to extend their knowledge of geographical terms but only the higher-attaining pupils use them confidently. The lowest attaining pupils have a sound knowledge of topics such as tourism and energy but have a poor knowledge of where places are. Pupils tabulate, graph and analyse data effectively.

153. The quality of teaching is good and pupils learn well. Lessons start promptly with a lively 'starter' activity to review previous work that gains pupils' interest and establishes a good working atmosphere. In the best lessons the objectives of the work are made clear to

pupils at the start and assessed rigorously at the end so pupils know exactly what they are doing and what they have learnt. Lessons are well planned with a well-structured series of lively activities, often with pupils working in groups or pairs, which are effectively designed to encourage pupils to gain information and to reinforce their understanding. Pupils engage enthusiastically in these well thought out exercises, co-operate effectively with others, work hard and maintain concentration.

154. In one lesson lower attaining pupils in Year 8 studied the causes of flooding. The lesson started promptly with a brisk review of previous work; they quickly considered the aims of the lesson, attentively watched a short video clip of a news item about a recent flood. Following this they read and enthusiastically analysed a newspaper article in pairs extending and reinforcing their knowledge and then accurately completed a record of the information gained. The lesson finished with a lively activity to share their information with others and assess the good progress they had made.

155. Higher-attaining pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons, but often they are not challenged enough through rigorous questioning and sufficiently demanding materials. Teachers have friendly yet firm relationships with pupils who behave well and have a good attitude to the subject. Marking is inconsistent and often superficial with few comments to help pupils to improve. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because teachers pitch lessons at an appropriate level and match work closely to their needs.

156. Leadership is effective. There is a clear sense of direction and well-considered strategies for improvement. The scheme of work is well written and contains a very comprehensive programme of fieldwork in Years 7-9 that provides a strong foundation for the well-organised fieldwork in Years 10-11. There is not enough monitoring of the teaching and marking across the department. Good quality assessment procedures give an accurate picture of pupils' progress providing a firm basis for helping individual pupils to improve. Insufficient specialist rooms results in staff moving to a wide range of classrooms with their materials, leading to additional pressures on staff and limited resources. The department has made satisfactory improvements since the previous inspection and has the capacity to improve further.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good, and some teaching is very good and excellent.
- The leadership and management of history are very good.
- Pupils' attitudes are positive and generally pupils enjoy history.

Areas for improvement

- The achievement of boys, particularly in modern world history at GCSE.
- More consistent approaches to teaching and learning so that all pupils encounter 'active' approaches that engage their interest.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement over time	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	N/A	Below average
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Good	Good

Leadership of the subject	Very good
Management of the subject	Very good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Satisfactory

157. Standards at 14 are average. Teachers' assessments at the end of last year were a little conservative and attainment is better than they were estimating. However, boys do not achieve as well as girls.

158. GCSE results for the Schools' Council history course have been well above the national average for three years, with 2001 being an outstanding year. Achievement has also been good with most pupils either exceeding or gaining the grades predicted for them. However, in the modern world history GCSE course, the results have been below the national average for three years and there has been significant under-achievement, mainly by boys. This has resulted in history being below the national average for the proportion of those gaining grades A* to C. In terms of pupils gaining grades A* to G, results are slightly above the national level, for boys as well as for girls. Girls do particularly well and all those entered last year gained a grade. There is no clear trend in results.

159. History is a popular subject, and more boys than girls choose the modern world history course. They are attracted by the study of two world wars and the excellent annual battlefields visit to France and Belgium. Significant numbers of lower attaining boys enjoy the course, but are not sufficiently motivated and their achievement is unsatisfactory. This course may not be the most appropriate choice for them. The department is working hard on a number of different approaches to solve the problem of boys' underachievement.

160. By Year 9 pupils can evaluate historical evidence well, dealing with evidence that is contradictory, and working out whether evidence is reliable and what it tells them historically. They can handle simple numerical evidence, and their literacy skills are generally good. The higher attaining groups are working above the national average and some pupils produce high quality written work, for example their reports into nineteenth century factory conditions. Pupils with learning difficulties, and those who are gifted and talented, progress as well as the rest.

161. By Year 11 pupils can describe and explain historical events with appropriate detail and understanding, balancing views and coming to suitable conclusions. Attainment is better in Schools Council history classes; nevertheless some good quality writing was seen in both courses. Some impressive coursework resulted from a visit to the old jail at Beaumaris. Pupils of all abilities make similar progress, but there are pockets of pupils usually boys who are not learning as well as the others because their concentration and perseverance are not good enough.

162. In all years attitudes and behaviour are generally good, with the exception of the boys noted above. Most pupils show interest and work at a good pace. They complete homework tasks, which are helpful in raising standards and achieve well. There is, however, a significant minority who leave tasks unfinished and their achievement is unsatisfactory.

163. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Nearly all teaching was good or better and in several lessons, the teaching was very good or excellent. In Year 10, an excellent lesson on the Elizabethan theatre was characterised by pace, energy and humour, and by imaginative methods that actively involved all the pupils. In the lessons that were not so strong, the pupils were too passive. Teachers plan thoroughly, know their subject very well and manage the behaviour of pupils skilfully. They are not able to develop ICT work because they do not have adequate access to ICT facilities. In some very good lessons artefacts were used to great advantage. In a Year 9 lesson on the First World War, pupils were able to handle a British soldier's rifle. As a result they were able to understand fighting conditions with greater accuracy. Marking is regular; it gives ample encouragement and also some points for improvement.

164. Subject planning is thorough, including the planning for personal development, which is significantly enhanced by the programme of outside visits. The procedures for the assessment and guidance of pupils are good. The subject leader runs a big department, but he has no deputy and insufficient management time. Unsatisfactory levels of resources in terms of books and ICT facilities further hamper his role in ensuring high standards. The library stock is inadequate for history.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- There are adequate resources to deliver timetabled ICT lessons.
- A well-equipped and up to date City Learning Centre ensures good quality resources for lessons taught there.
- Teachers generally plan lessons well to ensure pupils extend their ICT skills.
- The gifted and talented pupils progress very well as result of support and extension activities.
- Pupils respond well and show a positive attitude to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The school does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum for ICT provision.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum.
- Strategies to extend target setting and pupil assessment need further development.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement over time	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	N/A	Average
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Very Good	Very Good
Leadership of the subject		Satisfactory
Management of the subject		Satisfactory
Improvement since the previous inspection		Satisfactory

165. National Curriculum teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicated standards attained by pupils were well above the national average. New procedures for

assessments have been introduced to ensure that in 2003 this will more accurately reflect the work seen in Year 9 which was average.

166. In Year 7 pupils can design Logos for an estate agent combining text and graphics with some understanding of the need to consider the audience. They do not yet present information in different forms although they have begun to construct a database. Year 8 pupils are able to write a series of instructions to control the movement of a screen turtle, although only the more able understand how to make up procedures with these instructions and put one procedure inside another. By the end of Year 9 pupils can use a range of ICT tools to create leaflets, sports day programmes and a range of printed documents. They combine graphics and text for a specific audience but do not yet appreciate how to amend for different audiences. In Year 9 the most able pupils demonstrate a high level of skill in using the advanced features of a database package.

167. In the 2002 GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* - C overall was well below national figures. Girls attained above the national figures but the boys were well below. The 2002 results were below those achieved in previous years which were in line with national averages. Evidence from lessons and work seen during the inspection indicates that current standards are average. In Year 10 pupils can use a range of ICT facilities to create graphic and text printouts. They design labels for plants but do not appreciate that the name should be large enough for everyone to read. They use a spreadsheet to model the costs for various sized ponds, although they do not always understand how the formulae have been created. In Year 11 many pupils can analyse the success of their personal projects. They can create testing strategies although these do not always list the different types of error that need to be checked.

168. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers generally plan and structure their lessons well setting tasks which allow pupils to extend their knowledge of and skills in using ICT. Teachers prepare well for the differing learning needs of pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve as well as others and the gifted and talented demonstrate advanced skills. Teachers do not yet set targets for individual pupils and there is no formative procedure for assessing how well pupils are doing. In a very good Year 7 lesson, the teacher used a range of skills to ensure pupils were fully involved. Pupils enthusiastically answered searching questions and extended their understanding of how a database is set up. They were able to explain terms such as 'fields' and 'records' using them in context. In a good Year 9 lesson the teacher used the school detention form to examine how data is collected for input to a computer. Pupils completed the form and then engaged actively in a discussion, suggesting significant improvements. They used their ideas to create their own data capture form.

169. Pupils have very positive attitudes to ICT and behave well in lessons. They are ready to answer questions, and become involved in discussions. They enjoy ICT and work with concentration and a determination to extend their own knowledge and skills.

170. The ratio of computers to pupils is 10:1, which is below the national requirement. The accommodation is just satisfactory and no room has more than 20 computers, so some pupils have to share. The rooms do not have modern technological equipment to support presentation of lessons and not all the computers are fully networked. There is no dedicated technician for ICT nor office or storage space.

171. The Head of Department has managed satisfactorily the new network and introduced new schemes of work. The three teachers are well qualified and experienced but all have heavy timetables. The school is planning to introduce the national strategy in Years 7-9 in September 2003. No vocational courses are offered in Years 10 and 11 and the school is not meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum as not all pupils take ICT. There is a need to improve the work of the department in relation to choice of lesson topics, planning, marking and report writing. There has been some improvement since the previous inspection, but there is a need to develop further staff expertise, courses and access to ICT to ensure that all pupils receive their entitlement.

Key skills: contributions made by other subjects to pupils' competency in ICT

172. In music pupils use computers to help them compose and perform. Pupils search the Internet in art and design to provide information for making a video presentation and in religious education to extend their knowledge of Judaism in preparation for a visit to a synagogue. Pupils use a range of software in English to improve their written and spoken presentations. In modern foreign languages pupils develop language skills with the aid of ICT. There is limited use and access in mathematics, science, design and technology and history, although access to the on-site City Learning Centre is improving opportunities. There is no management structure to map and keep track of the ICT experiences of all pupils and insufficient in-service training to develop staff expertise in the use of ICT to support teaching and learning. Overall, standards in ICT across all subjects are below average.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSE results are above the national average in French. In German they are very high. Pupils of all ages learn well because of good teaching from a stable and experienced staff. Pupils benefit from the department's good use of ICT and its excellent home-made learning materials. 	
Areas for improvement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The department is not effective at sharing good practice through checking on the quality of teaching and marking. Beyond the classroom pupils have very little to extend their experience of learning a language. 	

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen: French	Above average	Above average
German	Above average	Well above average
Achievement over time French	Good	Good
German	Good	Good
Results in GCSE French	N/A	Above average
German	N/A	Very high
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Good	Good
Leadership of the subject	Satisfactory	
Management of the subject	Good	
Improvement since the previous inspection	Satisfactory	

173. Standards are above average in French and German. Pupils make good progress in their learning because teaching gives them plenty of opportunities to use the language actively. They are well drilled in speaking to each other in pairs. This allows them to learn through plenty of practice and as a result many are capable of holding brief but intelligible dialogues. Teachers are good speakers of French and German. They use the language a lot in lessons with the result that pupils understand more and more what they are hearing. This explains why pupils have good listening skills and respond swiftly to instructions in the language. However, they would benefit from more practice with their pronunciation which is

often too English-sounding. Also, they do not use the language enough to ask for things or apologise for being late. Teaching makes good use of vivid and colourful methods for capturing pupils' attention and helping them to learn. In a Year 7 French lesson a group of boys enacted a most enjoyable scene in a café which they had made up themselves. It was in very fluent and well-pronounced French.

174. In both French and German boys' results were similar to those of girls in 2002, in contrast to the national picture. In French, nearly a quarter of those who took GCSE achieved one of the top grades A* or A. GCSE results in German have been very high, and attainment in German in Year 11 is currently well above average, because teaching expects unusually high standards of pupils and pushes them hard. A group of able linguists in Year 11 watched a computer presentation about the rise of Nazism in Germany. They made very good sense of the explanation in advanced German and showed keen interest and sharp responses, learning very fast in the process.

175. Teachers use ICT to good effect. This helps many pupils to learn better and keeps their interest alive. They have too little chance to read freely in the foreign language, however, and high-attaining pupils would also benefit from opportunities to write more creatively.

176. Pupils with learning difficulties, boys as well as girls, make similar progress to other pupils. This is because they are in small classes and teachers adapt their methods to suit their needs. They give them enjoyable activities such as competitions and exercises on the computer that stimulate them and allow them to work at their own pace, building gradually on success.

177. The large majority of pupils are well disposed to learning a language and behave well. This applies to all age groups and boys as well as girls. They show respect for each other when they work together and can be trusted to work unsupervised. These positive attitudes contribute to pupils' good achievement and the progress they make over time.

178. Management of the department is strong and efficient. The department's bank of learning materials is an excellent resource. New teachers and students in training are very well supported. However, priorities are not focused clearly enough on the raising of standards. There is no culture of observing others teach or occasionally checking on the quality of marking. The result of this is that teaching, while good overall, is uneven in quality and marking is inconsistent. Apart from a well established annual exchange to Germany, there is little the department offers outside the classroom to enrich pupils' experience of learning a language. Given its stable and committed staff, the department is well placed to improve.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average and pupils make good progress through the school.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Extra-curricular music and instrumental lessons are of high quality and enrich pupils' experience of music.
- There has been good progress since the last inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Sometimes pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to learn independently.
- The progress of the department, including the monitoring of teaching, is not formally evaluated.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Above average	Above average
Achievement over time	Good	Good
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	Above average	Very high
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Very good	Very good
Leadership of the subject	Good	
Management of the subject	Good	
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good	

179. Pupils reach above average standards by the end of Year 9. They play the keyboards well in their performances of *With a Little Help from my Friends*. Their compositions using all the 12 tones are effective. Those composed by higher attainers use interesting and atmospheric sounds on the keyboard. Their listening and appraising skills are good. Standards in Year 11 are above average. They have good knowledge of musical techniques, which support their listening skills. Most pupils in Year 11 play woodwind and brass instruments or sing well. They play in the school band or sing in the choir, both of which provide challenging activities for those who are talented in music. All pupils make good progress through the school including those with special learning needs and pupils who are gifted and talented.

180. Teaching is good overall and many features are very good. Lessons are very well planned with plenty of variety to help pupils to concentrate. Interesting topics, particularly that on *Film Music*, enthuse the pupils, who talk animatedly about what they hear and know. When doing this and planning their work, the musical terms they use are a confident part of their vocabulary. Pupils are given opportunities to read out loud and silently in class. When playing music pupils in Year 7 are encouraged to keep a strong beat while creating interesting rhythms, which divide the beats into smaller note values. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 use computers to help them compose music. More computers will be needed to enable this to happen in Years 7 to 9. Pupils co-operate effectively when playing the keyboards and use well their potential to vary volume and tone. In Year 10, pupils play their pieces in class. This is a good strategy because not only do they get the opportunity to play to an audience, they also become familiar with the marking scheme for the examination and set themselves small targets for improvement. The teachers guide this very well and use their expertise to advise and support each pupil appropriately. This approach should be developed

more in Years 7 to 9, encouraging pupils' familiarity with the National Curriculum levels of attainment. Teachers are very encouraging and promote a good atmosphere for learning in class, especially for the lower attaining pupils. They are sometimes tempted to control pupils' learning too much in class, particularly with older pupils.

181. Pupils enjoy music. All behave maturely and responsibly and music provides very good opportunities for their personal development. The excellent band, which had just returned from a trip to Majorca, played eagerly with great attention and commitment in their rehearsal. Their trip had been an invaluable experience. The choirs, whose standards are also high, sing with commitment and enjoyment. About 100 pupils in the school learn to play instruments and many have reached an advanced standard. The quality of the lessons seen was very good and sometimes excellent as pupils prepare for their recitals. The department is well led and managed and the teachers have co-operated well to make good improvements since the last inspection. They need now to refine the assessment strategy for Years 7 to 9 and to put in place a formal system for reviewing and evaluating the progress made by the department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- There are good relationships amongst teachers and pupils.
- Pupils show interest and have positive attitudes to physical education
- Leadership and management of the department are good.
- There is good provision for extra curricular activities.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in GCSE physical education need to be improved.
- Teachers need to share good practice to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Teachers need to make better use of National Curriculum levels in teaching and assessment.
- The length of units of work should be increased to improve standards.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement over time	Good	Satisfactory
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	N/A	Average
Quality of teaching	Good	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Good	Satisfactory
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Good	Good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Management of the subject	Good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Satisfactory

182. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and reach average standards which are maintained in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have good subject knowledge and give clear explanations and demonstrations, which help pupils to make good progress in learning new skills. In a Year 7 mixed rugby lesson pupils quickly learned how to run with the ball, and how to score a try as they learned the rules and techniques.

183. Teachers plan lessons well in Years 7 to 9 with challenging tasks and high expectations of pupils to work hard. This leads to good progress as pupils build on skills during lessons. Pupils make very good progress in Year 8 dance and by the end of their first lesson they are able to perform short dance phrases, of eight and sixteen beats, incorporating fitness activities taken from football.

184. In Years 10 and 11 some lessons are less successful because planning does not fully take into account pupils' previous experience in the activity. Pupils are expected to play full games without the necessary basic skills. In a Year 10 volleyball lesson pupils understand the rules and how to serve, but their lack of skills in digging and passing results in a poor standard of team play and organisation.

185. Pupils' positive attitudes about the subject contribute to their learning, as they work hard at tasks set by teachers. However, they rarely have the opportunity to work independently at the start of lessons, as teachers control their warm up, which pupils could take charge of themselves. In GCSE Year 11 pupils are very task- focused as they complete personal projects making good use of ICT to improve the presentation of their work. However, some pupils, mainly boys, underachieve in GCSE, because their project work, a requirement of the examination board, is not of a sufficiently high standard. Assessment is used effectively to determine teaching groups in Year 7 swimming and at GCSE in Years 10 and 11. This helps teachers to set appropriate work for pupils' ability levels. In Year 7 swimming low attaining pupils work in a small group, where they can gain confidence in the water and start to learn correct swimming technique, as some pupils are as yet unable to swim expected distances for their age.

186. However, there is less use of assessment using national curriculum levels to help pupils know how well they are doing, and what targets they might set for themselves. The leadership and management of the department is good, with a well- planned curriculum and effective deployment of teachers, accommodation and resources. Although teaching is being monitored for performance management, this needs to be further developed, so that the quality of teaching across the department is improved. The school gained 'Sportsmark' in 2002, and the good provision of extra curricular activities of clubs and teams provides opportunities for all pupils, including the gifted and talented, to further develop their sporting skills and talents. There are strengths in boys' soccer, basketball, cricket and athletics, and in girls' netball, soccer, and athletics. The development of hockey is restricted because of the inadequate outdoor areas for this sport.

187. Since the previous inspection there has been satisfactory progress as standards have been maintained and although GCSE results are average for many pupils it is their best subject.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- There is good teaching in most lessons.
- Management and leadership are good.
- All pupils have the opportunity to gain accreditation in the subject.
- Assessment procedures have improved since the previous inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Boys' attainment is not as good as it should be.
- There are not enough learning activities for higher-attaining pupils.
- Speaking skills are not well developed.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement over time	Good	Good
Results in NC Tests & GCSE	N/A	Below average
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Attitudes of pupils to their work	Good	Good
Leadership of the subject		Good
Management of the subject		Good
Improvement since the previous inspection		Good

188. Results at GCSE in 2002 were below the national average. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Two pupils gained the highest grade and more than half met or exceeded their predicted grade. Results have varied from year to year and the numbers entered have been relatively small.

189. The attainment of most pupils in Year 11 is average and they achieve well. They have sound knowledge of key features of the religions they study. They apply this to moral issues considered in lessons. They express their own views in ways which show that they understand religious and moral teachings. Written work is stronger than oral work. Verbal answers to questions are often brief and undeveloped. Adapted materials help pupils with learning difficulties to make good progress and most pupils achieve well. Talented and gifted pupils achieve satisfactorily.

190. The attainment of most pupils in Year 9 is average. They can describe some main features of religion, make links between religious teaching and moral issues and many express their own views, especially in project work, with evident thought and sincerity. The attainment of girls is generally better than boys because the written work of some boys is brief, superficial and poorly presented. Good support from teachers helps pupils with learning difficulties to make good progress and most pupils achieve well. Lessons are enhanced by visits to religious communities and places of worship and there are very good links with local Christian groups. The subject is making a distinctive contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

191. The quality of teaching and learning in most lessons is good. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject, enabling them to plan lessons which help pupils to understand religious ideas and to relate these to their own lives. Good teaching on a range of issues in

Year 11 such as marriage, the sanctity of life and rites of passage required pupils to research the topics and formulate their own views. Teachers plan a good variety of activities in lessons.

192. Good use of ICT enabled pupils in a Year 8 lesson to extend their knowledge of Judaism and to prepare for a forthcoming visit to a synagogue.

193. Pupils respond particularly well to opportunities for more extended written work and personal research. A Year 9 assessment on the moral and religious debate about abortion gave pupils an opportunity to reflect on their views and stimulated many thoughtful comments. In a minority of lessons hurried conclusions do not allow for effective reinforcement of learning. Teachers do not always provide opportunities for higher attaining pupils to work at a faster pace, or encourage pupils to develop their speaking skills by requiring fuller answers to the questions they ask.

194. Management of the department is good. The head of department provides effective leadership to a team of specialist and non-specialist teachers. Assessment procedures have been improved since the previous inspection, although marking of pupils' work does not always give clear guidance about how they can improve. The schemes of work give good guidance to teachers although there is no regular monitoring of teaching. Clear targets for improvement, including raising attainment for boys, have been set. This is a good department, making a significant contribution to the life of the school and the development of pupils.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. Inspectors in their subject reports refer to 2001 results when comparing students' attainment with national figures.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	33	58	*	6	*	1.2	*
Chemistry	12	100	*	42	*	3.2	*
Biology	17	82	*	18	*	2.2	*
Physics	17	82	*	24	*	2.1	*
Design technology	17	88	*	18	*	2.2	*
Business studies	28	93	*	25	*	2.6	*
Economics	6	67	*	33	*	2	*
ICT	18	89	*	22	*	2.3	*
Physical education	16	88	*	19	*	2.3	*
Art and design	15	100	*	27	*	2.5	*
Music	5	100	*	60	*	3.8	*
Theatre studies	5	80	*	0	*	1.8	*
Media studies	32	100	*	53	*	3.5	*
Geography	33	94	*	6	*	2.2	*
History	23	91	*	30	*	2.4	*
Religious studies	9	100	*	33	*	2.7	*
Politics	4	100	*	50	*	3.5	*
Sociology	17	94	*	29	*	2.5	*
Psychology	34	74	*	27	*	2.1	*
English language	19	100	*	32	*	2.8	*
English literature	9	89	*	11	*	2.2	*
French	2	0	*	0	*	0	*
German	6	83	*	33	*	2.5	*
Spanish	2	100	*	50	*	2.5	*

* National comparative data for AS level results in 2002 are not yet available.

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	16	94	*	56	*	6.9	*
Chemistry	17	94	*	41	*	5.8	*
Biology	19	95	*	32	*	5.2	*
Physics	10	90	*	40	*	5.4	*
Design and technology	9	100	*	22	*	4.2	*
Business studies	20	100	*	5	*	4.7	*
ICT	7	71	*	14	*	3.1	*
Physical education	16	81	*	13	*	4.4	*
Art and design	3	67	*	0	*	2.7	*
Health and social care	10	100	*	0	*	9.6	*
Media studies	12	100	*	67	*	8	*
Geography	31	100	*	55	*	7.0	*
History	18	89	*	6	*	4.2	*
Religious studies	7	100	*	0	*	3.7	*
Politics	10	100	*	50	*	6.8	*
Sociology	19	100	*	16	*	5.3	*
Psychology	23	100	*	17	*	5	*
English language	15	100	*	27	*	6.1	*
English literature	9	100	*	56	*	7.3	*
French	3	100	*	33	*	6.7	*
German	3	100	*	33	*	7.3	*
Spanish	1	100	*	0	*	4	*

** National comparative data for A Level and AVCE results in 2002 are not yet available.*

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and biology. Chemistry and physics were sampled. Results at A2 in chemistry were above average in 2001. They were not as strong the following year. One lesson in chemistry was observed in which teaching and learning were very good. Performance in the 2001 A2 examination in physics was below average and there is evidence of some underachievement in recent years. Teaching is good in both physics and chemistry. There is good provision for students who re-sit examinations. Most students complete these courses.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Very strong teacher – pupil relationships result in high levels of interest and commitment.
- The teaching of the subject by well-qualified staff is good.
- There are very positive attitudes to the subject by students, especially in Year 13.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough checking of the quality of teaching and this limits the spread of good practice across the department.
- There is insufficient time for GCSE re-sit lessons.

Key judgements:

Standards of work seen	Average
Achievement over time	Good
Results in examinations in 2001	Below average
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good
Leadership of the subject	Satisfactory
Management of the subject	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

195. A2 results in 2001 were below average. In previous years they have been above average or well above average. Results in 2002 were better than in 2001.

196. The achievement of pupils taking A level mathematics has been at least satisfactory and in some years good. The school has much detailed analysis of students' prior attainment and of their achievement over time. This data clearly shows that over the past few years the trend in students' achievement has been slowly improving and has always been satisfactory. The few students who take further mathematics have also made satisfactory progress over time. There is little difference between the achievement of male and female students. The progress being made by the present group of sixth formers is good when compared with their attainment at GCSE.

197. Students can choose to study mathematics or further mathematics at A level or can re-sit GCSE mathematics. Within the modular structure of the course students have a choice of which modules to study. The retention rate of students during Year 12 is good. Those students who re-sit GCSE mathematics have a timetable with one normal lesson and

two sessions during lunchtimes. As many students cannot attend the full lesson this results in inadequate provision for this subject. Although some students do improve their GCSE grades during Year 12 this timetabling arrangement is unsatisfactory.

198. Teaching is good overall with some very good aspects. The A level course is well organised, lessons are well planned and teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are designed to draw students into the session and to challenge them appropriately. Teachers make effective use of question and answer sessions to generate high levels of interest and ensure student involvement. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on parametric equations the teacher invited students to explain the significance of parametric equations and their derivatives. Although initially confused, students gained confidence as the topic was discussed and soon understood the principles involved. As a result learning was very good, some students consolidating their learning in algebra and calculus as well.

199. The involvement and interest generated by good teaching in lessons helps to promote good learning. Over the longer term, however, some students' technical weaknesses in algebra (and, in some cases, poor retention of prior learning) tends to slow their progress. The A level courses are self contained so independent learning in the form of research is rare, except in the case of a few students who make use of the Internet. Other than this, computer facilities are little used in A level teaching although students are confident in the use of graphical calculators.

200. Students appreciate that teachers are approachable outside lessons and value the help that they are given both in the classroom and away from it. The views of all students about the subject are positive, especially in Year 13. The regular marking of work is very good – comments are helpful and indicate how students might improve. As a result students are very clear about their potential in the subject. This good practice in marking makes homework very effective in reinforcing learning.

201. Teachers discuss ideas about teaching strategies readily amongst themselves but there is little formal checking on the quality of teaching. This should be improved in order to spread best practice among all members of the department.

Biology

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

Strengths

- In the best lessons there is good teaching and students make good progress.
- Students behave well, work hard and show enthusiasm.
- Relationships are good and students are confident that they have access to advice.
- The checking of students' work and setting targets are good; students know how well they are doing.

Areas for improvement

- Results in A level courses are below average.
- The quality of teaching is not checked systematically.
- Some lessons lack variety in the range of learning activities.

Key judgements:

Standards of work seen	Below average
Achievement over time	Satisfactory
Results in examinations in 2001	Below average
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Satisfactory
Attitudes of students to their work	Good
Leadership of the subject	Unsatisfactory
Management of the subject	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

202. In 2001 the percentage of students who gained the highest A level grades was less than half the national average and nearly half of the students gained results that were one grade or more below what was expected from their GCSE results. There was a similar picture of students' under-achievement the following year, when the same proportion of students failed to gain their predicted grades. Students do less well in biology than in the other subjects they study and in 2002 boys did much less well than girls. However, evidence from work seen during the inspection indicates that students are now making satisfactory progress in lessons and that the achievements of the present students since they began their courses are also satisfactory, largely because teaching and learning are now, in the main, satisfactory.

203. In a Year 13 lesson students' understanding of the damage caused by alcohol was about average although high achievers did much better. Understanding of the way in which sense cells allow the eye to detect different colours was below average. In a Year 12 lesson about pulse rates and fitness, students' knowledge of the reasons for changes in blood pressure was below average and some were well below average. By the end of the A level course, students' achievements are satisfactory because their starting point is below average.

204. Teaching is satisfactory overall: some is good and occasionally there is unsatisfactory teaching. In the best lessons teachers ask demanding questions. They provide clear explanations and provide a variety of tasks such as reading and research activities about the liver. Very good use is made of PowerPoint presentations and the Internet is used for research about nutrition and digestion. Good advice about answering examination questions is given frequently and good quality information sheets are provided. Relationships are good and as a result students are usually willing to answer questions. Sometimes teaching is unsatisfactory. Then planning is poor and students have no opportunities for independent learning; there is no demanding questioning and there are no checks on understanding during the lesson. On these occasions the teacher leads too much of the lesson, explanations are too brief and the progress made by students is unsatisfactory. Students' notes are not checked to ensure that they are complete and some work is not detailed enough to meet the needs of AS and A level courses.

205. Students work hard in lessons. They are often but not always willing to answer questions, although they will do so if teachers encourage them. Some work in students' folders is incomplete and poorly organised; it will not be useful for revision.

206. Good long-term planning ensures that syllabus requirements are met and that books and other resources are available, but the planning of individual lessons fails to provide for the variety of teaching methods that is needed. Teaching is not checked and there are no plans aimed at improving the quality of unsatisfactory teaching. Evaluation of students' work has not led to strategies to improve performance through, for example, following up poorly organised work in students' folders.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

There was no focused subject in this curriculum area but A level product design was sampled. Standards of work seen were average. Large numbers of students follow this course in Year 12. Teaching and learning are good. Students work on a good range of product development, for example designing a removable plug for disabled people. The use of ICT in design is especially good. Several teachers teach the course. Nearly all students continue through to the examination.

BUSINESS

The focus for the inspection was on business studies and economics. No other subjects were sampled.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers know the subject very well.
- Good quality marking ensures students make good progress.
- Students are positive about the subject.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough use of ICT to support learning.
- The range of learning activities for students is somewhat narrow.
- The present examination course does not meet the needs of all the students.

Key judgements:

Standards of work seen	Average
Achievement over time	Good
Results in examinations in 2001	Average
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good
Leadership of the subject	Good
Management of the subject	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

207. Standards of work seen in lessons are average. The 2001 AS examination results were average. In 2002 the majority of students did better than was predicted taking account of their performance at GCSE. All A2 students achieved a pass grade in the 2001 examination in line with previous years. Just under half did better than was expected. Results in A2 for 2002, the first for the new A level specifications, were not as good as the previous year. Few students gained higher grades. There is no significant difference between the performance of male and female students.

208. The quality of written work is good and shows a sound knowledge of business concepts although students' analytical skills are less strong. Year 12 students develop a good understanding of general aspects of the business environment, and are clear about the purpose and value of developing business objectives. Most are able to state how these objectives influence the direction the business takes. They are making good progress and

achieving well. Year 13 students make satisfactory progress with some students achieving well. They recognise the additional challenge of A2. Students make good use of the local business community but spend too little time working independently to improve their understanding of wider business issues. This affects their chances of achieving the higher grades.

209. The quality of teaching is good. Lessons benefit from detailed planning and clear lesson objectives. Teachers know their subject well and mostly take care to present it in a clear way. The pace of lessons is matched well to the needs of all students and teachers have high expectations. Relatively small groups enable teachers to have a good knowledge of the students, so that they are able to support individual needs. On occasions teachers provide too much direction and give students too little opportunity to develop and extend their answers to questions. Lessons are structured but at times there is too little time for students to properly review and evaluate their learning. There is insufficient use made of ICT. Students apply themselves well but some have problems expressing themselves clearly both in their oral and written work. They are aware of how well they are doing through good marking which provides plenty of information on how to improve. Attitudes to the subject are good even though students do not exhibit great enthusiasm when discussing their work. There is a quiet commitment to success.

210. The department is well led and managed and specialist teachers work together well. They make good use of well-established business links. The accommodation is adequate to meet the needs of the subject. Whilst most students are served well by the A level course there is currently no vocational alternative to support differing learning needs.

211. The department has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

Economics

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

Strengths

- Teachers' knowledge of their subject is very good.
- Good quality marking and guidance promotes progress.
- Students demonstrate commitment to the subject and achieve well in relation to their attainment at GCSE.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of ICT to improve learning.

Key judgements:

Standards of work seen	Average
Achievement over time	Good
Results in examinations in 2001	N/A
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good
Leadership of the subject	Good
Management of the subject	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

212. Standards of work are average for students in both years. Four out of the six students entered for the AS examination in 2002 gained a pass grade at a level above that predicted by their performance in GCSE. Those four students are now taking A2 and are making good

progress. There are no A2 results for 2001 or 2002. Comparison with national statistics is unreliable given the very small numbers taking the subject.

213. Students are able to explain the difference between macro and micro economic theory. They recognise that the A2 work is more challenging than AS and some struggle to provide clear and concise explanations of theory of economic growth. Those in Year 12, having spent the previous three weeks looking at economic indicators, were able to apply their knowledge. Most can interpret data, with minimal assistance, relating it to how the economy works. In both years students are insecure in their oral presentations. Some find difficulty in explaining aspects of the subject using appropriate technical language.

214. The quality of teaching is good. Lessons are well prepared with good supporting resources that are accessible to all students. There is generally a good range of activities to ensure full student involvement and participation. This means that most lessons are taught at a good pace. Teachers know their students well. Good relationships between teachers and students contribute to the effective learning that takes place. Teachers show an awareness of the range of ability within the small groups and manage the learning with sensitivity, therefore maintaining a good level of motivation. The level of challenge usually matches the needs of the students. On occasions there is inefficient use of time when students are required to reproduce notes from overhead projector slides. On these occasions students are inclined to accept, without question, lessons that use too limited a range of teaching methods. The quality of learning is good because teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and students are usually attentive. They respond to teachers' questioning and are productive when set tasks. At times students are over-reliant on teachers and show a low level of independence, rarely questioning what teachers say. Students generally have a positive approach, though, and the quality of folders suggests good application and commitment to success.

215. The department is well managed and members of staff work as a cohesive team complementing each other's strengths. The good leadership ensures that the majority of students achieve their potential, and some exceed it. Some students, however, find the course very challenging and may be more suited to courses with a stronger vocational bias. There is insufficient use of ICT in the subject. Resources are limited and therefore do not encourage staff or students to use computers readily for research, presentation, or testing economic models.

216. The department has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

There was no focused subject inspection in this curriculum area. ICT was sampled. A2 results were well below average in 2001 and in 2002. Five out of seven students achieved pass grades. Performance has been variable and sometimes poor in recent years but there has been some improvement overall. Teaching and learning in the two observed lessons were satisfactory. A very high proportion of students continue through to the examination.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

There was no focused subject inspection in this curriculum area. Physical education was sampled. One lesson was observed in which teaching and learning were very good. A2 results have been above average until 2001 when they were average. There was some improvement in 2002. Physical education is a popular subject in Year 12. Some students begin the course with no previous examination experience of the subject and with lower than average grades at GCSE.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

There was no focused subject inspection in this curriculum area. Health and social care AVCE was sampled. Students cover an impressive range of assignments. The course is supported by broad range of visiting speakers and visits to places such as care homes.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The inspection focused on media studies. Art and design, music, and theatre studies were sampled. Two lessons were seen in art and design. Students' examination performance varies from year to year. In 2001 results in the A2 examination were above average; students did well at the higher grades. Performance was not as strong in 2002. AS results in 2001 were below average but improved in 2002. Teaching and learning are good. Students know how to research well and are developing as individual artists in work that shows much flair. Sketchbooks are used well and students develop good, creative ICT skills. A very high proportion of students continue to the end of the course. The very small numbers of students taking music each year make comparisons with national figures unreliable. However, in 2001 the three students entered at A2 all achieved the highest grades in the subject. There were no candidates in the following year. Two lessons were observed in which teaching and learning were good. There were no A2 theatre studies candidates in 2002. The previous year eight students took the examination. Attainment was above the national average; all passed with over half at the higher grades. All students achieved the grades predicted for them. Students did less well at AS in 2002. The number of students taking the course varies greatly from year to year. There is only one student in the current Year 13 who is taught for part of the time with Year 12 students. One lesson was seen in which teaching and learning were good. Overall, standards in this lesson were below average.

Media studies

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are excellent
- The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.
- The range of support material provided for students is excellent.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are excellent.

Areas for improvement

None

Key judgements

Standards of work seen	High
Achievement over time	Excellent
Results in examinations in 2001	Well above average
Quality of teaching	Excellent
Quality of learning	Excellent
Attitudes of students to their work	Excellent
Leadership of the subject	Excellent
Management of the subject	Excellent
Improvement since the last inspection	N/A

217. Media studies is a strength of the school. Teaching and learning are excellent and this is resulting in work of a high standard.

218. Students are very good users of a range of practical media skills. They use ICT exceptionally well to support and express their ideas and can apply their knowledge in practical productions. They understand and can apply key concepts and use them well to evaluate text and film. Their knowledge of contemporary media and the social, historical, and economic contexts of their studies is very good. All are developing good independent research skills.

219. Leadership is excellent. Links with outside organisations have been established and further developments with higher education are planned. The course is managed extremely well and is attracting large numbers of students. Every detail of study has been considered and planning is very detailed. Students are exceptionally well provided with information and support material to enable them to successfully complete the course. This has resulted in all A2 students in 2002 achieving grades A to C and the majority of AS students achieving grades A to B. These results are higher than predicted from previous performance and students did better in media studies than in their other subjects.

220. In lessons teachers use new technology very effectively to clarify objectives and students can find essential learning material and store their work on-line in the new, excellently equipped ICT learning centre. Students are able to analyse how different aspects of characters are represented in films with a similar theme but from different periods. Judgements are well considered and clearly expressed because students regularly draft and redraft their views.

221. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject. They help students manipulate images and develop very good technical skills using sophisticated computer programmes. They provide students with suitable tasks that require them to link theory and practice. Students have regular individual tutorials and receive very helpful guidance. Students are successfully encouraged to use appropriate media vocabulary and, most importantly, they are encouraged to think and learn for themselves. Teachers have very high expectations, work very hard and make demands on students who respond in a very positive manner. Students discuss racial and sexual representation in the media – these issues are handled extremely well, leading to mature responses from students.

222. Lessons are brisk and are very efficiently managed, in part due to the programme of monitoring of teaching and learning in order to share good practice. The use of timed deadlines creates a sense of urgency in lessons which helps moves students on. Activities are very productive and not a moment is wasted.

223. Both male and female students achieve well and gain in skill, knowledge and self-confidence. They recognise that they are treated as adult learners and say that they are blossoming on the course.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography. History, religious studies, politics, sociology and psychology were sampled. History is a subject that is growing in popularity. Students particularly enjoy American history and their view of the subject is very positive. Examination results were well below average in 2001 but improved in 2002. The quality of teaching and learning in the two lessons observed was at least satisfactory. The small number of students entered for politics in 2001 achieved average standards. There was some improvement in 2002. One lesson was observed in which teaching and learning were very good. Students are very positive about the subject. Sociology is a popular subject which is attracting a growing number of students. A2 and AS results in 2001 were above average and improved in 2002. Two lessons were observed where teaching and learning were very good. Psychology

is a popular subject. In both 2001 and 2002 all students passed the examination achieving results which were broadly average. Teaching and learning are good and students reach the grades predicted for them. In all subjects a very high proportion of students complete the course through to examination.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Girls achieve standards that are above the national average.?
- The very good programme of fieldwork strengthens students' understanding.
- Students are well motivated and have very positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- The highest-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently.
- The department does not check on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The allocation of staff to teaching groups is unsatisfactory.

Key judgements

Standards of work seen	Average
Achievement over time	Satisfactory
Results in examinations in 2001	Average
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Satisfactory
Attitudes of students to their work	Good
Leadership of the subject	Good
Management of the subject	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

224. Students' overall attainment by the end of Year 13 is average. AS results in 2001 were above the national average but were not as strong the following year. Results in the A2 level examination have improved significantly since 2000, when results were below the national average and those at the higher levels were significantly below average. In 2002 results were significantly stronger with all 31 students attaining an A-G grade and a half achieving A or B grades. Female students consistently gain better results than the men as they complete their investigations more thoroughly. The department has implemented a strategy to overcome this problem. During the inspection the standard of work seen was average.

225. Students have a good knowledge of how landscapes and cities may change. They clearly understand how planning for change may create conflict, for example, over the redevelopment of a town centre, and how to resolve the views of differing groups of people. In lessons and in written work they show that they understand geographical models and terms, which the higher-attaining students use effectively. Students have good skills in fieldwork investigation, analysing data, reading maps, and using ICT for research. They successfully develop knowledge of a range of examples to illustrate the topics they are studying. However, teachers do not check students' notes and files, and many are not completed thoroughly and in enough depth and detail.

226. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to give clearly structured and well-illustrated explanations. They rarely use it to extend the challenge presented to the highest-attaining students through more rigorous questioning or extending the range of materials for them to study. The best lessons are

carefully planned with a good range of activities to extend and reinforce learning and ensure that pupils are fully involved. In one lesson in Year 12, for instance, students successfully studied a local conflict of interest regarding the use of speedboats on a beautiful lake. The lesson started briskly with a video which students watched intently. They then used their good map skills to study a map of the site and discuss intelligently possible areas of conflict. The lively pace of the lesson continued as students worked co-operatively in groups using well-chosen pictorial and newspaper evidence to establish the views of the people involved and discuss their findings with other groups. Finally they drew sensible conclusions and assessed the good progress made.

227. In some lessons, however, teachers dominate the discussion, do not make enough use of the ideas suggested by students, and do not provide opportunity for them to work with each other to test ideas and consolidate their understanding. The relationship between teachers and students is very good so students are well motivated, and work hard and conscientiously. Teachers mark assessment items thoroughly and make helpful comments to explain what students do wrong and how they can improve.

228. Leadership is good. There is a clear sense of purpose and a focus on raising standards. The subject is managed well. Students have a very positive view of the subject. The allocation of staff to the subject is unsatisfactory. Five teachers teach one lesson a week to the Year 13 group and a similar pattern occurs in Year 12. There is, consequently, insufficient coherence and consistency in course planning and assessment. There is no systematic checking of the quality of the course or the quality of teaching and learning. Accommodation is good. There is a commitment and capacity to raise standards further.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English literature, English language and German. French was sampled. A2 results in French were broadly average in 2001. There was some improvement in 2002. All students passed but overall achievement was below the grades predicted for students. Teaching and learning were satisfactory in the 2 lessons observed but lacks the pace and high expectations evident in German.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Students enjoy lessons.
- Teaching is good; some is very good.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The range of approaches used in the classroom is a little narrow.
- Too little attention is paid to checking the quality of teaching.
- The planning of the course could be improved.

Key judgements:

Standards of work seen	Average
Achievement over time	Satisfactory
Results in examinations in 2001	Average
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good
Leadership of the subject	Satisfactory
Management of the subject	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

229. Students' work in both Years 12 and 13 shows that they have average knowledge and understanding of literary texts. Most students in Year 12 were able to explore the use of language in a play by Christopher Marlowe by drawing on the text to illustrate their ideas. In both years higher attaining students write very fluently, organise their essays well and express some sophisticated ideas. In Year 13 some students have a good grasp of literary terminology and use it well. They were able to explore the impact of structure in *The Color Purple* and the way it affects the reader. Middle and lower attaining students have more limited understanding and although they are well prepared in lessons do not develop their ideas in much depth in their essays. They do not write at great length. Some students do not check their work for technical errors. More confident students enjoyed and participated well in discussion to speculate about character and motivation. They made astute points about Faustus's arrogance. They demonstrated thorough knowledge of the play and were developing good understanding of the life and times in which the play is set.

230. Standards in examinations have fluctuated in recent years. In 2000 results were well below average. In 2002 they were much better. Achievement over this period has been satisfactory and is now improving as a result of good teaching.

231. Students are positive about the subject. They enjoy the exchange of ideas although not all participate well in discussion. They listen carefully, make notes spontaneously, and respond well when questioned in class. Work in files and folders suggests that some students work harder than others. They cooperate well.

232. Teachers know the subject well and transmit their enthusiasm to students. Humour is used effectively. Relationships in the classroom are very good; teachers know their students and this helps more reserved students to express their ideas and opinions. Teachers strike a good balance between informality and purposefulness. Discussion is mostly well led and more confident students respond well to stimulating and probing questions. Teachers are generally well prepared but most lessons follow a similar format which, although appreciated by students, sometimes presents a limited range of activities and opportunities for learning. Students would benefit from more varied and structured approaches. Although lessons move at satisfactory pace, sometimes too much time is given to discussion so that a clear focus is not maintained and key points are lost. Students' work is very well marked and teachers then give students good advice about how to improve. Lessons have a useful and appropriate focus on examination strategies and techniques so that students are clear about what will be required. They are given good supporting reading material to help them extend their ideas and reading.

233. Day-to-day management of the subject runs smoothly. Arrangements to ensure work to cover teachers' absence were quickly made. Students' work is regularly and accurately assessed and there are annual checks to make sure grading is in line with national standards. Teachers are very well informed about students' earlier assessments and are given predicted grades based on students' earlier results so they know what a student should

achieve. Students receive good individual support and teachers are willing to give time outside lessons.

234. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. In order to improve standards further there should be more detailed course planning and monitoring of teaching to ensure that good practice is shared amongst teachers.

English language

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding of students' needs to enable them to plan suitable lessons.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not share good practice by watching each other teach.

Key judgements:

Standards of work seen	Below average
Achievement over time	Satisfactory
Results in examinations in 2001	Well below average
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good
Leadership of the subject	Satisfactory
Management of the subject	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	N/A

235. Students in Year 12 show knowledge and understanding of the use of language in political speeches. They have identified the techniques used by politicians, and have analysed speeches, identifying the use of statistics, repetition, parenthesis and other rhetorical devices. They compose their own quite realistic speeches, with the help of support materials provided by the teacher, showing good skills in the use of computers for word processing and Internet research. Students in Year 13 show understanding of the factors that influence language and bring about change. They recognise new language usages in a text provided and, with the help of a reference document provided by the teacher, identify the categories. Students identify language acquisition models represented by examples in a task sheet and justify their choices. They offer sensible contributions to discussion from their own linguistic experiences, but in general are not comfortable in the use of specialised linguistic terminology.

236. Achievement over time is satisfactory and is improving. Students begin studying in Year 12 with levels of attainment in GCSE English which are below average for an A level English language course. They make steady progress, achieving grades at AS level which are at least in line with their GCSE grades on entry to the course and go on to similar success in the A2 examination. Overall, standards of attainment are below average.

237. The subject is not a longstanding option for students in the sixth form. The first entry was in 1998, and results at that time and since, with the exception of one year, have been consistently well below the national average. Attainment was much better in 2002 when students' average points were slightly better than the national average for the previous year.

There is no national comparator for 2002. Results at AS in 2002 are in line with the national average for the previous year.

238. The quality of teaching and learning is good and students are making good progress. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and good understanding of students' needs which enable the planning of appropriate lessons. They are painstaking in their explanations, so that students develop good understanding, and teachers consolidate that understanding by providing a variety of support materials. Relationships between teachers and students are good, which encourages students to participate and work co-operatively. Some are quite dependent upon the teacher's input.

239. Students' views of the course are very positive. They find the subject interesting, the teaching stimulating, and they enjoy the relaxed and friendly atmosphere in lessons. They appreciate being treated as young adults. They feel teachers are always there to help and are clear about the progress they are making because of the helpful comments on their work. Many students say it is their favourite subject. The appeal of the subject is clear from the high numbers who stay on from AS in Year 12 and on to A2 in Year 13.

240. The subject is well managed. Teaching is shared between teachers to give students variety of experience and students' progress is carefully recorded. The subject leader has a clear view of the requirements of the subject but at present there is no observation of teaching and learning to share good practice and improve standards.

German

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

Strengths

- Results at A Level have been above average in recent years except for 2001.
- Students learn well through teaching that is demanding and proficient.
- Students in Year 12 benefit from a well-established exchange to Germany.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers of German do not take enough opportunity to share good practice by observing each other teach.
- The withdrawal of a foreign language assistant has reduced students' opportunities to speak in German.

Key judgements:

Standards of work seen	Above average
Achievement over time	Good
Results in examinations in 2001	Well below average
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good
Leadership of the subject	Satisfactory
Management of the subject	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

241. A Level results in 2001 were not typical of students' performance over the past few years. In recent years results have been above the national average and in 2002 results were much better than in the previous year. Taken together, students have achieved above average results and have fulfilled expectations of them, given their prior attainment.

242. Year 13 students have made strong progress since starting the course. They speak German with good pronunciation and are confidently fluent when they talk about their chosen topics. Students have to listen carefully to their teachers who speak in fast uncompromising German. As a result they have developed above-average comprehension. Their writing, too, is well developed. They have good research skills, making ample use of the Internet, and write thoughtfully in idiomatic German on issues that interest them such as the First World War and the importance in literature of children's fairy tales. Thorough, helpful marking allows them to learn from their mistakes.

243. Year 12 students demonstrate broadly average standards of attainment. They listen well and understand much of their teachers' fluent German. The higher-attaining students have left behind the simple prescribed utterances of GCSE and are now adapting language successfully to form complex structures in speech and writing. Other students, however, have not made similar progress and have difficulty forming the German they know into full intelligible sentences. These students in particular need more practice in speaking and constructing sentences than they are currently getting. At this level all students could benefit greatly from individual conversation with a foreign language assistant.

244. Students at both stages benefit from strong teaching conducted entirely in German. At its best this teaching is very challenging and makes use of vivid and engaging methods for getting students to develop their fluency. Year 13 students were discussing German history during the Second World War, for example. The teacher gave them cards with "trigger" words from which they had to form sentences to show what they knew about the period. This was most effective in prompting them to think on their feet and make spontaneous responses in German.

245. Where teaching relies heavily on the textbook and does not plan for active rehearsal of language, students do not learn as fast or commit new grammar to memory as well. This is because they are not as directly involved in their own learning. In this respect teachers, and hence students, would benefit from opportunities to share ideas and best practice through observing others teach and discussing methods that work well. There is no such culture of openness at present.

246. On the whole, however, students appreciate the quality of teaching they receive and the good support they have had from their teachers. They have good relationships with their teachers and are positive about all aspects of the course. Several of them have benefited from the annual exchange to Sandhausen in Germany, which has developed their linguistic skills and broadened their cultural horizons. The school has withdrawn the services of a German language assistant whose very good individual help last year with language development was greatly valued by both students and staff.