

INSPECTION REPORT

ST JOHN'S RC COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Bishop Auckland

LEA area: Durham

Unique reference number: 114325

Headteacher: Mr G. Moran

Reporting inspector: Mr R. Drew

7281

Dates of inspection: 16th – 20th September 2002

Inspection number: 249769

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:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Woodhouse Lane Bishop Auckland County Durham
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr F. T. Wilson
Date of previous inspection:	September 1996

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7281	R. Drew	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and pupils' achievements How well the school is led and managed What the school should do to improve further?
9710	R. Burgess	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents How well does the school care for its pupils
4677	V. Banks	Team inspector	Geography Educational inclusion The provision for pupils with English as an additional language	
30899	K. G. Boden	Team inspector	Design and technology	
1547	G. Clarke	Team inspector	Biology (Sixth Form)	
18447	R. L. Cohen	Team inspector	Business education (Sixth Form) History (Sixth Form)	
19586	W. Easterby	Team inspector	English	
27416	T. Howard	Team inspector	Mathematics	
21785	V. Kerr	Team inspector	Science Chemistry (Sixth Form)	
31963	M. Padmore	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
19867	M. Pettitt	Team inspector	Art and design (11-16) History (11-16)	
4829	I. Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages (11-16)	
7222	A. Watson	Team inspector	Music Provision for pupils with special educational needs	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils
12972	T. K. Weaden	Team inspector	Physical education	How well are pupils taught

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St John's is an 11 to 18 Roman Catholic comprehensive school with 1260 pupils on roll, of whom 214 are sixth form students. It serves the parishes of south west Durham, including the town of Bishop Auckland. Pupils come from a range of social and economic backgrounds: fewer pupils than average (14 per cent) are entitled to free school meals, but more homes than average are entitled to family credits. The great majority of pupils are white, with less than one per cent coming from ethnic minority communities, notably Indian and Bangladeshi. Only two pupils have English as an additional language. Travellers' children comprise another very small minority group of pupils. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average and covers a very wide range. At 1.8 per cent, the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is below average, and there is a below-average proportion of pupils, 14.6 per cent, on the register.

Since the previous inspection, the number on roll has risen significantly, especially in the sixth form, and the school is heavily over-subscribed each year. A new headteacher and two new deputies were appointed in 2001 and three assistant headteachers the year before. The school acquired technology college status in 1996 and has had this reaffirmed very recently. It has joined the Bishop Auckland Excellence in Clusters Project this year.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. It develops pupils into highly motivated, very well behaved and sociable young adults. Standards are above national average for 14 year olds and for pupils aged 16. Teaching is collectively very good and the school is very effectively led and managed. The school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Leadership and management are very good. The sense of direction and the way in which the school's aims and values permeate its work are excellent. The current and previous leadership teams have achieved very good improvement since the last inspection.
- The social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils is very good, including excellent moral guidance, and very good support for pupils' personal development.
- Very good teaching and learning are characterised by high expectations and very high achievement.
- There is good achievement at each stage of learning, leading to above-average standards at ages 14 and 16.
- The attitudes of pupils and students are excellent, as are relationships between pupils and staff.
- A very good curriculum is provided for all age groups, well tailored to pupils' and students' needs.
- The school provides a very pleasant working environment as a result of the high-quality contribution of support and site maintenance staff.

What could be improved

- Good practice in assessment should be supported and extended by helping all staff to use national base-line data, targets for academic attainment in all subjects and National Curriculum levels, GCSE and post-16 grades in report writing.
- Staff expertise in day-to-day lessons in the use of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills should be extended.
- There is a need to complete the implementation of extensive monitoring of teaching to ensure best practice is fully disseminated.
- Accommodation and resources for the library, science laboratories, dedicated sixth form teaching rooms and drama are unsatisfactory.
- Standards in some subjects are below the school's otherwise impressive standards, notably in modern languages, geography and drama in Years 10 and 11.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement has been very good. Most of the key issues raised in the report of September 1996 have been tackled successfully: the sixth form curriculum has expanded greatly, support for pupils with special educational needs is now good and initiatives are regularly reviewed. While the formal systems for monitoring teaching are satisfactory rather than strong, teaching quality has nevertheless improved dramatically from 84 per cent "satisfactory or better" in 1996 to 99 per cent in this category in 2002.

In addition, the school's results for all age groups have risen noticeably and its growing popularity has led to a large increase in the number on roll. In the sixth form, student numbers have risen from 65 to 214. There have also been marked improvements in accommodation and resources, though further increases are necessary.

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

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

Pupils enter Year 7 with broadly average standards of attainment. By the age of 14, they achieve results in National Curriculum tests that are well above the national average in English and science, and still above average in mathematics. Work seen during the inspection across the full range of subjects is also collectively above average, indicating that pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9. Progress is particularly strong in English; it is good in most other subjects and satisfactory in history, geography and modern languages.

At the age of 16, pupils again reach above-average standards. Taking the last three years together, the proportion of A* to C grades significantly exceeds the national figure, and the unvalidated 2002 results strongly confirm this position. The school has chosen to enter many pupils for courses other than GCSE. They achieve well in these options, but these results are

not included in some published comparisons between this school and others. The school falls just short of the very demanding targets it agreed with the local education authority for GCSE outcomes in 2001 and 2002. Inspection evidence shows that pupils reach standards that are above average compared with similar schools and that they achieve well between the ages of 14 and 16. Examination results are well above the national average in design and technology, physical educational and ICT courses. They are below average in German. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were above average in design and technology, physical education, music, art and design, English and science, but below average in German and drama.

Pupils with special educational needs progress as well as their peers due to well-placed support. Where they can be identified, gifted and talented pupils progress similarly well. Girls make better progress than boys, though the gap for 14 year olds is far narrower than the national one. At 16 girls out-perform boys most noticeably in the proportion of A and A* grades awarded, but overall the gender gap is narrow by national standards.

An above-average proportion of Year 11 pupils stay on into the sixth form and attainment on entry, while very wide, is lower than in many sixth forms. Standards reached by 18 year olds are slightly below the national average, but rising. Their average points score was 14.4 in 2001, compared with 17.8 nationally. However, this represents good achievement: all value-added calculations for the sixth form as a whole are very positive, which matches with the high-quality teaching and learning observed during the inspection. Examination results are particularly good in design and technology and physical education and also above average in music. They are below average in geography, history, mathematics, computing and business studies. Progress, while good overall, is very good in physical education, design and technology and music. It is satisfactory in mathematics, modern languages, history and ICT.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils are very positive and constructive in their approach to school and show a far livelier and more enthusiastic interest than is common. The maturity and commitment of pupils are striking features of the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Behaviour both in lessons and around school is consistently very good: pupils are polite, alert to the needs of others and act very responsibly when unsupervised.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. There are many formal and unplanned opportunities for pupils to develop confidence and social skills, take on responsibilities and use opportunities offered to them. They use these well. Relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils are excellent and a strength of the school.
Attendance	Very good. Overall rates are well above the national level and punctuality to lessons is very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning in the school are very good and provide the basis for much of its success and the good overall achievement of pupils. Their quality has improved significantly since the previous inspection. While teaching and the response of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good and sometimes better, the proportion of very good teaching is even higher in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. During the inspection, 98 per cent of lessons had satisfactory or better teaching and learning.

Pupils' learning is so effective because their attitudes are very positive and the teaching is authoritative and challenging. Pupils concentrate very well and work at a strong pace. Their knowledge of the levels at which they are working – and to which they should aspire – is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 but far more clearly and helpfully defined in Years 10 to 13.

Teachers are particularly strong subject specialists and they establish very good working relationships with pupils. In all year groups, teachers set such high expectations of the class as a whole and give such strong encouragement and support that pupils learn very effectively. This is despite the relative under-use of individualised tasks or targets for different pupils. Teachers are less confident at systematically reinforcing literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in their lessons than in other aspects of their work, though overall, with the exception of numeracy, these basic skills are taught satisfactorily.

Teaching and learning for the school as a whole are particularly good in English, physical education and mathematics. They are good in virtually all other subjects and satisfactory in geography.

Pupils with special educational needs learn as effectively as their peers due to good specific support and the general benefits of a highly purposeful atmosphere in lessons. Gifted and talented pupils are not yet systematically identified by the school; where evidence exists, it indicates that they too learn as effectively as the rest of the class.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The curriculum in all year groups fully meets statutory requirements. It has been broadened and adapted well to meet the needs and interests of different pupils so that equality of access and opportunity is excellent. Formal strategies for numeracy teaching are unsatisfactory, though informal support lessens this problem.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Support for pupils with special educational needs is well organised. Teachers and classroom support staff use their knowledge of pupils' needs to give them considerable help in a good proportion of lessons.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school provides far more scope for reflection and other aspects of spiritual development than is usual. Moral guidance to pupils is excellent and a great strength of the school. Scope for social development is also very good. Cultural development is promoted well.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The school has excellent procedures for minimising oppressive behaviour and promotes good behaviour very successfully. It implements child protection arrangements very effectively. Monitoring of pupils' academic performance is satisfactory overall, with scope for better use of targets.
Partnership	Very good. Parental support for the school is strong and they find the school very approachable. Reports to parents are satisfactory, but lack the high quality typical of the school's work as a whole.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The sense of direction and purpose given by the headteacher is excellent and the way he and senior colleagues encourage the school's aims and values to be reflected in its work is equally impressive. Management of subjects and other middle management roles are of good quality.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors show a good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provide well-informed strategic support and advice to senior managers.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school has shown that it can assess its own work and bring about marked improvements as a result. It has the skills and commitment to take evaluation further and is in the process of putting in place the necessary monitoring systems.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school has demonstrated effective financial management for many years and is now particularly skilful at gaining additional funds and in deploying these well. It is good at applying value for money principles in the staffing structures and course choices it makes and in the use of support and maintenance services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The very high expectations placed on their children. • The highly approachable nature of the school staff. • The way school helps their children to mature. • The quality of leadership and management. • The quality of teaching. • Behaviour in the school. • The progress their children make. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater consistency in the use of homework. • Greater consultation and advance warning over significant changes in school. • The information about their children's progress

Inspectors agree with each of the individual aspects supported by parents and with the very high level of overall approval expressed in the questionnaire and the parents' meeting. While the school's homework arrangements are not faultless, compared with common practice in other schools, they are very good. On the issue of working closely with parents, the school is aware of a recent exception, but the weight of evidence indicates a very successful level of co-operation. Inspectors judge that generally the frequency and quality of communication between home and school is very good, but pupils' reports lack specific detail on aspects of progress in subjects.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 214 students in the sixth form, virtually all of whom have come through Years 7 to 11 in the school. All courses are taught within the school sixth form and a wide range of A level, AS and vocational courses are offered, supported by a compulsory core curriculum which incorporates general studies, religious education and a critical thinking course.

Students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, and, on balance, they broadly match the national profile. The school offers sixth form places to high attainers and low attainers alike, providing they have appropriate commitment. As a result, this sixth form includes many more students with below-average GCSE grades than is common, and the overall prior attainment levels are below average compared with sixth forms nationally.

Staying on rates, at 73 per cent, are very high and numbers have more than trebled since the previous inspection. A considerable number of new courses – both vocational and non-vocational – have been introduced during the same period.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

While spending per student is broadly average, the sixth form offers very good teaching, leadership and management. Students show exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. Courses are very carefully chosen and adapted to meet student needs and are well supported, with most teaching taking place in group sizes of 10 to 25. As a result, students achieve well and in some subjects make very good progress. While average points scores are below national standards, they are rising each year and already represent substantial added-value and achievement by students in relation to their standards on entry to the sixth form. The sixth form is very effective and gives good value for money.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good overall
- There is an excellent match of staff expertise to the courses they teach.
- The curriculum very successfully meets the needs of a wider than usual range of students.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The provision for students' personal development is excellent.
- Careers advice and general guidance are very good.
- Provision is particularly successful in English, physical education, design and technology, chemistry, and business studies.

What could be improved

- In geography, history, physics and modern languages the quality of provision is satisfactory compared with national norms, but below the standards typical of this sixth form.
- Library facilities and resource levels in some subjects are unsatisfactory, though plans are in place to deal with this issue.
- Expansion of sixth form numbers means that the existing high-quality accommodation requires additional dedicated sixth form teaching rooms and social areas.
- Student groups are too large in some AS groups.
- Transitional materials in mathematics are needed to ensure that progress rises from satisfactory to good.

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 provision. Standards are below average, but improving, and students make sound progress. Current teaching is very good.
Biology	Provision in biology is good . Attainment at A level has been above average overall, but below average at the higher grades. Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment as a result of effective teaching and support.
Chemistry	Provision is very good . Teaching is consistently very good, carefully matched to the needs of individual students. Standards are above average and many students exceed the grades expected them.
Design and technology	Very good . This is a popular, expanding course with standards well above the national average. Teaching is good and students are very positive about the quality and value of the course.
Business studies AVCE	Good overall provision. While standards are below the national average, progress is good. Students start with modest prior knowledge and learn well as a result of very good, well-organised, teaching.
Computing/ ICT (AVCE)	Good . Students are making good progress in AVCE ICT and have made sound achievements in A-level computing. While examination results in computing are below average, most students start the course with less prior knowledge than average. Teaching is satisfactory in computing but good in AVCE.
Physical education	Provision is very good . Teaching and learning are strong, with all students being fully extended through well-considered tasks that encourage thorough research. Standards are well above national averages. Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subject.
Geography	Provision is satisfactory . Standards are below national average, but improving, representing good progress in relation to prior learning. Teaching is good.
History	Provision is satisfactory . Students make sound progress in relation to their own standards at GCSE. Teaching is satisfactory and students have a very positive attitude to study. Standards in examinations are below average.
English literature	Provision is very good . Very good teaching and assessment procedures allow students to make good progress. They reach national average standards from a below-average starting point.

In addition, lessons were observed in AS and A2 art and design, English Language, French, German, media studies, theatre studies, music technology, physics, psychology and sociology. AVCE lessons in travel and tourism, health and social care, ICT and manufacturing were also observed along with re-sit lessons in GCSE mathematics. Teaching and students' progress were particularly good in art and design, English language,

music technology, theatre studies manufacturing and the GCSE re-sit lessons. Progress was broadly satisfactory in physics French and German.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Support and guidance are very good. Sixth form tutors and subject teachers have a very accurate knowledge of students' academic and personal development needs. There are good systems in place for frequent reviews of progress and for well-timed advice about careers and other opportunities beyond school. Staff use these systems well and show a particularly high level of commitment to their students' welfare.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	This is very good. The director of sixth form has established a very successful work ethic amongst students and has successfully broadened the curriculum in order to keep raising standards and meeting students' needs. Recent appointments of assistant directors of sixth form and co-ordinator of core studies give an improved structure to the growing sixth form and increased status to non-examination courses.

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 are treated as young adults. • Courses suit their needs and aspirations very well. • Teaching is good. • Teachers are very accessible and helpful. • They enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it. • They have been helped to settle in quickly. • They have been encouraged to study independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minority are unsure about • The quality of careers advice. • Whether adequate activities outside examination course are provided.

Inspectors fully endorse the students' very positive views on so many aspects of sixth form provision. Inspectors judge that, compared with other sixth forms, the quality of careers advice is very good. The current sixth form curriculum, with its newly structured core studies programme, is judged to be very good.

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. It is a strength of the school that pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9, again in Years 10 and 11 and, for those staying on, again in the sixth form. This reflects the very good teaching they receive and the excellent attitude of pupils and students.

2. Pupils' standards on entry to the school broadly match the range and the average that exist nationally. However, by the age of 14, pupils reach above-average standards in national tests. In English, for example, 78 per cent of pupils reached level 5 or above in the 2001 tests, compared with 64 per cent nationally. This well above average outcome was supported by above-average results in the mathematics and science tests. Taken together, these three core subjects were well above the average for all schools and those in the same free school meals category. For the three subjects together, they were also better than the predictions made by the local education authority.

3. Standards across the curriculum as a whole are also above average for current 14 year olds. In the work seen by inspectors, standards were well above average in English and above average in science, mathematics, design and technology and ICT. In all other subjects, they were average. These standards amount to good overall achievement across Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs are helped to make good progress by well-organised support in class; higher-attaining pupils make good progress and, where identified, gifted and talented pupils also progress well. The process of identification and systematic support for such pupils is incomplete. Girls make slightly better progress than boys, but the gap is far narrower than at national level. Overall, test results for 14 year olds have risen faster than the national trend for several years, and current standards are much improved from the time of the previous inspection.

4. At the age of 16, pupils are again reaching above-average results, indicating that they have achieved well in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results for the three years 1999 to 2002 averaged 52 per cent of candidates with five or more A* to C passes, compared with 48 per cent nationally. The 2002 results, at 58 per cent, confirm this above-average performance, though fall just short of the very demanding target of 59 per cent agreed with the local education authority. While results have risen and fallen over recent years, each year pupils performed well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. The school has successfully entered a significant number of pupils aged 16 for courses other than GCSE, notably Certificates of Achievement. The structure and content of these courses have allowed lower-attaining pupils to make good progress. When these achievements are added to those of middle and higher attainers doing well on GCSE courses, the overall standards in examinations for 16 year olds are judged by inspectors to exceed national averages for all schools and be above average for schools in the same free school meals category.

5. Standards vary from subject to subject, both in examination results and in the work seen during the inspection. Results are well above average in design and technology, ICT and physical education. They are above average in art and design, science and English, broadly average in mathematics, history, geography and French, but below average in German. The work seen during inspection reveals a broadly similar pattern, though music displays above-average standards and drama below average.

6. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in Years 10 and 11. While there is less in-class support, it remains good in quality, and pupils are more thoroughly grouped by ability in these years, so that the pitch of teaching is particularly appropriate. Higher-attaining pupils also make good progress, benefiting from the grouping arrangements and from the pervasive high level of expectations placed on all pupils. The number of ethnic minority pupils in the school is small and the school does not analyse information about them separately. The majority speak English fluently and they make good progress. The two pupils at early stages of learning the language receive special support in class and tuition outside lessons. Their individual education plans are shared with teachers and targets are set regularly and their progress is carefully monitored and recorded. Parents are fully informed and involved in their progress. The support is given in lessons is appropriate.

Sixth form

7. Achievement in the sixth form is also above average in relation to students' prior attainment. The school's overall point scores in the 2001 examinations are broadly in line with national ones. To reach this level, students are achieving well during Years 12 and 13. For example, predictions for the 2002 A level results based on students' earlier performance at GCSE were for an overall points score of 13.6 and for 15 per cent A and B grade passes. The actual outcome was 14.4 points and 26 per cent A and B grades.

8. This points outcome is the result of very good provision by the school and outstanding commitment by students. The sixth form constantly enlarges and diversifies the courses it offers in order to meet students' needs successfully, and the leadership and tutorial system ensure that strong support, guidance and high expectations prevail in the sixth form. Students' attitudes in lessons are strikingly positive and match their very supportive overall view of life in the sixth form.

9. Achievement is particularly good in design and technology, physical education, music, chemistry, English and business studies. It is broadly satisfactory by national standards, though below the school's norm, in geography, physics, history and modern languages.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Overall, pupils have excellent attitudes to school and their standards of behaviour are very good. Pupils' facility to show initiative and demonstrate personal responsibility are very good and relationships in the school are excellent. This success reflects the dedication of teachers, staff and parents and represents very good improvement over the already high standards seen during the last inspection. Improvement is marked in the sixth form, which has expanded considerably since the last inspection, to the benefit of the whole school.

11. Overall, pupils' attitudes to lessons are excellent throughout the school. They attend well, and show great enthusiasm for, and interest in, the opportunities offered for learning, and for spiritual and social development. Pupils appreciate the range of extra-curricular activities, especially in music, drama and sports, and participation is high. They are reflective in assemblies and during pastoral periods with their tutors. Pupils work with enthusiasm, at a good pace and aim to do their best, as was seen amongst Year 7 pupils learning the skills of tonal shading in art and design, and in a Year 11 mathematics lesson where pupils were able to describe their workings and participate fully in the learning process. Occasionally pupils are too reticent; Year 10 pupils were observed to be well motivated and enjoying their drama lesson, but not all took full advantage of the opportunities offered.

12. Behaviour in the school is very good. Movement around the school, arriving and leaving, and in the dining areas, is orderly; in the crowded and rather narrow corridors and stairways, pupils are polite and considerate of others. Pupils respond well to their teachers. In specialist areas, such as design and technology and science, they conduct themselves in a safe and sensible manner. There were no permanent exclusions in the past year and the number of pupils excluded for fixed periods is low.

13. Pupils' responses to school life show their excellent willingness to meet the school motto of being guided by gospel values. There is a very good absence of oppressive behaviour; bullying, sexism or racism are not evident. Any bullying that occurs is well handled and is not an issue for most pupils. Pupils understand the impact of their actions on others, and the respect they show for other people's feelings, values and beliefs is excellent. They show suitable respect for books and equipment, and use new technology with confidence.

14. Pupils' facility to show initiative and demonstrate personal responsibility is very good. They are confident to learn through exploration, for example, in using computer software to complete an exercise in word-processing, and in art and design, where 15 year olds were seen to make good use of their sketchbooks to research and develop ideas. Relationships in the school are excellent and those between staff and pupils have a strong impact on learning and in helping pupils to develop as young citizens. Contributions to the school and wider communities are significant, as is demonstrated by the fund-raising undertaken for a variety of charities, and pupils' willingness to work alongside other groups of pupils, for example, in sports or paired reading.

15. The pupils with special educational needs have a good attitude to learning. They form good relationships with teachers, learning support assistants and visiting specialists. Behaviour is consistently good and the pupils collaborate effectively in small group activities. Personal development is well supported by good quality plans for each pupil.

16. Attendance is very good and well above the national average. This is a good improvement since the last inspection. Punctuality is very good.

Sixth form

17. Excellent attitudes also pertain in the sixth form. Students appreciate the support given, especially those whose performance in Year 11 would prevent them continuing with sixth form studies at some other institutions. They enjoy their courses, are highly motivated and clearly involved in their work. They are hard working and diligent. They participate fully in both whole-school and enrichment activities, such as the community sports leader award, school productions and charitable fund-raising, providing good role models for younger pupils.

18. Students develop very good personal and learning skills, and feel they are encouraged to study independently, particularly in researching academic subjects and in personal needs through use of the Internet. In most lessons, they are highly motivated, as seen, for example, in music technology, but some reticent response was evident, particularly in geography and amongst lower attainers.

19. Students are happy in the sixth form and express very positive views about the experience that it affords them. They voiced strong appreciation of their teachers and the help afforded them in their choice of courses, although they would welcome some improvements to their accommodation. Although in a questionnaire a few pupils had reservations about the advice they received on sixth form courses and careers, and also the range of enrichment

and extra-curricular courses, in discussions during the inspection, students said that these were areas that they valued, a view supported by the inspection team.

20. Attendance in the sixth form is good. Most students have very good attendance records and are punctual for lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the school is very good. In a very high proportion of lessons seen during the inspection, the teaching was good or very good. Learning closely matched teaching quality. In Years 7 to 11, teaching is excellent in about 3 per cent of lessons, very good in 24 per cent and consistently good in another 44 per cent. In only about 2 per cent of lessons was teaching deemed to be unsatisfactory. Learning is also very good overall, representing a very good improvement since the 1996 inspection. The proportion of lessons with satisfactory or better teaching has risen from 85 per cent to 98 per cent, with very good or excellent teaching in approximately 25 per cent of lessons. A crucial factor is the focus that teaching and learning have received throughout the school, and the particular emphasis being given by the new senior management team on enhancing learning for all. The opportunities for continuing professional development have also resulted in 84 per cent of the teaching staff attending some form of in-service training in the last year.

22. Years 7 to 9 have broadly similar qualities of teaching to that in Years 10 and 11, with the proportions of good, very good and excellent teaching being slightly better in the older year groups, at 71 per cent as opposed to 65 per cent. The pattern of learning shows identical similarities and differences.

23. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. Good or better teaching accounts for 76 per cent of lessons. Nearly a third of lessons seen were very good or excellent, which compares with a quarter in the rest of the school. Learning in lessons in the sixth form was consistently good or better, usually being good or very good. There is evidence that a culture of independent learning is developing.

24. Teaching and learning for pupils who have special educational needs is mostly good. The recent appointment of five new learning support assistants is enhancing the learning of many of these pupils. Pupils make good progress towards targets set for them. The strategies of working with good-quality support teaching are developing across the school. In some areas, particularly the teaching of English, teachers pay very close attention to the pupils' individual education plans when preparing lessons so that work is appropriately challenging. In turn, the pupils are well motivated and eager to learn, which is reflected in their attitude towards school and their good behaviour.

25. Across the school, teachers have high but realistic expectations of their pupils. They achieve a great deal by encouraging good behaviour and endeavour. They are very good at tailoring their teaching to provide interest and appropriate challenge to the wide range of pupils that they teach. Expertise and knowledge of subjects are good in Years 7 to 9, but is even more impressive in many GCSE, A level and vocational education lessons. While some teachers use assessment well, the use of base-line assessment and targets for academic attainment needs extending across the whole school and current good practice needs sharing. The teaching of literacy, numeracy and ICT across all subjects is at a relatively early stage: while satisfactory, there is still scope for further development. Numeracy teaching across the curriculum has yet to become an established feature, and opportunities to reinforce number skills are being missed.

26. Pupils' learning is very good in terms of their application to hard work. Teachers quickly establish that high standards are required and pupils appreciate that their efforts are rewarded by good progress and by praise from staff. They receive pertinent feedback concerning their progress and use it in order to improve ongoing work. Their effort and pace of working are effective. In Years 10 and 11, pupils generally have a good awareness of how they are doing and what is required to improve.

27. The many strengths of teachers often combine to produce very effective teaching and learning. For example, a music lesson with Year 7 successfully exploited first-rate knowledge of the subject and lively delivery. Pupils were effectively introduced to the technical vocabulary "stave", "octave" and "treble clef". They were enthused by the thought of using keyboards and responded quickly to the many questions asked by the teacher, thus extending their knowledge and understanding of notes on the stave. In a Year 8 German lesson, concentration and interest were maintained by brisk pace as pupils learned numbers and had to think quickly in order to respond accurately to quick-fire questions. This activity followed a PowerPoint presentation and group recital of numbers, variety helping to ensure that the pupils learnt effectively.

28. Teaching is most effective when it builds on previous learning, as in the mathematics lesson in Year 7 on the topic of 3-dimensional shapes. Pupils recalled earlier work with shapes to include cube, pyramid and sphere. The teacher built on this to show examples of how shapes impact on life in general, helping pupils to understand that the shape of a crucifix is needed in order to draw a cube. Pupils are keen to share their knowledge and understanding from primary school and eager to develop further.

29. In Years 10 and 11, very good teaching is typical in English, music, physical education and mathematics, while consistently good teaching is evident in ICT, design and technology, art and design, geography and science. In the very good teaching, teachers use their knowledge of pupils to good effect, as in a science lesson on atomic structure where the teacher directed appropriate questions at individuals and encouraged accuracy in their answers. A good pace was maintained throughout as the teacher changes the activities from whole-class questions and answers, note taking, a "bingo" type game and individual calculations around atomic number and mass number. In many of the very good lessons, there is a good balance of whole-class teaching, small group work and individual tasks. In a physical education theory lesson, the whole class face directed questions about the function of the skeleton, quickly followed by pupils working in groups of three to identify and label a colleague's bones. The whole class shared answers in collating the correct location and then individuals were asked to describe the location of specific bones more precisely.

30. When teaching and learning are less successful, there is a lack of pace and challenge in the work and the involvement of pupils is minimal. In a Year 8 science lesson, the teaching was ineffective because the pupils were talked at, read to from the text and then expected to make notes copying from the text. The teacher failed to engage the pupils in their own learning. Pupils were passive listeners for too long and tended to spend more time on copying and note-taking than pursuing demanding concepts and skills.

31. The overall quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs in Years 7 to 9 is good and in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form it is very good. Teachers effectively match the challenges in lessons to the pupils' specific needs and the pupils then make good progress over time, though individual learning programmes should be improved and targets reviewed more regularly. Teaching of pupils with special needs is good in English, ICT, geography, history, French, German and music, and in the other subjects it is satisfactory. In science, it is very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is well supported by the effective deployment of learning support assistants. Teaching is well planned, enabling pupils

to learn in small but challenging steps. Good overall planning, a variety of teaching styles and appropriate resources effectively supports the pupils' learning. Links with literacy are good. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, the pupils effectively developed a range of vocabulary to express their feelings on homelessness. With younger pupils, language, numeracy and ICT skills are effectively developed through the use of "Success Maker." Teaching is effectively supported by summer schools and a programme of paired reading, involving Year 10 pupil volunteers, who listen to pupils with special educational needs read during lunchtime. When teaching is less effective, objectives are unclear and lessons lack pace.

Sixth form

32. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. All lessons seen during the inspection had satisfactory or better teaching and good, very good and excellent teaching accounted for 76 per cent of sixth form lessons. This is slightly higher than the 68 per cent of lessons in the rest of the school. Learning in lessons in the sixth form is consistently very good. The quality of independent study is more variable and the research culture developing in physical education serves as a model of good practice. Subject expertise is very good in both A level and vocational education courses. Assessment is developing and students are usually aware of their current level of attainment and what they have to do to improve.

33. Teaching and learning are particularly strong in some subjects. Both are very good in music, physical education, English and mathematics. They are good in design and technology, business studies, geography, science and modern language and satisfactory in the remainder. In many lessons, teaching combines a number of strengths to good effect. In an English lesson in Year 13, the teacher combined a PowerPoint presentation from two students with a teacher-led overhead projector presentation about Rupert Brooke and "Peace", so that the students had access to a wealth of material. The teacher was able to emphasise the key points and show how to use technical language accurately in writing a synoptic paper. There was also excellent teaching in a physical education lesson where students experienced at first hand the difference between "arousal" and "anxiety" as they set about answering a spoof paper that they thought was part of baseline assessment at Year 13. As a result, the teacher was able to reflect accurately upon the psychological factors affecting performance. A combination of very good subject expertise and knowledge of the students enabled the teacher to ask searching questions in expanding their knowledge and understanding. As a result, learning was excellent.

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

34. Overall, the curriculum provided is very good. A very good range of learning opportunities is provided for all the pupils, including those with special educational needs. The curriculum is broad and balanced and reflects the aims of the school.

35. In Years 7 to 9, curricular provision is very good. Pupils are taught all the subjects of the National Curriculum, together with religious education and personal, social and health education. Statutory requirements are fully met. The changes brought about as a consequence of technology college status funding has resulted in ICT suites in the majority of subjects. Provision in terms of equal opportunities is very good. The curriculum is socially inclusive, with a wide range of extra curricular activities that enable pupils to enrich their experience beyond lessons. Time allocation is over-generous in science and as a consequence insufficient time is available for mathematics, both here and in Years 10 and 11 There is also a limited time for the study of both French and German in Years 7 to 9. Year 7 pupils now study German, but in Years 7 to 9 this subject is allocated only half the time given to French. The time allocation in art and design, geography, history and music is

minimal for the effective delivery of the programmes of study. The situation in Year 7 science, in which some classes have two and sometimes three teachers, is not satisfactory. Some staff training on mixed ability teaching has taken place but more needs to be offered to support the recent changes to pupils grouping in Years 7 to 9. In subjects such as ICT pupils make an effective start on GCSE courses in Year 9.

36. Overall, the provision for the pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good in terms of breadth and balance. As well as a core group of eight subjects, pupils can select from a wide range of options, including vocational qualifications. In Year 10 there is an imbalance in science, with ten sets as against eight sets in English and mathematics. Until the current Year 10, half of the pupils took single rather than double science, well below the national average. All pupils are entered for GCSE in science and 90 per cent are entered for GCSE English. The remaining pupils follow the English Certificate of Achievement course. There are no pupils studying two modern languages in Years 10 and 11. Careers guidance is effectively delivered as part of the school's pastoral programme, an improvement since the last inspection. Work experience arrangements are effectively implemented. In ICT, all pupils follow nationally recognised courses. In physical education, too few opportunities are provided for off-site learning experiences with more creative activities for boys. There are good links with local sporting clubs and good cross-phase links with neighbouring primary schools through physical education, science and ICT. The school plays a leading role in the Sports Action Zone and has links with other schools. Assessment procedures are satisfactory, but greater use should be made of them to inform curricular planning.

37. Curricular provision for the pupils with special educational needs in all Years from 7 to 13 is good. The school's provision offers equal opportunity for boys and girls to benefit from the whole curriculum and effective measures are taken to ensure inclusion of all pupils in all activities within the mainstream. A varied menu of in-class support, small teaching groups and individual tuition across the school enables the pupils' individual needs to be effectively met. ICT programs, such as "Success Maker", effectively support learning. The needs of seventeen pupils with statements of special educational needs are effectively met and their reviews provide a good focus for future learning. There is good provision for support in class and five full-time learning support assistants work effectively with individuals and small groups. Individual targets are well thought out, but should be reviewed at more regular intervals. These targets include goals for literacy, numeracy and behaviour. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is at an early stage of development as part of the Bishop Auckland Excellence in Clusters initiative, through which ideas are shared and funding is provided. Strategies have now been established to support such pupils, use has been made of extra funds for sending Year 11 pupils to visit Oxford University and educational mentors have also been employed. The school views all pupils and students as having 'God-given' gifts and talents and hopes that the benefits in learning strategies developed through this initiative will be shared beyond the provision for those initially targeted for support. Many departments already make provision that serves gifted or talented pupils as well as others.

38. The school's stated aims show a clear commitment to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness within the context of the Catholic faith and Gospel values. Provision for the spiritual development of the pupils is very good. It is fostered in areas of the curriculum such as art and design, English, history, music and religious education, where sensitive provision dealing with the major and fundamental issues of life enable pupils to develop their spiritual awareness in a personal and meaningful manner. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is also provided in the acts of collective worship, which are centred on a thoughtful and effective programme based on a theme for the week, and which, during the inspection week, centred, poignantly and spiritually, on services to celebrate the life of a young pupil who had died exactly one year before.

39. Provision for the moral development of pupils is excellent. The school has very good and clear moral values that include high and consistent expectations of the way pupils conduct themselves in class and how they behave towards each other generally. The school promotes good behaviour by establishing, within an orderly community, a clear and effective code of conduct that encourages a proper sense of right and wrong. The system is supported by parents, encouraged by staff and accepted by pupils, and it forms an integral part of the school's daily life. Staff provide good role models and pupils understand what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and respect and consideration for other people and for their property. Moral development is at the heart of the very good programme of personal and social education. This is supported in several areas of the curriculum, including, for example, history, where pupils are encouraged to consider the moral questions associated with such diverse topics as the Slave trade and of the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles after the end of the First World War. There are also opportunities for practical application, such as the support for charities, in which the whole school participates.

40. The school offers very good provision for pupils' social development and this is a strength. Opportunities for the pupils to develop social skills are afforded by the provision of a large number of extra-curricular activities, including a range of sports and clubs, and by in-house activities, such as paired reading schemes and the anti-bullying "Square Mile Project". The school also provides, through diverse activities such as the Student Council, opportunities for the pupils to take responsibilities and show initiative and thus to contribute to the wider corporate life of the school.

41. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. Pupils are taught to appreciate their own cultural traditions and learn about some of the diversity and richness of other cultures, a particular strength of a school with a highly homogenous cultural population. For example, in religious education, pupils learn of a range of religious festival and customs, such as Pesach, the Jewish Passover. Awareness of the cultural development of the art and design, music and literature of other cultures is also promoted, for example, the study of music from Africa and India. Such provision is well developed and makes a significant contribution to the better preparation of the pupils for life in a multi-cultural society.

Sixth form

42. Sixth form provision is very good. A wide range of courses is available and sixth form numbers are increasing. Pupils may select from nearly 20 AS and A2 courses and a growing and popular range of vocational A levels. GNVQ and re-sit GCSE English and mathematics courses are also available. The A and AS range includes well established options which build on GCSEs taught in the school as well as a growing number of newer courses such as psychology, media studies. In some of these, however, group sizes are too large for effective participation by all students. The balance between vocational and non-vocational options has also been maintained as the sixth form has expanded with the addition of courses such as AVCE s in manufacturing, ICT, health and social care and travel and tourism. In order to promote the broadest possible outlook amongst students a compulsory and well organised core-curriculum is also taught, comprising general studies, religious education and critical thinking. These are currently being integrated into a single, externally examined course. Opportunities for recreational physical education should be provided and enquiry skills should be improved in geography through residential fieldwork. There is a very strong emphasis on mature behaviour, individual responsibility and consideration for others.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

43. The school makes very good provision for the care of its pupils. There are established procedures to identify and handle issues related to child protection; staff are informed of their

responsibilities by the designated teacher and in the staff handbook. Good procedures are in place to protect the health and safety of pupils and staff, and there are clear guidelines to deal with first aid and minor emergencies. Routine checks are conducted at appropriate intervals to ensure the safe operation of electrical, fire prevention and other equipment. The school provides a clean, safe and secure learning and working environment for all its pupils and staff. External agencies are well used to support individual students.

44. The school's monitoring of academic performance and personal development is good, with good educational and personal support and guidance available to pupils. Pastoral care is excellent. The role of pastoral tutor is highly valued by senior management and pupils, which enhances pupils' personal development. Achievements and targets for improvement are recorded in individuals' planners and pupils also set their personal targets for the year through the use of self-contracts. Assessment procedures in many subject areas provide too little formal monitoring to support educational guidance at the same level.

45. Procedures for monitoring attendance are very good and attendance rates have risen significantly since the last inspection.

46. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and eliminating oppressive behaviour are excellent. The Code of Conduct is clearly understood and used consistently throughout the school. Specialists from a range of external services are used well to support pupils' well-being.

47. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and academic progress and the use of assessment information to guide curricular planning are satisfactory overall. Some very good practice is evident in English, but in most subjects, pupils are given too little guidance to ensure that they know how they progress in relation to national criteria. In Years 10 and 11, they have a better idea of their performance according to GCSE requirements. Pupils are assessed by the use of national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, but levels are not routinely assessed to grade pupils' work in other subjects. An effective mentoring programme is in place for pupils who need additional personal or educational support.

48. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are excellent. The use of planners and self-contracts to maintain a coherent record of personal targets and achievements plays a significant part in the personal support that the school provides its pupils.

49. The value and care of each individual is a cornerstone of the school's philosophy and is reflected in the harmonious atmosphere and practical organisation of the curriculum. All policies are successfully put into practice. In both the main school and the sixth form, all pupils have equal access to the curriculum and to extra-curricular activities. Departments cater well for different aptitudes and needs, for example: mathematics provides courses to suit intermediate and higher abilities in the sixth form and the new AVCE courses in the sixth form have attracted good numbers. Stereotypes are challenged: science encourages and highlights female role models and design and technology has attracted good numbers of girls in the sixth form.

50. The care and support for pupils with special educational needs is good and improvements have been made in identifying such pupils since the last inspection. Links with neighbouring primary schools are well established and ensure that detailed information is provided before the pupils transfer to secondary school. This information, together with end-of-unit tests, enables the department to have accurate and up-to-date records on individuals. The care and well being of pupils with special needs is effectively addressed through regular contact with parents. The pupils' progress is kept under review and they are able to move on and off the register as is appropriate. Teachers and learning support assistants know the pupils they work with well.

Sixth form

Assessment

51. There are good procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress. Individual learning needs are well provided for. Assessment data is very well used to guide curricular planning and there are good procedures in place to monitor and support pupils' academic progress. Students are well informed about their progress and know their target grades.

52. Teachers know their students well, enabling them to make good day-to-day assessments. The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance provided to students and their parents is very good. Careers education and guidance to enable students to plan for future courses, study or career opportunities are very good.

Advice, support and guidance

53. The educational and personal support and guidance for students in the sixth form is very good. There is a good rapport between students and tutors, Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good, and any study leave in the final year is through negotiation with individual students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

54. Parents view this as a very good school. They expressed their views in a questionnaire and at a well-attended meeting for parents with the inspector. They particularly like the school's ethos and the attitudes and values that it promotes, and recognise the dedication of staff. Most parents say there has been sustained improvement over a number of years. Parents feel that the school has high expectations for their children, who are helped to become mature and responsible and make good progress. Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems and consider it is well led and managed. Most said that their children like school.

55. A small number of parents, particularly of Year 7 pupils, were concerned about the amount of homework set, although pupils interviewed said they thought it about right. Some parents were annoyed about the lateness of communicating new arrangements for teaching groups and the lack of prior consultation, although generally they felt that links with parents are good, with planners providing a very effective communications link. A few said they would like formal consultations with their children's subject teachers, and not just their pastoral tutor.

56. The inspectors agree with parents that this is a very good school with an excellent ethos. Relationships within the school, and the care and dedication of the staff, enable pupils and students of all groups and abilities to achieve well. They agree that whilst communication

with parents is usually very good, the handling of the new teaching arrangements was not, which the school and governors acknowledge. However,, the pupils and tutors have settled quickly into their new groupings and planned assessment and monitoring arrangements should ensure that tutors can give full and informed reports to parents.

57. Overall, the school has good and effective links with parents. Parents' involvement has a very good impact on the work of the school and the contribution they make to their children's learning at school and at home is very good. The quality of information provided to parents is satisfactory. Information about the school is contained in an attractive and detailed prospectus and the termly newsletters are very well produced. Governors produce an annual report to parents covering aspects of school life in considerable detail, although some information is omitted, such as the school's targets for GCSE pass rates. Annual progress reports are satisfactory. All subjects are reported on, but many of the comments and targets are concerned with pupils' attitudes rather than areas of knowledge of the subject or specific skills that need to be improved. Very few of the reports indicate clearly how a pupil's attainment relates to national criteria, such as National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. Reports for sixth formers are good, with clear and detailed comments on how to improve work to gain a higher grade in public examinations. The quality of information and guidance given to parents before pupils engage in trips outside school is very good.

58. The Friends of St John's is a strong and effective organisation, which, besides fund-raising and providing support to the school in a number of ways, is beginning to be used as a consultative body. Pupils' planners provide an extremely effective link between the school and parents and are well used by staff, pupils and parents, both in the main school and in the sixth form. Attendance at consultation evenings, school sports matches, productions, concerts and masses is very high.

59. A strong partnership with parents has been maintained since the last inspection.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

60. The overall quality of leadership and management in the school is very good. The contribution of the headteacher is excellent, and his senior colleagues provide very effective support in helping to translate the school's aims into reality. A major success is the degree to which the staff as a whole share and implement the attitudes and policies that senior managers seek to pursue. Another is the pupils' strong commitment and respect for others and which reflect the "Gospel values", central to the school's vision. As a result of such good leadership and management pupils and students see lessons as opportunities to be grasped and they use them to learn very effectively: this has a major beneficial impact on the standards they reach. Teachers also gain immensely from working within such a secure, highly constructive and consistently understood framework. On the one hand they have very high expectations clearly spelt out to them by senior managers, while on the other they are given the support and back up - and the leadership by example - they require to succeed.

61. Many of the successes of the school are well established and are thus also a credit to previous senior managers. The current post-holders have built on these positive trends and been particularly effective, in very little time, in establishing new features. A climate of collaboration in which the potential of all staff is valued and nurtured now prevails; new breadth has been given to the curriculum so that it meets a wider range of aspirations and learning needs; initiatives such as systematic monitoring, literacy and numeracy strategies and planned provision for monitoring have been set up or given renewed impetus. At middle-management level, leadership qualities and the efficiency of management are good overall. They are very good in some subjects, notably English, physical education and business

studies, and good in most others. Leadership and management in science and geography are broadly satisfactory.

62. The governing body plays a successful role in leading and managing. Collectively, governors acquire a clear, well-informed view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In addition to reports and other documentary sources, sufficient governors meet staff and see the school in session for them to acquire first-hand information. They are well organised and use their structures effectively in monitoring the school's work. As a result, they offer the senior managers good strategic advice and support they make long-term plans to implement existing priorities. The governing body also fulfils all its statutory duties effectively.

63. Both development planning and financial management in the school are very good. Short- to long-term planning is well designed, and is the outcome of considerable consultation. The school has already identified in its priorities for development nearly all the areas inspectors judge to be in need of improvement. Planning and monitoring the progress of initiatives has been done well in the past, allowing the school to make good progress in the years immediately after the previous inspection. Priorities pursued by the new leadership team have accelerated improvement through such avenues as changes to leadership in English, mathematics and modern languages, curricular expansion and the beginnings of systematic lesson observation. For improvement to continue at a similar rate, the monitoring and supporting programme, currently satisfactory, needs the extent and variety of coverage seen in schools with excellent practice. Developmental planning at departmental level is variable in quality, with the most successful departments already demonstrating how beneficial better planning can be.

64. Funding of educational priorities is managed very well, partly because these priorities are clear and well argued. In addition, day-to-day and longer-term financial management are orderly and efficient so that funds are available to support educational objects. The school pursues "best-value" principles well, in that it compares its performance and provision with those of other schools and looks for cost-effective ways of improving its work. It has replaced teachers with support staff in several areas, including special educational needs and administration, and it has supported the prudent building repair programme of its site maintenance staff.

Accommodation

65. The condition of the building is sound and it is kept in a good state of repair by an efficient site manager, supported by good cleaning staff and effective procedures for regular maintenance. An "asset management plan", agreed with the local authority, is used to deal with both major and minor repair projects and is updated regularly. Regular checks are carried out on the internal and external fabric, potential problems identified and prompt action taken before expensive major repairs are required. The building is well cared for and this is reflected in the good decorative condition, the high state of cleanliness and the good-quality displays in corridors and classrooms. Pupils respond well to such high standards and respect their working environment; there is an almost complete lack of litter and graffiti. Good pupil discipline lessens the potential dangers caused by congestion on narrow corridors in some areas. The installation of security cameras and fencing has reduced the incidence of vandalism from outside the school, but damage to the perimeter of the all-weather sports pitch presents a potential hazard to those using it. Interior accommodation for physical education is good and the swimming pool, in particular, is a valuable asset to the school.

66. The school has been effective in identifying its accommodation needs and using all available sources of funding to carry out alterations. This has resulted in many improvements since the last inspection. The available accommodation is well managed, but space is at a premium and there is little room for flexibility in the way accommodation is used. There are

sufficient general classrooms and specialist areas for all subjects except science, where some classes are taught in non-specialist classrooms. Some specialist laboratories are too small for the number of pupils in some groups. Similarly, the size of some design and technology areas limits movement during practical activities. The lack of adequate soundproofing in music (an issue raised in the last report) has a detrimental effect on pupils receiving individual tuition. Facilities for drama are inadequate. The teaching area is also used as a classroom and furniture needs frequent re-arrangement.

67. There is restricted access to the school's teaching accommodation for pupils with restricted mobility, including those in wheelchairs. The library and science laboratories present particular problems of access. The first floor location and small size of the library also make it difficult to manage and limit its effectiveness as a whole school resource.

Staffing

68. The number of staff is adequate for the needs of the curriculum. Teachers are well qualified and have a good range of experience in the subjects that they teach. The quality of support is adequate in science and ICT, but not in design and technology.

69. Procedures for the professional development of staff are very good. All aspects of staff development are well documented. In addition to the school's training days, staff development is provided by the Durham Local Education Authority and the Durham and Darlington Catholic CPD Partnership. In 2001-02, the vast majority of teachers in the school attended at least one form of in-service training as well as in-house sessions.

70. Procedures for the induction of staff new to the school and for the training of new teachers are very good. The programme is well formatted, with regular meetings to cover specific aspects of the school's provision. Newly qualified teachers are observed in their teaching and targets are set. All teachers new to the school and the newly qualified teachers spoke very highly of the induction procedures and of the support that they had received so far.

Resources

71. Learning resources within departments are adequate for the demands of the curriculum. They are very good in modern languages and in ICT, where the computer ratio, at 1:3, is above the national average. Learning resources range from good to satisfactory in all other subjects, apart from science, where much of the equipment for data-logging is out of date. In addition, the department has access to a room equipped with ten computers, but which is not a laboratory and is not suitable for "wet" chemistry. The stock of books in the library is limited for the number of pupils in the school: there is insufficient shelving space to cope with any additional books

Sixth form

Leadership and management

72. This is very good. The school's leadership team liaise closely with the director of sixth form, providing consistency of support and approach with the rest of the school. The director has worked hard over several years to establish the current, very successful, work ethic that prevails amongst students and, in consultation with other senior managers, has periodically broadened the curriculum in order to keep raising standards and meeting students' needs. His choices of new courses have been strongly vindicated by the enthusiastic take –up by students and the good progress they make. Continued expansion of the sixth form has required additional management posts to be created and the recent appointments of assistant heads of sixth form and co-ordinator of core studies meet that need well, giving an

improved structure for supporting and administrating the sixth form as a whole and imparting increased status to non-examination courses.

Accommodation and Resources

73. Since the last inspection, good improvements have been made to sixth form facilities, but the sixth form's continued popularity sudden, and unpredictable rate of expansion in student numbers has resulted in there being too few dedicated sixth form study areas, tutorial rooms and social facilities. The provision of books and other facilities for sixth form research in the library is unsatisfactory, although the school are already aware of this and the accommodation constraints and have plans in hand to expand further.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

74. In order to capitalise on the school's many existing strengths, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) Complete the implementation of the school's new assessment arrangements, ensuring rigour in the use of:
 - base-line data for pupils in all teaching groups,
 - medium-term and long-term academic targets based on National Curriculum levels or examination board grades,
 - regular reviews of pupils' achievement and progress towards such targets.(Paragraphs: 25, 44, 47)

- (2) Using existing development plans, accelerate the training of staff in the systematic use of strategies to promote:
 - literacy skills,
 - numeracy skills,
 - ICT skills,
 - the specific needs of gifted and talented pupils.(Paragraphs: 25, 37, 82, 95, 134)

- (3) Complete the implementation of systematic and widespread support and monitoring of teaching so that:
 - all staff have the fullest possible entitlement to professional evaluation and support of their work,
 - best practice in the school can be disseminated comprehensively.(Paragraphs: 30, 63)

- (4) Extend, in line with current plans, the accommodation and resources required to provide pupils with satisfactory library facilities, science laboratories and drama spaces.
(Paragraphs: 66, 71, 87, 102)

- (5) Focus support and monitoring by the senior management team on the leadership and management of those subjects where either achievement and standards, or the quality of management, are below the school's impressive norms, notably in: history, geography, modern languages, drama and science
(Paragraphs: 5, 61, 86, 101, 102, 127, 134, 142)

Sixth form

- (1) Raise standards by focused monitoring and improved target-setting in those subjects where achievement is below the sixth form norm, notably, geography, history, physics and modern languages.
(Paragraphs: 9, 200, 206)
- (2) Add to existing high quality accommodation, to meet the growing needs of an ever expanding sixth form:
 - sufficient, dedicated, sixth form teaching rooms,
 - independent research spaces and resources,
 - social areas and facilities.(Paragraphs: 73)
- (3) Reduce group sizes in some subjects, for instance in AS psychology and AS media studies, where the scope for individual attention is too limited.
(Paragraphs: 42)
- (4) Modify existing resources used in Year 12 mathematics teaching to ensure all students make a smooth transition from GCSE to post-16 courses.
(Paragraphs: 161)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	150
	Sixth form	59
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		60

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	4	32	66	45	3	0	0
Percentage	2.6	21.3	44	30	2	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	16	26	14	0	0	0
Percentage	5.1	27.1	44.1	23.7	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1032	175
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	115	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	16	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	142	6

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	12

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	85	104	189

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	62	67	67
	Girls	86	83	85
	Total	148	150	152
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (71)	79 (75)	81 (73)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	59 (26)	49 (50)	39 (35)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	53	69	60
	Girls	79	86	78
	Total	132	155	138
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (66)	82 (79)	73 (76)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (25)	50 (48)	34 (49)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	106	97	203

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	52	90	102
	Girls	48	93	97
	Total	100	183	199
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	49 (59)	90 (94)	98 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	36.9
	National	39.0

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	43	36	79
	Average point score per candidate	14.2	13.1	13.7
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	36	29	65	9	8	17
	Average point score per candidate	14.6	14.0	14.4	9.3	8.3	8.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils**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	1190	40	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	11	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	3	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	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	71
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	7.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	259

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	23.7
Key Stage 4	20.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	3 359 059
Total expenditure	3 328 908
Expenditure per pupil	2 731
Balance brought forward from previous year	133 217
Balance carried forward to next year	163 368

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	23
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	23

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1260
Number of questionnaires returned	168

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	55	32	7	4	1
My child is making good progress in school.	57	35	3	2	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	47	43	4	2	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	45	15	6	2
The teaching is good.	44	49	3	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	43	13	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	33	3	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	69	29	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	39	46	9	4	1
The school is well led and managed.	52	39	3	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	39	3	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	36	6	1	8

Other issues raised by parents

A significant minority of those at the Parents' Meeting were concerned at a lack of consultation or explanation regarding changes to pupils' groupings in Years 7 to 9 made this September.

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 **very good**.

Strengths

- Pupils achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The need to adapt lesson planning for the new, reduced, 50 minute allocation.
- The amount of multi-cultural resources used to support learning.
- The identification of the gifted and talented and provision of appropriate extension work for them.

75. In the 2001 national tests at age 14, results were well above the national average and well above when compared to similar schools. They were especially good at the higher levels. Results have improved considerably over the last three years and remain similar in 2002. They were better than those gained in mathematics and science. Girls did better than boys by about the same as they did nationally.

76. In the GCSE English and English literature examinations in 2001, results were above average. Twenty-five pupils did not take GCSE, but many of these gained distinctions in the Certificate of Achievement. Results have risen over the last three years and have gone up again in 2002, especially in English. More pupils were entered for GCSE in 2002, and plans are for all to be entered in 2003. Though girls did better than boys in 2001, it was by far less than occurs nationally, but the difference between them has gone back to national levels in 2002. Pupils do as well in English as in most of their other subjects. When compared with similar schools, pupils' results were above average, and when compared with pupils' prior attainment they were well above average.

77. These above average results are confirmed by inspection evidence. Standards at age 14 are well above average, in all aspects of the subject, speaking and listening, reading and writing, representing very good achievement from entry at the national average. High-attaining pupils, both boys and girls, read independently, and have a mature response to Shakespeare. They speak confidently and write, using complex sentences, with assurance. They have a very good vocabulary. Middle attainers understand their reading, including Shakespeare. They use appropriate language and tone in speaking and writing and express ideas accurately. Lower attainers listen carefully and understand the content of their reading. They speak briefly, but aptly. They can write at length and use paragraphs given help, but make spelling errors, and use a lot of "and" and "so" constructions.

78. By the age of 16, standards are above average. This again represents very good achievement, since Year 11 pupils have entered the school with significantly below average skills in English. Many pupils achieve the highest grades, both boys and girls. These higher attainers can work with accuracy and speed, using a wide vocabulary accurately and fluently, both orally and on paper. They show perceptive understanding of character in their reading and of how authors use language - for example, in how Shakespeare creates humour in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Middle attainers analyse poetry independently, using quotation to support their ideas. They can develop ideas in their speaking and write at length reasonably

accurately, though they make some spelling errors. Lower attainers struggle to express their ideas in an extended way, both orally and in writing, but they can do so with support from the teacher. For instance, they can set out a letter accurately, but they make basic errors in their spelling. They understand plot and characters in their reading. Their folders of coursework show that they work hard and complete their assignments. Work shows great improvement after careful re-drafting.

79. Pupils with special needs achieve very well. They are given much individual help by teachers and often good extra help within the classroom. The standards of girls are higher than those of boys, as is found nationally.

80. Standards of teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is, on occasion, excellent. For instance, in a Year 11 lesson, pupils worked at a tremendous pace to produce reports in their groups on different aspects of two stories in their anthologies, which would then be shared with the rest of the group. The teacher had high expectations and confidence in their attitudes and ability. Pupils had to think for themselves and show excellent group co-operation in order to complete the task, which they did, using the computers to produce extremely useful work. The lesson was also very good preparation for working under the time pressure of examinations. Year 9 pupils made excellent progress in a lesson looking at different genres. With close co-operation from a learning support assistant, the use of a variety of interesting methods, including the television, and very careful planning, all pupils in the class worked hard at an appropriate level for their ability and showed much enthusiasm for their learning. Pupils are well aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, because teachers constantly assess understanding through very good questioning which develops pupils' awareness, and marking of work is very good. Levels and grades are awarded regularly and pupils have the appropriate criteria in front of them, so that they know how to improve. Where teaching is less successful, work is somewhat rushed because it has not been adapted from 60 minutes to the new 50-minute period. The department has yet to identify gifted and talented pupils, but has begun to think where it can extend provision for them. The department makes a very good contribution to the development of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, especially in group discussion and in the emphasis on the study of literature, but there is insufficient use of material which will develop their understanding of different cultures.

81. The quality of leadership and management is very good and the department has improved very well since the previous inspection. There is now excellent shared commitment to improve still further. Many beneficial changes have been made under the new head of department, especially in the last year: for instance, National Curriculum programmes of study have been much improved and ensure that pupils progress systematically through the school; teaching is very consistent because of close monitoring procedures, and is now very good. As a result, standards have risen and are set to rise even further.

Literacy

82. The contributions made across the curriculum to improving pupils' literacy are satisfactory. Not all subject areas have specific literacy policies and whilst some make positive contributions, such as history, geography and music, others do not focus on this area sufficiently. Though some work was done immediately after the last inspection, the school has been slow in conveying to all teachers the importance of this aspect of their work in further improving literacy. Two training days have taken place, a research and development post has now been established and an action plan has been written. The plan stresses the importance of raising standards through literacy and gives good general advice, but does not state exactly what can be done in specific areas, nor when strategies will be introduced.

83. Standards of literacy are good. Pupils read with understanding, speak clearly and write with reasonable accuracy, for a variety of purposes. Important subject vocabulary is displayed in most classrooms, and pupils are encouraged to use technical terms accurately, for instance, in physical education and geography. Though spelling errors are sometimes corrected, pupils are rarely taught how to improve their spelling. There is insufficient exploration of ideas through speaking and listening and insufficient planned opportunities for pupils to practise different kinds of reading. Pupils are taught to write in a variety of styles in history, and shown how to plan and develop ideas clearly in geography, but often writing is restricted to note-taking.

Drama

84. Drama is offered as a discrete subject as an option in Years 10 and 11. Overall, the quality of provision in drama is satisfactory. Its strengths are that the department makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to extra-curricular activities. In terms of areas requiring improvement, pupils need to learn how to analyse their own and others' performances in greater detail and depth, and there is a lack of clarity about overall management of drama across the school as a whole. In addition, drama lacks adequate, designated accommodation.

85. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, results were well below national average. They fluctuate from year to year but have not reached the national average for several years. In 2002 they were significantly better than in 2001. Very few boys elect to study drama.

86. Standards by the end of Year 11 are below national average. Pupils achieve satisfactorily during their course, developing a growing awareness of dramatic techniques and gaining confidence in performance. Most have little experience of drama before Year 10. There are several high attainers who perform convincingly and many sustain role effectively. They use techniques such as freeze frame and successfully convey action in two time bands concurrently, for example, in a response to "Blood Brothers". However, some need help to generate ideas and lack confidence in performance. Though pupils analyse their own performances to improve them, they do not do so in sufficient detail to improve performance in depth.

87. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. It is severely constrained by the lack of adequate accommodation. Relationships are good and pupils and teachers work hard together. The GCSE course has been well planned, but there is a lack of overall management to co-ordinate and develop the role of drama within the school as a whole. Whilst a co-ordinator has been appointed recently, there is no structured plan of action for the future.

88. Drama contributes very well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils in Year 10, for instance were responding to creation myths from other cultures. Pupils work co-operatively in groups and do much work on moral issues, such as bullying. It also makes a very good contribution to extra curricular activities. There are annual large-scale productions, regular theatre visits, and well-organised drama clubs where older students give valuable help.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- The new leadership and management of the department are good, providing clear direction and action plans for improvement.
- Examination and test results show an improving trend.

Areas for improvement

- Develop schemes of work to ensure appropriate work for pupils of all levels of prior attainment.
- Take further steps to reduce the impact of restricted curricular time on the learning of pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Improve the use of assessment data and assessment procedures to enable accurate diagnosis of progress and target-setting for pupils.

89. In Year 7, pupils enter the school with attainment that is at the national average. In the Year 9 2002 National Curriculum tests, there was an improvement on the results of the previous year, notably in the increase in the number of pupils attaining the higher grades. In 2001, pupils' performance in their National Curriculum tests was above the national average. Results were above average when compared with pupils from similar schools, representing good progress by pupils. Results in mathematics were below those in English and similar to those in science. Over the last three years, standards have remained above the national average. At the end of Year 11 in 2002, there was an improvement on the 2001 results in the percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades. The 2001 GCSE results were close to the national average and average compared with similar schools. This represented satisfactory achievement by pupils who attain in line with their predicted grades. The 2001 results showed a dip in a rising trend against national averages. Pupils for whom the GCSE examination was unsuitable were successful in gaining the Certificate of Achievement in mathematics. Recent disruption to the management within the mathematics department has been a contributory factor in the momentary fall in results. There has been no significant pattern in the difference in results of girls and boys. High-attaining pupils progress better than other groups of pupils.

90. In Years 7 to 9, pupils progress well and standards in lessons and in work seen are above average. Pupils work hard during lessons and learn well. There is a good level of numeracy and pupils have good knowledge of basic geometric shapes. For example, in a Year 7 group of low-attaining pupils, they were able to name most 3-dimensional solids and describe their properties in technical terms. By the end of Year 9, pupils are working at levels above the national average and many begin their study for the GCSE examination. There is good evidence of the beneficial effect of the National Numeracy Strategy, which has had a positive influence on the learning of pupils, improving both their numeracy and their algebraic skills. A group of the highest-attaining Year 9 pupils displayed confidence in converting complex fractions into decimals and understood the teacher's description of "standard form" for decimal numbers. By the end of Year 11, standards are average and achievement is satisfactory, with some pupils working at the higher levels of attainment. In a Year 11 lesson revising elementary trigonometry, they showed very good recall of sine, cosine and tangent, and were able to perform a variety of calculations. Pupils' files from the previous Year 11 show good application of investigation skills and some produce their findings using a variety of computer techniques. Overall, progress during Years 10 and 11 is slower than in Years 7 to 9, due in part to the restricted time allocation and recent changes in staffing. Lower-attaining pupils have difficulty maintaining their pace of progress and lack a secure grasp of

basic numeracy skills and how to apply them to the real world. Pupils for whom GCSE examinations are inappropriate study successfully for their Certificate of Achievement.

91. Teachers ensure that all pupils are included in the learning experiences on offer. Pupils from differing cultural heritages, including those for whom English is an additional language, were seen achieving well, in line with their individual abilities. Those with special education needs are well supported by teachers and by skilled classroom assistants, who help others in addition to target pupils. Good support was seen for pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties when the supporting teacher and the classroom learning assistant gave one-to-one support to ensure that pupils gained from their learning opportunities. Extension work, which provides challenge, was used in all ability groups.

92. Overall, teaching is good. In lessons observed, teaching was better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Teachers know their subject very well and use this knowledge to provide well-planned lessons, as seen, for example, in a Year 11 lesson with lower-attaining pupils who investigated the mathematical rules for winning a game. The well-focused task provided a very good learning incentive, giving confidence to the group. The pace at which work has to be covered in Years 10 and 11 needs to be matched with adequate reinforcement since some pupils struggle to retain what they have learned in previous lessons. Although many lessons are dominated by the teacher, a good variety of activities is used to enhance pupils' learning. They engage in group and paired work, practical investigations and modelling, and some use computers to produce spreadsheets. Pupils appreciate their teachers' high expectations of them to perform well and they respond willingly to the opportunities provided. Pace and challenge are significant features of the most successful lessons and pupils respond very well. Teaching is least successful when pupils are not given sufficient explanation as to why a process works or when teachers do not give mathematically accurate examples for them to follow. The marking of books is satisfactory, but the overall use of assessment data and procedures in Years 7 to 9 is insufficient to enable accurate diagnosis of pupils' progress and individual targets for improvement.

93. Management and leadership of the department are good. The new head of department has a clear vision of the developments required to bring about success for pupils. The improvement of schemes of work to co-ordinate teaching to year groups and the development of the assessment system are already identified. Resources are satisfactory and very well managed, enabling good progress for all pupils. Accommodation is good, providing a stimulating learning environment. However, the size of some rooms is of concern when there are classes of 30 or more. Most specialist teachers have their own rooms, giving the department a good sense of identity in which pupils expect to learn well. Staffing is good, with all teachers well qualified for the levels at which they teach. Whilst curricular provision is satisfactory, there is insufficient time allocated to Years 10 and 11 for mathematics. The time constraint limits the amount of review and background enrichment that teachers can bring to their lessons.

94. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Good developments in staffing have enhanced the department. Standards have improved steadily over recent years. The quality of teaching has been developed to a good standard. The provision of ICT has improved and the National Numeracy Strategy has been successfully introduced within mathematics teaching.

Numeracy

95. The provision for developing numeracy beyond the mathematics department, across the remainder of the curriculum is unsatisfactory. The school is due to hold whole-school training on the development of numeracy at half term, but there is currently no whole school numeracy policy and the development of numeracy skills is not written into schemes of work. The mathematics department has introduced the National Numeracy Strategy into lessons in Years 7 and 8, which has resulted in an improvement in basic skills. The general level of numeracy within the school is above average and supports pupils' achievement well in other subjects. Those departments that are major contributors to numeracy skills include geography, science and design and technology. Numeracy is used in ICT and in a limited way in music, history and modern languages. For instance, in science lessons, pupils use a variety of mixed units, including velocity and capacity measures, and plot graphs from experimental data. In design and technology, pupils use a variety of units for measuring lengths, weights and volumes. In geography, pupils collect and display data using a variety of graphical methods; they also develop skills using grid references, scale and measurement. In a music lesson observed, the teacher linked pupils' work to their understanding of mathematical terms. There is a need for the school to hold training for all staff and develop a whole-school policy to co-ordinate all contributions to the development of pupils' numeracy.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Standards that are above average overall and in some respects well above average.
- Pupils achieve well.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good.

Areas for improvement

- There is no formal monitoring of teaching and learning.
- The use of assessment and target-setting to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching is not yet developed.
- The schemes of work which form the basis for lessons in Years 7 to 9 need to be updated.

96. In the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining the national target level was well above the national average and well above the results gained by pupils with similar backgrounds. The proportion gaining the levels expected of higher-attaining pupils was well above the national figure and above that of similar pupils. The overall results, reflecting the performance of all pupils, was above the national figure and that for similar schools. This standard has been maintained over the last five years. The results for 2002 are better than 2001; more pupils have exceeded the national target level and the proportion gaining the higher levels has increased by almost 10 per cent. The performance of boys is slightly better than that of girls, in contrast to the national picture, where standards are similar. As pupils enter the school with standards close to the national average, these results show that good achievement is made between Years 7 and 9.

97. Standards observed during the inspection were above average. Pupils in Year 9, learning about the reactivity of metals, could relate their new knowledge intelligently to their previous work on the periodic table of elements. In another Year 9 class, pupils showed good experimental skills when investigating the factors affecting the rate of cooling. Pupils in Year 7, at the beginning of their secondary science education, were able to build on their work at

primary school and successfully construct food chains, although a few lower-attaining pupils needed much teacher support. In all lessons observed, most pupils coped with work set at the level needed for success in the national tests. The work in pupils' books is of a uniformly good standard, showing, for example, unusually high skills in drawing accurate graphs. Frequent internal tests, marked to national standards, also confirm the maintenance of good standards.

98. In 2001, the results in the GCSE examinations taken at the age of 16 were above the national average. The percentage of pupils obtaining higher grades (A* to C) in science is close to that of similar schools. When compared to the results obtained by pupils who were of a similar standard at age 14, the percentage gaining higher grades is very high. Results in 2002 were better: 56 per cent of pupils gained a higher grade compared to 49 per cent in 2001. There has been improvement over time from being close to the national average in 1999 to above it in 2001. The good progress evident in these standards extends to all pupils. For the last four years, at least 98 per cent of pupils have obtained a GCSE pass in science compared to only 90 per cent nationally. Unlike nationally, at this school boys' performance exceeds that of girls.

99. Evidence gathered during the inspection showed that above-average standards are being maintained. The books of pupils of all levels of attainment contain complete accounts of work set at appropriate degrees of difficulty. In class, pupils display their skills and knowledge well in both experimental and theoretical contexts. A higher-attaining group in Year 10 were able to work out the chemistry of the blast furnace from first principles by applying their learning from earlier years. Pupils in a middle set successfully completed a difficult practical requiring them to heat very small pieces of metals to extremely high temperatures. They did the work with great care and clear understanding of safety precautions. Continuing improvement in pupils' skill in writing up science investigations, including calculations and graphs, shows clearly in the Year 11 course work. Lower-attaining pupils, including some who have special educational needs, have mastered most of the basic techniques for measurement and are consolidating their grasp of experimental method. For example, pupils in a Year 11 set of lower attainers understood clearly which variables needed to be controlled in an experiment on insulation.

100. Teaching is good. Of the lessons observed, 95 per cent were satisfactory or better, three-quarters were good or better and two-fifths were very good or excellent. Teaching is based on total commitment to pupils' academic and personal development. Pupils recognise this and respond with trust, very positive attitudes to their studies and consistently very good behaviour. These good relationships, combined with teachers' very good command of the subject, result in all lessons providing a secure environment for learning. Lessons are planned carefully and many include imaginative and exciting activities that result in very good learning. The learning by one Year 10 class about the structure of living cells was made more effective and enjoyable by the skilled use of a projector linked to a computer programme. A Year 9 lesson on the function of muscles involved pupils measuring the size of their own muscles during movement; this approach made a potentially dry topic interesting and helped the pupils to absorb the information more readily. Very occasionally teaching is too reliant on methods that lead to pupils having a very passive role. In these lessons, they are asked to absorb information from the textbook or from over-long explanations by the teacher. Pupils lose concentration and, although they continue to behave well, they do not learn effectively.

101. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. The GCSE courses are well managed, as is the day-to-day running of the department. Teachers and technicians, who are very skilled and dedicated, work together as a mutually supportive team. Relationships are good and morale is high. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is good, with all pupils now able to follow the double award course. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is, however, in need of

revision. Lessons are based on schemes of work that were designed some time ago and are becoming unsuitable to meet the needs of the latest developments in the subject. Day-to-day marking of pupils' work is good. The longer-term assessment of pupils' standards and achievement and the setting of individual targets are good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. The use of assessment data to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching is satisfactory. This aspect of management, which is not as good as others, combined with the lack of formal procedures to monitor directly the quality of teaching, is limiting the department's capacity to improve.

102. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. There are not enough laboratories for all lessons and some are too small for many classes. The areas for preparation of experimental materials for lessons are barely adequate. As the numbers of teaching groups is predicted to rise next year, these deficiencies will become more critical and may seriously limit the learning opportunities for some pupils.

103. The department's use of ICT to enrich learning experiences is good in some respects. The use of projectors to involve whole classes in computer programmes and microscope work is enhancing learning. However, difficulties in getting appropriate access to computers and the lack of specialised hardware are limiting pupils' experience of using computers in their experimental work.

104. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Both teaching and standards of attainment are much better and there are improvements in the curriculum.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent.
- Teachers' possess very good knowledge of their subject and provide pupils with skilled demonstrations.
- Pupils produce high quality work in ceramics.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' drawing skills in Years 7 to 9 should be improved.
- Assessment and monitoring of pupils is not fully developed.
- Developmental planning is needed.

105. The standards of pupils' work at the age of 14 are average. There is no significant difference in the standards achieved between boys and girls. The standards of work seen during inspection accord with recent teacher assessments. Pupils demonstrate a bold and often imaginative use of colour and design in a range of topics, including those derived from a study of surrealism. In work based on Op Art they make good use of sketchbooks to research material and develop their ideas, often with thoughtful use of abstraction as in a series of Fantasy Windows. Work in three dimensions is often imaginative, especially in the design and completion of ceramic work, as in topic work on architectural structures and abstract eyes. The quality of pupils' observational drawing is more variable and occasionally weak. Pupils are beginning to evaluate their work but are often diffident in response. Pupils join the school with a varied, often limited, experience of art and design and make good progress in lessons and that achievement overall is good. Pupils with special educational needs and the gifted and talented achieve well.

106. The standards of pupils' work at the age of 16 are above average. In the 2001 GCSE examination, the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades was above the national average, with boys achieving better than girls. Over the past three years, all pupils have gained a grade. The subject is amongst the most successful in the school. The 2002 results show a fall in standards, partly owing to the department's open-access policy and the large number of pupils entered for the examination with low prior attainment. The standards of work seen during the inspection indicate a consolidation of the achievements found in Years 7 to 9. Pupils often produce work of excellent quality in ceramics, researching thoroughly and producing end products with high levels of finish, bold design and confident use of colour. In individual work on the theme "In My World", many pupils researched their ideas widely, often modifying them with ICT. Sketchbooks are well used and pupils have a good understanding of the notion of work in progress. Many show individuality, use a wide range of media and take great pride in their work. A small minority do not always make the most of their ideas and a few pupils lack confidence in evaluating their work or discussing artists who have influenced them. The majority of pupils make at least good, sometimes excellent, progress. Pupils with special educational needs and the gifted and talented achieve well.

107. Pupils have very good attitudes in lessons. They enjoy art and design, work with concentration and enthusiasm, form good relationships with teachers, and develop independent working habits. Behaviour is excellent.

108. The quality of teaching and learning are good. Teachers strongly enhance pupils' learning through sensitive, caring, supportive and well-disciplined teaching. They know each pupil well and offer a classroom environment in which pupils can establish good working practices and develop independence of thought in the creation of their artworks. When initiating a new topic, teachers use their very good knowledge of their subject to demonstrate to the whole class with great skill, such as in Year 9 work on creating ceramic containers. At their most effective, they question pupils carefully and develop pupils' confidence by encouraging them to see that many approaches are possible in producing a painting from initial researched ideas. They set high expectations. Teachers circulate well during practical work and give discreet encouragement and advice, enabling pupils to develop at their own rates. In a minority of lessons in Years 10 and 11, a rather slow working pace is sometimes accepted. Teachers make good use of resources, including ICT, and pupils' own research reflects this variety as they proceed throughout the school. Lessons are well planned and part of an imaginative scheme of work. Work based on art from other cultures and times is well used to benefit pupils' spiritual and cultural education. Homework makes good use of sketchbooks for researched work, but could include more opportunities for close observational drawing. Some lessons miss opportunities to extend pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

109. The department is well managed. The curriculum is carefully devised, resources are utilised well and the opportunities for pupils to display work, visit exhibitions and work outside normal teaching time are good. The department lacks a coherent policy for day-to-day assessment and short-term target-setting, leaving a minority of pupils unclear as to what they need to do to improve further.

110. The department has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils have greater opportunities to study a range of artists. There has been an increase in the use of ICT in the art and design curriculum.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Good teaching, supported by well-planned courses and very good pupil attitudes has established very good working relationships and enabled the attainment of above-average standards.
- The provision of both GCSE and vocational courses for Years 10 and 11 gives good opportunities for pupils of varying abilities and aptitudes to achieve their potential.
- The effective integration of computer work into designing and making gives pupils a thorough background in all areas of the technology curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- Further develop project booklets to allow pupils in Years 7 to 9 to make a greater individual contribution to their work through independent research.
- Broaden the curriculum to allow pupils in Years 10 and 11 to study electronics or systems and control to GCSE level.

111. Standards for pupils aged 14 are above average. By the end of Year 9, pupils have developed good practical skills and can use tools, materials and equipment with confidence. Practical outcomes are made to a good standard. They are able to follow a good design methodology and higher-attaining pupils can use good three-dimensional drawings to record and develop ideas. Strong structures provided by course booklets support lower-attaining pupils and pupils with special needs, but can limit independent work by higher-attaining pupils. In textiles, pupils produce colourful, imaginative and well-made work. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, all pupils worked enthusiastically to measure and cut accurate patterns for storage containers and, because the project appealed equally to both sexes, boys in the group did not show any reluctance to participate. In resistant materials, carefully chosen projects allow pupils to develop good practical skills across a wide range of technology processes. For example, a group Year 9 pupils were able to assemble and solder components to make an electronic timer. A pupil with special needs was able to describe accurately the components she was using and suggest uses for the finished product. As pupils enter the school with an average level of attainment, achievement is good.

112. Overall, GCSE results are well above average. In 2001, the percentage of A* to C grades was 6 per cent above the national figure. This was less than in 2000, but evidence collected during the inspection does not suggest a downward trend. When each area of design and technology is considered separately, food, textiles and graphics perform well above average, whilst resistant materials is below. This reflects the predominance of boys opting for resistant materials and their relative underperformance. The school has recognised this and adopted various strategies to remedy the situation. Comparative figures indicate that pupils do better in technology than in some of their other examination subjects. GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses in health and social care and in manufacturing have also yielded good results for those pupils wanting alternative accreditation. These results are reflected in work seen during the inspection, which is above average. Many GCSE folders contain in-depth research from a variety of sources including the Internet, CD-ROM and questionnaires. Research and design ideas are annotated and recorded using a good balance of hand-drawn graphics and computer techniques. Design folders in food, textiles and graphics represent a high level of commitment and effort. Many pupils build on a strong foundation of skills and knowledge to work with greater independence, whilst weaker pupils continue to benefit from structured guidelines. For example, a pupil with special needs had responded to all the assessment objectives in her resistant materials folder and, despite difficulties with research and development work, had clearly communicated her ideas for a

jewellery box through good three-dimensional drawings. Many pupils use computers effectively to improve presentation, scan images from the digital camera, and process data from questionnaires. Use of computer-aided manufacturing equipment is integrated into many projects. Pupils continue to achieve well throughout Years 10 and 11 and their capacity for independent work increases greatly.

113. Teaching is good overall. It was good in over four-fifths of lessons and satisfactory in the most of the remainder. Only in one lesson was teaching unsatisfactory. Teachers have been effective in establishing very good relationships with pupils, which allows for high-quality individual help and advice. Pupils respond with very good behaviour and attitudes. This was evident in the very good learning atmosphere seen in most lessons. Detailed lesson planning, precise objectives and clear explanations, combined with well-established working procedures, enable pupils to work with a sense of purpose. A major factor contributing to the high standard achieved by pupils is the hard work and commitment of teachers in providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities, ranging from additional help with examination coursework to general interest clubs and activities. Pupils have achieved notable success in regional and national competitions such as, for example, "Robot Wars" and "Cook of the Year". Many of these positive features were missing from the very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching seen. The quality of teaching is monitored by the head of department and strong support is given to newly qualified teachers. Teachers receive valuable support by the technician but the allocation of time is insufficient to reduce the burden of routine tasks or to provide appropriate in-class support.

114. Leadership and management are good. The experienced and hard-working head of department has established good team spirit and a shared view for development for the subject. However, this has yet to be articulated in an overall development plan that would assist in matching the available budget and accommodation to the curriculum provided. The broadly based curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 provides a worthwhile technological experience and successfully integrates areas such as electronics, control technology and computer-aided design and manufacturing. The curriculum for older pupils does not provide opportunities to develop skills in electronics or systems and control, but vocational courses are successful in providing for the needs of pupils who might not benefit from a GCSE course. Good assessment procedures produce detailed information on pupils' performance but this is not always used precisely to set targets for pupils. The provision and maintenance of a good range of equipment and resources has been achieved at the cost of an overspend on available funds.

115. Since the last inspection, there have been very good improvements in examination results, departmental administration, teaching quality and curricular provision.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Standards are broadly in line with the national average.
- Achievement is satisfactory overall.
- Teachers' knowledge of their subject and organisation in the classroom are good.
- Relationships are strong between teachers and pupils.

Areas for improvement

- Improve examination standards at higher levels by further development of enquiry and fieldwork to broaden research techniques.
- Improve the consistency in teaching and learning by staff training.
- Assessment, especially in setting detailed targets, should be improved so that pupils' progress can be identified.

116. Over the last few years, the numbers taking GCSE geography have declined. Results have fluctuated, but remained broadly in line with national averages. In 2001, pupils' performance was lower than in most of their other subjects. No pupil achieved an A* grade. In 2002, nearly half gained A* to C grades and everyone passed, as they have done since the previous inspection. Boys' performance was lower than girls', and both were below the national average of the previous year. Last year they did not do as well as usual in their coursework. Steps are being taken to improve the quality through careful monitoring. Possible factors contributing to the yearly fluctuations are the small numbers involved, the differing abilities of pupils choosing GCSE geography and pupils not being taught by the same teacher. Falling numbers are partly attributable to restrictions in option choices. A change this year has resulted in a dramatic increase, demonstrating the growing popularity of the subject.

117. In Year 9, the majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve average standards. These are not reflected in the teacher-assessed tests, which are unreliable. Given that standards on entry are broadly average and pupils have gaps in understanding and skills, their achievement is satisfactory progress. The school does not formally identify gifted pupils. Traveller pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons, but absence affects their achievement over time. No difference was seen in the achievement of girls and boys or of different ethnic groups.

118. Most pupils are good at finding information from different sources. They can follow guided lines of enquiry, in which their numerical skills support them well. There are insufficient opportunities, particularly for higher-attainers, for pupils to devise their own questions and to follow them through logically to a conclusion. Fieldwork is not used enough to help to build effective research techniques for GCSE. Teachers' good attention to literacy helps pupils to improve their vocabulary, find information and organise ideas. Helpful guidance is provided for pupils with English as an additional language having difficulties in understanding technical language. Teachers provide a variety of work so that pupils write for different purposes. Higher-attaining pupils, for example, wrote detailed comparisons between the Valle d'Aosta and the Italian industrial triangle. The use of a framework was especially helpful for lower attainers and pupils with special educational needs to help them to make simple comparisons. ICT skills are sound and pupils are beginning to use them to present information and for research.

119. Standards in Year 11 are average. Pupils make good progress, especially in Year 10, benefiting from an improved curriculum and an emphasis on developing examination skills. Most use technical terms accurately. Their map and information-retrieval skills have improved. Their work is mainly factual. Although higher-attaining pupils express themselves well, there are not enough opportunities for them to extend their ideas through essays. Group or paired activities in most lessons encourage discussion and help pupils to make connections between ideas. For example, in one lesson, they made good links about the positive and negative impact of tourism on the economy and the environment. In another, their collective findings not only provided them with the basic material for creating a tourist brochure, but also with a useful revision guide.

120. Attitudes are good. Pupils want to learn, as demonstrated in well-presented homework, carefully word-processed projects and in good behaviour. They show initiative and enthusiasm in practical tasks. In an investigation of features associated with farms, for example, lower-attaining pupils showed sound understanding of the ways different factors affected the choices made by farmers.

121. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and has good features. It is better in Years 10 and 11. Here progress is more consistent because pupils benefit from greater emphasis on independent work. Teachers use their expertise well to develop pupils' answers and to explain ideas clearly so that pupils increase their understanding. They prepare well for lessons so that on arrival pupils settle promptly and work hard. Good use is made of praise and pupils feel valued and work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Good planning builds effectively on what pupils have learnt, ensuring that they are clear about what they have to do. Summing-up at the end of lessons is often too short and not enough use is made of checking with pupils what they have learnt and what needs to be followed up. While a substantial proportion of lessons are well structured so that learning is reinforced and the teaching is lively and interactive, about a quarter are over-directed and the questioning and methods do not encourage sharing ideas or independent thinking. In a minority of lessons, pupils are not refocused quickly enough to sustain the pace. Homework complements classwork well. Marking is a weakness: some is encouraging, but some is cursory and insufficient use is made of written comments to show pupils what they have done well and where they need to improve.

122. Satisfactory achievement has been made by tackling the issues in the last report. Resources have improved. Schemes of work have been well revised to provide more learning opportunities. Sound assessment systems are now in place, although standardisation procedures in Years 7 to 9 need refining to ensure greater accuracy in assessing levels. The head of department has insufficient time to perform all his monitoring duties effectively. Fieldwork provision is still inadequate. Using assessment effectively to inform planning and to improve individual performance is recognised as a weakness and is an area for attention.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Teachers possess a confident understanding of history and provide a well-planned curriculum, using a wide range of resources.
- Pupils' written work is very well presented.
- Lessons are enhanced by the provision of well-organised visits to museums and historical sites.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities should be extended for pupils' to develop independent learning in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching should be monitored and good practice shared.
- Recent developments in assessment across all year groups should be consolidated and targets established for pupils' individual progress.

123. The standards of pupils' work at the age of 14 are broadly average. There is no significant difference in the standards achieved between boys and girls. The standards of work seen during the inspection match recent teacher assessments. In work on nineteenth century industrialisation, pupils made good use of primary sources to assess the quality of life in the towns. In work on the Tudors, they demonstrated a lively familiarity with key figures and reflected thoughtfully on Henry VIII's relationship with the church. Standards of written presentation are very good. Pupils respond well in imaginative written work, such as diary entries, but standards in more formal writing vary widely. Given their academic starting point in Year 7, all pupils achieve well.

124. The standards of pupils' work at the age of 16 are also average. In the 2001 GCSE examination, the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades was slightly above the national average. Girls achieved significantly better than boys. Only a minority of pupils gained the highest grades. The 2002 results represent a slight fall in results, partly owing to the department's open-access policy and the numbers of pupils entered for the examination with low academic attainment. The standards of work seen during the inspection confirm the average attainment levels of recent years. When studying the causes of the First World War, many pupils can draw adequate conclusions from a range of sources, but their facility to interpret them critically is less secure. Many pupils lack independence of thought and are over-reliant on the teacher in Year 11 lessons. They produce careful and often imaginative work when engaged in writing dialogue and newspaper reports, but more extended formal writing, though is often modest in scope. Only a few pupils challenge source material. Many pupils make thoughtful links with present-day issues. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and for a few it is good.

125. All pupils display very good attitudes in their lessons. They work purposefully at all times, co-operate in group work and participate in lively class discussions. Their behaviour is excellent.

126. The overall quality of teaching in history is good. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Teachers have a confident and enthusiastic teaching style that enables pupils to develop good working habits and a respect for history. They possess very good knowledge of their subject and bring the subject alive by using a wide range of resources, attractive displays and by communicating the past, as in a Year 10 lesson discussing the events in Sarajevo in 1914. All teachers manage pupils very effectively and pupils flourish in lessons, where there is good discipline and their views are respected. Teachers work hard to improve

literacy and promote high standards of written presentation. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is well planned to incorporate a briskly paced range of short activities in each lesson, helping pupils to consolidate understanding of a specific range of points, as in work on nineteenth-century social change. In a few lessons, the teachers' voice level is too high when helping individuals during a written task, which affects the concentration of the rest of the class. In a minority of lessons, teachers are over-reliant on the verbal responses of a few pupils and do not check that all the class understands. Occasionally, there is limited challenge for higher attainers. In a minority of lessons in Years 10 and 11 some tasks set are inappropriate, such as cutting out source material or designing posters, lessons are too teacher-led and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop independently. Homework is used effectively to support learning. In Years 7 to 9, it is well marked, but in Years 10 and 11, pupils are not always supplied with sufficient substantive comment to aid their improvement.

127. A new head of history has established clear priorities for the subject and produced an excellent action plan, identifying a specific need to improve procedures for assessment that will incorporate target-setting across the curriculum. Recently devised pamphlets provide all pupils with a clear understanding of each topic, how it will be assessed and the skills they are developing. A programme of visits to museums and historical sites has begun and is well supported by work-sheets, carefully linked to classwork. Opportunities for the use of ICT in all years are identified, but currently restricted by access to facilities. Teaching needs to be formally monitored, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and best practice identified and shared within the department. A policy on numeracy in history is yet to be developed.

128. The history department has made satisfactory improvement since the last report. GCSE results have risen; there is a greater range of activities within the curriculum; and opportunities for using ICT are clearly identified.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 are above average.
- Pupils in Year 9 start a GCSE course in ICT.
- Examination results at age 16 are consistently well above the national average.
- There is good leadership of the department.
- Teaching and learning are well supported by the network administrator.

Areas for improvement

- There is no comprehensive scheme of work to direct teaching and learning in ICT across the curriculum.
- There are no procedures for the assessment of ICT across the curriculum.

129. In the 2002 teachers' assessments, pupils aged 14 attained standards that were above the expected national averages. Attainment in teachers' assessments has been consistently high over several years. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, are making good progress in ICT lessons.

130. The ICT department has developed a good basic skills course for pupils in Years 7 and 8, which is very effective in equipping pupils with skills that they go on to apply in the different subjects in the curriculum. Pupils develop good communication skills. They produce high-quality documents that combine text and graphics and communicate well with the intended audience. After researching websites to analyse the features that make them effective, they design their own sites well. This work helps to develop literacy skills by its

emphasis on communication through the written word. Pupils successfully communicate and model information using spreadsheets. They do so in a variety of contexts including a wide-ranging task that requires them to work up a lottery bid for sports facilities. They complete customer surveys and communicate the findings with bar charts that they create using industry-standard software. This part of the course contributes well to the development of numeracy skills as pupils learn to enter formulae in profit and loss accounts. They work on databases and can merge lists of names and addresses with standardised documents. An important part of the ICT curriculum, the impact of ICT on the individual in society, is well covered in Year 9. Pupils learn about the main features of the Data Protection Act. The design and technology and science departments cover other areas of National Curriculum ICT, such as control technology and data-logging. Pupils in these lessons make good progress and attain above-average standards. This year, the department has introduced a GCSE examination course in Year 9 that pupils will follow up to age 16, which poses a good challenge for pupils.

131. In the 2002 GCSE examinations, the percentage of pupils who attained A* to C grades in the long course was well above average. This has been the pattern over several years and is a strength of the school. Those who take the short course GCSE and the Certificate of Achievement also achieve well. In 2001, over 90 per cent of pupils gained an A* to C grade in the short course. In the Certificate of Achievement, all pupils gain either level 2 or 3. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in ICT.

132. Year 11 GCSE pupils develop a very good understanding of key concepts and knowledge in the subject. In their project work, they demonstrate a very good working knowledge of a suitable range of industry-standard software. They know enough to compare competently the features of the software and to choose the right application for specific purposes. They produce a very good running commentary on their work, explaining well why they alter drafts. They analyse the problems they tackle very well and generate good performance criteria to which they work closely.

133. Teaching is consistently good in ICT. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and communicate this well through expert demonstration and good-quality feedback as they circulate to help pupils with tasks. Lessons usually begin with the teacher sharing lesson objectives and end with a review that helps pupils to understand what progress they have made. This is good practice and gives pupils a better understanding of their own learning. Homework is set regularly, is relevant and contributes well to progress. Relationships are very good in all years. Pupils are keen to learn. They enjoy the practical nature of the subject and are well motivated by the technology. Teachers often use data projectors linked to their computer to introduce lessons. In one lesson, the teacher offered the use of this machine to a lower-attaining pupil who gained in self-esteem and confidence with the teacher's quietly sympathetic support, especially when he was called upon to introduce key points later in the lesson. Teachers offer a consistently high degree of challenge, as is evident from the introduction of a GCSE course to all Year 9 pupils. Preparation and planning are good. The best teaching exhibits rapid pace and features enthusiasm for ICT coupled with expertise.

134. The subject is well managed by the newly appointed head of department, who has been responsible for the introduction of the new courses. As ICT co-ordinator in the past, he has made an important contribution to the training of teachers and to the raising of the profile of ICT in the school. The department offers examination courses in ICT for all its pupils in Years 10 and 11. This good provision is enhanced by a range of cross-curricular opportunities in a number of departments, including English, design and technology, music and science. Despite these advances, the efforts of departments are largely uncoordinated. The school needs to develop a whole-school scheme of work that will direct the teaching of ICT across the curriculum to avoid duplication in teaching and learning and

ensure a more efficient allocation of resources. An important task relating to this is the development of assessment procedures to track the learning of individuals in the separate subjects. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is not formalised in the department, which means that opportunities to recognise and share good practice are missed. The teaching and learning of ICT are well supported by the network administrator and the newly appointed ICT technician.

MODERN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- The department is very well resourced and makes good use of modern technology.
- Good teaching is helped by pupils' good attitudes.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- Results in French have improved at GCSE.

Areas for improvement

- There is low attainment in German in GCSE.
- No pupils study two languages in Years 10 to 11.
- The marking of pupils' written work in Years 7 to 9 should be improved.

135. Teachers' assessments of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2001 suggested that pupils' overall level of attainment in French was above the national average, but these assessments are generous. Pupils' overall standards of attainment in French by the end of Year 9 are average. Most pupils begin a second language in Year 8 for one lesson per week, and pupils attain appropriate levels. Pupils understand the foreign languages used by teachers and successfully extract information heard on cassette. Oral skills are satisfactory and pronunciation is generally sound, but some pupils lack confidence. In their written work, pupils write about their topics at an appropriate level, but accuracy varies. Few pupils redraft their work or complete corrections to improve accuracy.

136. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 11 is average in French and below average in German. Higher-attaining pupils showed good understanding; middle-attaining pupils spoke with sound pronunciation, but lacked confidence and were dependent on prompts. Lower-attaining pupils read aloud satisfactorily. Higher-attaining pupils in French in Year 11 talked confidently about different types of food and gave opinions and extracted information successfully from conversations on cassette. In their written work, higher-attaining pupils in German use the perfect tense; in French they use a range of tenses.

137. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A* to C in the GCSE examinations in French in 2001 was close to the national average. Boys were in line with the national average for boys, but girls were below that for girls nationally. However, no boys attained the highest grades (A* or A). The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A* to G was just above the national average. The trend over three years in grades A* to C has remained relatively constant until 2002, when the proportion of these pupils increased by 10 per cent.

138. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A* to C in the GCSE examinations in German in 2001 was significantly below the national average. At grades A* to G, the proportion was above the national average. In 2002, the proportion of pupils attaining grades A* to C decreased by 12 per cent. Compared with all results for 2001 in the school, boys and girls perform better in every other subject than in French and German. Pupils

learning German begin their study one year later than French and have only half of the curricular time devoted to French. In addition, these pupils did not have the benefit of a specialist German teacher for part of the course

139. The rate of achievement of most pupils in French in Years 7 to 11 and in German in Years 8 and 9 is satisfactory. Progress in the lessons observed in Years 10 and 11 is now satisfactory, after being unsatisfactory in the past. Over time, pupils acquire a sound knowledge of the relevant vocabulary for different topics in conjunction with the grammatical framework and structures. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated into their classes and make progress in line with other pupils. Learning assistants give good support.

140. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are good, sometimes very good. Pupils are attentive and well behaved, apply themselves well to their tasks and generally co-operate with each other sensibly in paired work. Concentration and interest are maintained well.

141. The quality of teaching is now good, with much of the teaching being done by relatively new staff. Teachers generally make very good use of the foreign language in lessons. The teaching of basic skills is sound. Lesson planning is very good. Every lesson begins with revision, and there are different activities and skills. There are good opportunities in many lessons for pupils to hear and speak French. Occasionally, individual pupils' oracy is not challenged sufficiently. Teaching methods are effective in many lessons. The management of pupils and relationships are very good. Teachers make very good use of resources and of modern technology. Homework is set regularly, though the marking of pupils' written work in Years 7 to 9 is too superficial

142. A new head of department is in post and brings very good leadership and management to modern language provision. The turnover of teachers has been high and this has led to a lack of continuity and de-motivation: German has been very heavily disrupted. Achievement by pupils has been limited by this factor, but in lessons they are now making much better progress.

143. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Pupils now begin German in Year 7 and a second German specialist teacher has joined the staff. The department has the commitment and the capacity to improve.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- A very good range of extra-curricular activities makes a significant contribution to pupils' development.
- The management of the department is good.

Areas for improvement

- Increase the number of pupils being entered for GCSE music.
- Practice room facilities should be improved.
- Assessment and marking should be improved.

144. Standards by Year 9 are above national expectations. Although no pupils were entered for the GCSE examination in 2001, since the last inspection an average of eleven pupils have been entered each year for music GCSE. Two pupils in Year 11 and eleven pupils in Year 10 are preparing for GCSE. The one candidate entered for AS music in 2001

achieved grade D. In the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music examinations, from ten entries in woodwind, brass and vocal examinations, three pupils obtained distinctions, five merits and two pass grades.

145. In the work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9, standards are above average and pupils achieve well. Year 7 pupils have a good understanding of pitch and rhythm and Year 8 pupils effectively perform “Blues” chords on the keyboard. In their study of Jamaican music, Year 9 pupils develop a good technical vocabulary including ostinato, reggae, riff and triads.

146. In Years 10 and 11, standards are above average and pupils achieve well. Year 11 pupils have a good understanding of serialism, minimalism and experimental music.

147. The pupils in Years 7 to 9 have a good attitude to music. They enjoy lessons and are keen to learn. For many it is their favourite subject. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are highly motivated and sixth form students have an excellent attitude to learning about technology and music. Pupils and students work well together and pupil-teacher relationships are mature and productive. Musical activities are inclusive, involving boys and girls of all abilities. Pupils are courteous and polite and handle the expensive resources and instruments they use with care. They show respect for their own and each other’s performances.

148. The quality of teaching is good and at best excellent. The teachers and visiting instrumentalists are accomplished musicians with a secure knowledge of their subject. Lessons are well prepared, with objectives explained at the start of the lesson. A range of teaching styles helps to sustain the pupils’ interest. Pupils with special educational needs are identified and are effectively supported by teachers and learning support assistants. Pupils’ work is effectively assessed as the lesson proceeds, but overall assessment procedures and marking of work are not good enough. Teaching makes an important contribution to the pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities are being missed for singing and musical contributions in assemblies. Pupils study a range of musical styles including Blues, Indian and Jamaican music. A wide range of extra-curricular music, including choirs, clubs, visits and shows such as “Return to the Forbidden Planet”, make an important contribution to musical knowledge and performance skills. ICT resources should continue to be improved in Years 7 to 11 in order to prepare pupils for the music technology course in the sixth form. Teaching is less effective when learning outcomes are not made clear to the pupils; it is most effective when pupils are given adequate time to complete tasks fully during the lesson.

149. In all years, pupils learn well and achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. Younger pupils make good progress in their understanding of theory and the elements of music. Composition and performance skills should continue to be improved and pupils should appraise their own and each other’s performances. Standards and levels of interest amongst pupils in Years 7 to 9 indicate opportunity for more of them to opt for GCSE music would be receive a positive response.

150. Higher-attaining pupils make very good progress as a result of instrumental tuition. Six visiting musicians offer high-quality voice and instrumental tuition for 60 pupils. There is only one music practice room and this is in need of soundproofing. Issues raised during the last inspection have been fully addressed and the requirements of the National Curriculum are being met. The department is well managed.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is very good.
- The teaching is good and often very good where positive relationships are supported by high but realistic expectations.
- The department is very well led and managed and teamwork is evident.
- The results of pupils in GCSE examinations are consistently above national averages and above the average for the school.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' understanding of principles of play across a range of games needs further development.
- The attainment of pupils on entry to the school needs to be closely monitored to inform assessment and progress over time.

151. Standards in the work of the majority of 11 to 14 year olds observed during the inspection are average. In games, gymnastics and orienteering, standards are average. In swimming, standards are above average, with some pupils performing at a very high level. Pupils exhibit a range of skills in basketball and hockey, some accompanied with technical accuracy. While others lack controlled execution, they display good technical understanding and honest endeavour. In gymnastics, pupils show a range of ideas and while some perform with poise and control, others are less assured. Boys attempt more challenging movements and balances, but often without poise and control. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 is good. All pupils recognise how to prepare for an activity and many have some knowledge of muscle groups and their function. Girls and boys move apparatus and equipment safely and efficiently. An understanding of the "principles of play" across a range of games is less well developed.

152. By the age of 16, the number of boys and girls gaining A* to C grades in GCSE examinations was above the school average and above the national average. This represents very good achievement for these pupils over five years at the school. There is no marked difference in the overall results for girls and boys, but the number of girls taking GCSE has been low. The current cohort in Year 10 shows an improvement in the participation of girls. In theory work, the understanding of key concepts and use of specific terminology linked to anatomy is well developed.

153. Standards in the work of 16 year olds observed in practical sessions are above average. Some pupils' work is of a higher quality and demonstrates a high level of skill. Several boys exhibit a high level of technical skill in passing and creating space in football. In aerobics, some girls demonstrate good co-ordination and possess a secure range of skills in movement, while a small number are less assured in their performance. In badminton and tennis, standards are sometimes below average and reflect the lack of previous experience. Standards in swimming are particularly high, with approximately half of the GCSE group already recording full marks at an early stage in the year.

154. It is rare that pupils with special educational needs can be distinguished from the rest and many make good progress in practical work. In Year 7, boys made good progress in the initial stages of orienteering, having been challenged with the responsibility of using a map to find a series of numbers. A large number of pupils develop and refine their skills in the extensive extra-curricular sports programme. Girls' participation in activities has been low, but recent initiatives with dance, sports aerobics and gymnastics are rapidly improving this aspect. The partnerships that have been built with local sporting organisations are particularly impressive, and standards are enhanced by the involvement of many pupils.

155. Teaching is consistently good, with much of it very good. Across Years 7 to 9, teaching is good. There are challenging objectives outlined at the start to lessons and teachers provide stimulating demonstration and planned progressions at brisk pace, with a variety of tasks. In Year 10, teaching is very good. Realistic tasks are set for the different needs within the group. An example of this was seen in a football lesson where pupils rose to the challenge of developing the ability to turn or “lay the ball off” in co-operative and then competitive situations. Across Years 7 to 11, learning of practical skills is good, but there are missed opportunities to improve understanding of the “principles of play” that are common to invasion games and net games. Distinctive features of teaching are the good knowledge of the subject and the encouragement of appropriate attitudes toward competitive or co-operative situations. Theory teaching at GCSE is a major strength.

156. The department makes the best use of the indoor and outdoor accommodation, and incidents of non-participation in lessons were not seen, an impressive feature. Very good leadership and management are major factors in the success of the department. The team has a clear vision for the future that has been translated into realistic aims and objectives. There is evidence of a reflective culture and a team ethos is well developed within the department. Improvement since the last inspection is very good, most notably in the widening of the curriculum, GCSE attainment and the planning of coherent schemes of work.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	3	67	62	67	15	3.0	1.5
Business studies	1	100	76	0	12	1.0	1.7
Other social studies	1	100	74	0	11	1.0	1.5
German	1	100	82	0	13	1.0	1.8

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	14	79	87	21	43	4.4	5.8
Biology	15	100	88	20	34	5.7	5.3
Chemistry	16	100	90	31	43	5.6	5.9
Physics	12	100	88	33	40	5.2	5.7
Design and technology	9	100	91	44	30	6.7	5.4
Business studies	13	100	92	8	32	5.2	5.5
Computer studies	4	100	86	0	23	4.0	4.6
Theatre studies	5	100	93	0	31	3.6	5.5
Sports/physical education studies	11	100	92	55	25	7.5	5.1
Art and design	6	83	96	17	46	4.0	6.6
Geography	8	100	92	0	38	4.5	5.7
History	7	75	88	0	35	3.7	5.4
Other social studies	5	40	87	0	34	1.6	5.3
Sociology	3	100	86	100	35	8.7	5.3
Religious studies	20	100	92	20	38	6.0	5.8
English language	1	100	91	0	30	6.0	5.3
English literature	14	100	95	14	37	5.3	5.9

French	4	50	89	25	38	4.0	5.6
German	2	50	91	0	40	1.0	5.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus in inspection was on mathematics, biology and chemistry, but physics was also sampled. One lesson was observed in which students were doing experimental work. Because the lesson was well planned and the teaching good, they completed the work accurately, relating their results appropriately to the underlying principles. Overall, the standards attained in physics over the last four years by the relatively small number of candidates have varied. All students have gained some form of A level grade, but the proportion of A and B grades has been below the national average.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The subject has improved recruitment to A level and there are clear plans for developing provision.
- Teachers' very good knowledge of the subject ensures high quality teaching of concepts.
- High-attaining students achieve the highest grades possible.

Areas for improvement

- Recruitment to AS courses is poor and strategies to improve retention rates into Year 13 are not effective.
- Insufficient A1 modules are covered in Year 12 to provide an AS qualification.
- There are no optional modules for gifted mathematicians.

157. The inspection covered A, AS level and re-sit GCSE courses.

158. In 2001, A level examinations students gained below-average results. The small numbers of students entered make comment on past trends unreliable. However, there was an improvement in the results of 2002, and those studying currently have higher entry qualifications. Analysis of students' performance at A level indicates satisfactory achievement. There were too few AS results in 2001 for national comparison, as some students do not complete their AS modules until Year 13. The school's policy of open access to the sixth form has placed many students on the AS course who lack the mathematical aptitude to progress successfully. At both A and AS levels, higher-attaining students achieve well. Of those students re-sitting GCSE mathematics to improve their grades, 13 per cent achieved grade C, while others improved on their previous grades. There is no evidence to suggest differences in the performance of male and female students. However, each year there are significantly more males than females taking mathematics courses.

159. The standard of A level work seen in folders and lessons is satisfactory. High-attaining students work well, offering expanded answers when working with the remainder theorem. Students are more confident applying techniques than in understanding the development of formal proofs. This was evident in a Year 13 group who had difficulty with the abstract nature of the proof of the factor rule for solving polynomials. During a mock module test, half of the students had difficulty in recalling correct processes and made false starts to questions. A Year 12 group of AS students, from both higher and intermediate GCSE courses, were able to understand the development of formulae for standard deviation. However, the levels of attainment on entry of some students is below that commonly found in

sixth forms, which affects their pace of progress through the course. Standards in GCSE re-sit groups are low. Students were observed at the start of their course investigating different mathematical puzzles that contained a variety of mathematical techniques. They showed enthusiasm and interest in their tasks.

160. The teaching of A level mathematics to sixth form students is very good. The high quality of teachers' knowledge of their subject ensures skilled delivery of new concepts to students. Very good student-teacher relationships within the classroom and the willingness of teachers to assist students at any time provide students with the confidence to seek help whenever it is needed. A Year 12 group learned well from the skilled development of formulae by the teacher, who ensured that students with differing ability and mathematical backgrounds were included in the learning. However, students are reluctant to challenge teachers and ask for further explanation during the delivery of new ideas. Regular assessment of work ensures that students are aware of their achievement and receive individual help from teachers, both during and after lessons. The predominant style of teaching is that of demonstration of technique and practice. However, teachers take opportunities to link work to the real world whenever possible. Students feel that they are treated as adults and are responsible for their own learning. The teaching of GCSE groups is good. Teachers are aware of the needs of students and the low skill-base from which they start. Care is taken by teachers to use appropriate levels of language and reward.

161. The new head of department has clear views on the developments required within the A level courses and recognises the need for transitional materials to prepare students for sixth form work and ensure that they complete sufficient modules to gain an AS qualification from their work in Year 12. There is a need to review entry to mathematics AS level to ensure that students will benefit from their learning experience and will complete their course of study. There is no opportunity for gifted students who may wish to take additional modules.

162. Since the last inspection, more students have completed A level courses each year. There are more teachers able to contribute to teaching in the sixth form and a growing number of higher-attaining students entering the course.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Students' achievement in relation to their prior average GCSE attainment is good.
- Teachers' are knowledgeable about their subject.
- Lessons are well-planned, with clear expectations of participation and endeavour supported by good relationships.

Areas for improvement

- Students' do not have the information-handling skills needed to secure the higher grades at A level.
- There are insufficient challenging tasks that enhance independent learning and research skills.

163. The school provides a course leading to AS and A levels, with an end-of-course practical examination appropriately chosen to match students' expertise. Results in the 2001 A level examination were above national averages because, as in 2000, all candidates gained an A to E grade. However, students' results at the higher A or B levels declined from 2000 to below national average, with a higher proportion of girls than boys gaining

grades at this level. Results in the 2002 examination follow this pattern, but information to make national comparisons is not yet available.

164. Two-thirds of students embarked on A level work in 2001, with an average GCSE results at grade C or below. They entered for AS level in 2002 and of the 25 entries, nine achieved results that were better than predicted and ten achieved as well as expected. Overall, this represents good achievement, although more boys than girls did not achieve as well as expected.

165. Standards seen in students' work are average. Year 12 students have settled onto their course and have already developed a good grasp of cell structure and the function of components. Year 13 students have a secure grasp of key concepts in photosynthesis, for example, about chloroplast structure and how different wavelengths of light are utilised. In genetics, they understand basic principles and apply earlier learning to work out problems, for example, in a lesson about the inheritance of haemophilia. They also demonstrate good practical skills, for example, in using microscopes to study leaf structure, and show they can relate structure to function. Higher-attaining students show well-developed understanding of principles, together with a clear ability to analyse information and assemble responses commensurate with standards needed for high grades. However, a clear majority of students have more limited analytical and organisational skills, being over-reliant on the teacher to provide information and showing little evidence of their own work.

166. The quality of teaching is good and leads to clear and effective learning in lessons. Lessons are thoroughly planned with clear objectives. Good use is made of exposition and questioning, where the high level of teachers' subject expertise and knowledge of individual students helps promote their understanding. Learning is reinforced by teachers giving individual students differential support whilst they work, but otherwise the same tasks are set to the class, with no clear accommodation to different learning needs. Some opportunities are given to help students to develop information-handling skills, for example, in a Year 12 lesson about cell structure. However, homework and other assignments are limited in this respect and the department should consider expanding opportunities for students to develop these skills.

167. Students respond very well to the teachers' clear expectations of involvement and endeavour. They maintain concentration and engagement during lessons, helped by the good relationships that are fostered. However, a significantly high proportion is reticent about speaking publicly although students answer fully at a more personal level. Students feel well supported, both by the day-to-day teachers' interest in them and the individual discussions held periodically about coursework assignments and modular examination results. Students are familiar with the grade levels they are expected to obtain and have challenging targets they aspire to meet.

168. The department is competently managed and there is a good working rapport between teaching and technical support staff. Shared teaching in both Years 12 and 13, with a clear partnership in planning, ensures familiarity with practice and an assurance that course requirements are met. The AS and A level courses are structured appropriately to meet examination board requirements and ensure that students are well prepared for modular examinations. Students have very adequate textbooks and equipment to support their work. ICT is used for data-gathering, but resources for supporting learning through illustration and research are very new and not fully functional. Participation in A level biology has improved markedly over the past two years, but this has led to overcrowding in the laboratory for practical work.

169. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection. Analysis and evaluation, coupled with student support, have developed significantly. In turn, results have risen markedly and students are achieving well.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- There is consistently very good teaching based on good insight into students' strengths and weaknesses, resulting in well-planned lessons and very effective learning.
- Standards are high, with most students exceeding expectations based on their performance at GCSE.
- Management is very good.
- Working relationships with students are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is under-used.
- The numbers of students in the Year 12 classes (taking AS level) are sometimes too large, limiting the opportunities to do extensive experimental work.

170. Results in examinations at the end of Year 13 matched the national average. Over the last four years, results have fluctuated. In comparison to national figures, they were above in 1998, below in 1999 and well above in 2000. These variations are to be expected, given the relatively small numbers of students in each year group. The results for 2002 are slightly below those for 2001. A relatively unusual and significant achievement is that for the last five years, no student has failed A level chemistry. When individual student's results are compared to the grade predicted on the basis of their results in science at GCSE, four out of five achieve at least the predicted grade and nearly half exceed it, representing good achievement. There is no significant variation in the performance of boys and girls.

171. Standards observed during the inspection are above the national average. Year 13 students, faced with a difficult practical investigation requiring them to identify an unknown organic chemical, worked with great skill. Working individually, students are able to use their knowledge of organic chemistry to select the correct diagnostic tests and organise their work methodically. They discussed their work fluently, using correct terminology and showing a mature appreciation of the principles underlying the experimental techniques. These students all obtained a grade in AS level in 2002 and over half obtained the higher grades (A or B). These results are confirmed by internal test results based on national standards and high-quality course work. Year 12 students in the first few lessons of the two-year course were successfully learning the fundamental concepts of atomic structure. The security of this learning will form a solid basis for the difficult work to come.

172. Teaching is consistently very good and results in very effective learning. Accurate insight into students' strengths and weaknesses is used to plan stimulating lessons that build efficiently on previous learning. Excellent relationships between teachers and students instil confidence, generate enthusiasm and result in students giving of their best. Experimental work is particularly well organised. Students are presented with problems supported by well-designed work sheets and firmly based on theoretical learning. Independence is always promoted. When students ask for help, teachers skillfully enable them to work out the problem for themselves. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject. There is also a very good understanding of the demands of the examination, which enables students to maximise their performance in both course work and written papers. The teaching is carefully designed so that students who are not taking A level mathematics are

able to cope with the mathematical elements of the syllabus. Difficulties in gaining appropriate access to computers and the lack of sufficient specialised hardware limits the use of ICT to enrich learning opportunities. The large size of classes taking AS level in Year 12 (23 in 2001) sometimes has a negative effect on teaching and learning. Teachers cannot give the amount of individual tuition they feel appropriate and access to a full range of experimental work is compromised.

173. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Assessment of students' work is very good. Frequent tests are used to check the learning of each section of the syllabus. These tests are closely marked to national standards and used well to keep students informed about their progress. When weaknesses are revealed, students are given appropriate guidance on what they need to do in order to improve. The head of chemistry closely monitors the quality of teaching and gives excellent support to less experienced colleagues.

174. Students' attitudes are very positive. Their enjoyment of lessons is evident, as is the effort they put into their work. Students' files are mainly composed of their own hand-written notes, which are complete and show obvious care. By Year 13, students have gained enormously in confidence and independence and are well prepared for the demands of higher education.

175. Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement. Standards have risen, teaching is better and the resources available for lessons are much improved. The uptake for A level by both boys and girls is healthy and rising.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of this inspection was AS/A levels in design and technology, but GNVQ intermediate / AVCE manufacturing was also sampled. Standards seen in GNVQ lessons are good and the five students on the course have made good progress in their ability to use computer technology to plan and carry out practical design tasks. Design folders are compiled with good graphic skills and students are able to analyse research material critically. All students have taken foundation and intermediate courses in Years 10 and 11 and these positive experiences have enabled them to work independently when necessary. Teaching is good and the well-organised course is particularly suited to the needs and abilities of the students.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and, together with very good student attitudes, has resulted in well above average examination results.
- Positive working relationships have created a climate where students can work in a mature and independent way.

Areas for improvement

- The refinement of assessment procedures to give students more precise targets.

176. Results obtained by students are well above average. In 2001, students achieved an average points score well above the national average and 44 per cent of candidates gained A and B grades. Unvalidated figures for 2002 indicate a further improvement. Standards of work seen during the inspection indicate that current students are likely to maintain this high

success rate. Very good AS level results in 2002 have given present Year 13 students a secure platform on which to base work for A2.

177. In lessons seen, standards are well above average. Year 12 students were developing design folios containing good research and analysis skills and were working at a level above that expected at this early stage in the course. Whilst some were more fluent than others in their use of sketches to record and develop ideas, all showed a good understanding of design processes. Students achieve very well throughout the course, and by Year 13 they have very good standards of presentation, make good use of sketches to develop ideas, use varied sources of information for research and demonstrate good analytical skills. For example, one student was able to identify a major weakness in the research element of his AS project and show that he could now focus his research more precisely. With good advice from teachers, students select project areas that present them with an appropriate challenge but maintain a reasonable chance of successful completion. For example, one student has carefully chosen her final project to match her particular background and skills in graphics. Computers are used effectively as a research tool and as a means of improving presentation. Many folders contain detailed, in-depth research and analysis representing hard work and commitment from students.

178. Teaching is good. Because teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of students well, they offer high quality advice and individual help. Students are given good verbal and written information on their progress, which gives them a clear idea of the practical steps they need to take. However, target grades established at the beginning of the course are not reviewed in the light of students' developing skills and many students are vague about what grade they are expected to obtain.

179. All students are very positive about the course and speak highly of its value to them as individuals. Most intend to study a design-related course at college or university. Students join the course from a background of different technology subjects at GCSE, but, because of the quality of support provided, none has had difficulty in adjusting to the greater individual responsibility required at this level. In lessons seen, students worked in a mature and independent way and were able to discuss their work in an informed manner.

180. Leadership and management of the subject are good. A great deal of time and effort has gone into planning and resourcing the course, which is a new development since the last inspection. The course has increased in popularity since its introduction and there are now eighteen students in Year 12 and ten in Year 13. There has been an encouraging increase in the number of female students opting for the subject, and in Year 12 the gender balance is even. During the inspection, no significant difference in the attainment of male and female students was observed, but female students have been well represented in the higher grade awards at A level. Textbook provision is good, but other resources and accommodation are shared with main school pupils. Students have good access to computers and computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment, the regular use of which greatly enhances the quality of design work.

181. Very good progress has been made in establishing the course and reaching its present high standards.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was solely on business education, as this is the only course offered in this curriculum area.

Business education

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

Strengths

- There is a wide range of provision, including academic and vocational courses.
- The admission policy encourages school ethos of inclusion.
- There is good achievement in relations to standards on entry to the courses.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Monitoring of teaching and the spreading best practice are not well developed.
- There is insufficient wider reading and methods to assist retention techniques are not explored.
- There are insufficient text books.

182. The school offers business education in Years 10 and 11 and at post-16. The inspection concentrated on provision in the sixth form, where the school offers GNVQ intermediate level, AVCE and AS/A2 levels.

183. At the intermediate level of GNVQ, results in 2001 saw, that out of nine students, seven (i.e. 78 per cent) gained merits. There were no distinctions. Work seen during the inspection indicated standards above pass rate and students confidently and accurately use a wide range of business terminology. They demonstrate clear understanding of key business concepts, such as the use and importance of administration in business organisations. Work is thorough and covers the requirements of the assessment evidence grid in a broad way.

184. At the AVCE, in Year 12 and 13 students attain levels appropriate at this stage. The strength of the students' classwork in both years is the steady accumulation of knowledge, which is well organised in their files, and in their basic understanding of the subject matter. Relative weaknesses are the interpretation and analysis of data and students' failure to retain the knowledge and understanding over time, which leads to lower performances in examinations.

185. In A level business studies, both at AS and A2, the examination results were below average for the last two years. In 2001, only 8 per cent of pupils attained A or B grades, compared with 26 per cent nationally. However, there are many encouraging trends in examination figures, since 54 per cent achieved grade C, compared with only 18 per cent nationally, and all students obtained a grade. The standards reached by current students, as seen in lessons and in their written work, are at least in line with, and occasionally above, the average. Their projects are interesting, well produced and professionally presented

186. In Years 12 and 13, students make good progress in understanding the central ideas of the subject. However, their achievement is no more than satisfactory overall. This is due mainly to the lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject, a concomitant of additional interests outside school which impact on the time they can devote to learning.

187. Overall, the quality of the teaching on all courses in the department is good, and occasionally very good. The new, young team of dynamic teachers have excellent rapport, and expert knowledge of their subject underpins discussion and lends clarity to the explanations provided. Lessons are carefully planned, and effective use is made of case studies and other activities to allow students to apply and extend their learning. However, a tendency to provide too much inhibits opportunities for the kind of analysis that will enable them to become more independent learners.

188. The department's open-door philosophy echoes the philosophy of the school, and students are offered a curriculum that is broad, balanced and offers opportunities for success. Good value is added and students make achieve well both within and between courses. Resources are adequate. New textbooks are needed in many areas. The accommodation is adequate, though there is no specialist room. Leadership and management are very good; the head of department has a clear vision for the future of the department and drives a good team forward to meet the wide and differing needs and aspirations of future cohorts of students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on A level computing, but the course in AVCE ICT was also extensively sampled.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- A new AVCE course has been introduced this year and has attracted a good number of students. ICT is now a popular subject in the sixth form.
- A scheme to lease laptop computers to Years 12 and 13 has had a very good take up and this has already had a beneficial impact on private study.

Areas for improvement

- Results in A level computing: these have been below national averages over many years.
- There is no systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching.

189. In Years 12 and 13, the school offers A and AS level courses in computing, and this year an AVCE in ICT that focuses on the practical applications of ICT in commerce and industry. Over many years, entries for A level computing have been very low and results have been consistently below national figures. The 2002 results showed a significant improvement on previous years, with nearly half the students gaining B grades. AS levels have been successful; with a third of students gaining A and B grades.

190. Standards in the Year 12 computing course are average. Students tackle practical tasks well, writing and testing simple programs successfully in a computer language that they are seeing for the first time. In the AVCE course, Year 12 students demonstrate a sound understanding of advanced spreadsheet functions and show that they can apply this in the context of practical problems. Year 13 computing students have a knowledge and understanding of how data is processed in a computer. Their projects follow the examination board's criteria closely and the technical solutions they propose are sound. Students draw on their previous learning satisfactorily to overcome problems.

191. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory and sometimes good. The better teaching features very good knowledge of their subject married with an enthusiasm for the subject that

is shared with the students and that makes learning enjoyable. These lessons are well planned and provide good levels of challenge. Tasks are often short and achievable and build well on previous learning. There is close support of individuals as they tackle technical problems or confront new concepts. There is often good use of the data projector to clarify learning points as they arise. The homework that is set provides work that extends as well as consolidates advances in learning. In the more pedestrian teaching, teachers fail to capture fully the interest of students and progress is slowed.

192. Leadership in the department is good, though more formal monitoring and evaluation of teaching is needed in order to share good practice in the department. The good take up for the new AVCE ICT course and for the A level computing is the result of the head of department's efforts to attract a wider range of students into post-16 ICT-related courses. He is responsible also for a successful scheme to promote learning through the leasing of laptop computers, which promotes the development of independent learning skills.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on physical education. In addition the AVCE course in travel and tourism was sampled. In the latter, both standards and teaching quality were above average.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Achievement in the sixth form is very good.
- The teaching is very good and staff exhibit an excellent knowledge of their subject.
- In recent years, results at A level and AS level have been the best in the school, with all pupils gaining A to E grade in the former.

Areas for improvement

- There is currently no recreational physical education programme for all pupils.
- The Community Sports Leader Award qualification is available, but student access to it is prevented by timetabling it against other A level sessions.

193. By the age of 17, the number of boys and girls gaining A to E grades in AS level is above the school average and above the national average. In the most recent results, over half the group recorded an A or B grade, while all pupils gained an A to E grade. At A level, the 100 per cent A to E grade attainment has been maintained, with between a third to a half of these groups regularly gaining A or B grades, representing very good achievement for all students during the one or two year courses. There is no marked difference in the overall results for girls and boys.

194. Standards in the work observed during the inspection are well above average. Students show very good knowledge and understanding of physiological, biomechanical and psychological factors affecting performance. In a Year 13 session, students were introduced to the topic of "arousal" and "anxiety" and it was noticeable that they were able to make good links to previous learning. In Year 12, students showed a readiness in learning technical language associated with identifying movement at specific joints.

195. Teaching is generally very good. Session outcomes are clearly outlined at the start of lessons and teachers provide stimulating examples and planned progressions at brisk pace. They know their students and direct questions appropriately in order to enhance learning and

test their knowledge of the topic. There is a good balance of practical work as a basis for whole group reflection, individual note taking and small group discussion. Teachers have high expectations of their students, underpinned by the evident encouragement of a research culture through the use of their individual files in which students are expected to independently research each topic and provide evidence from the media relating theory to practice. Files are marked regularly and pertinent feedback is offered.

196. The department makes the best use of the accommodation, but a dedicated theory-teaching base is needed to encourage the use of resources and wider reading. The positive attitude of the students and their willingness to follow up tasks overcomes this problem, but as the cohorts increase, the need for such a base becomes more acute. Very good leadership and teamwork are major factors in the success of the teaching team. An effective assessment system ensures that learning outcomes are monitored and in turn keeps students informed of their progress.

197. The Community Sports Leader Award course is available, but few students can access it as it set against other A level classes. The current cohort is at the initial stages and is making appropriate progress. There is currently no recreational physical education programme available to the whole sixth form.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No focus placed on this curriculum area, but sampling of the AVCE course in health and social care took place. Teaching and learning were good and the standards reached were above average.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

No focus was placed on this curriculum area but lessons were sampled in music technology, art and design, media studies and theatre studies courses. Teaching was very good overall and standards were above average.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography and history. In addition, sociology and psychology lessons were also sampled, in which teaching and learning were good and standards above average. A separate Diocesan inspection looked at religious education provision.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Results are improving.
- Students achieve well. The course attracts students with a wide range of ability and almost everyone achieves a pass grade.
- Teaching is good.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results at A level.
- Small numbers taking AS and A level courses
- More opportunities for extended oral contributions
- More use of assessment to improve individual performance.

198. The department caters for a very small number of students following AS and A level courses. The take up rate is low, but students are committed and regularly continue their education at universities. Two out of the three Year 13 students are considering taking degrees in geography.

199. Students first took the AS examination two years ago. Numbers are too small to make statistical comparisons with national standards, but they did as well in geography as they did in their other subjects. Similarly, in 2002 they achieved according to their potential, one student gaining an A grade.

200. Small A level numbers also make it difficult to draw national comparisons. However, since the last inspection and over the last few years, results have improved, although they remain just below average. In 2001, no students achieved higher grades, but everyone passed. In 2002, the results improved. Three out of seven candidates gained B grades and everyone obtained a grade. Most achieve well in relation to their attainment at the start of the sixth form. There were no significant differences in the performance of male and female students, either in examinations or during the inspection.

201. In the lessons and the work seen, standards achieved by students at AS and A level are average. They are achieving well from their starting point.

202. In Year 12, AS students have made a good beginning, particularly since some had not taken geography as an examination subject before. Teachers teach at the right level and relate work well to what students have done earlier in the school. For example, by building on what students knew about tropical forests, the teacher helped them to apply what they had learned about the nutrient cycle to different ecosystems and to link the information effectively back to a model. They have a good grasp of terminology for this stage and use photographs effectively to make sound observations about factors influencing population distributions and densities.

203. A scrutiny of work of the current Year 13 demonstrates that students take effective notes, which are useful for revision. They use information well from textbooks and the Internet. Their essays, though generally clear and well structured, lack the detail needed at this level and there is limited evidence of reading around the subject. They show sound understanding of geographical vocabulary and ideas in their tests. Higher-attaining students show good understanding of physical processes and relate them well to environmental management, as in work about the Three Gorges Project. In spite of problems caused by foot-and-mouth disease, students have been able to apply work about pollution to local

fieldwork. Both in their work and in discussion, students showed that they could all identify a hypothesis and establish a line of enquiry. Average and above-average attainers could link their results well to theory and were aware of the limitations and wider implications of their studies. Good attention by the teacher to developing numerical skills helped their investigations. Average and above-average attainers used statistical tests effectively to test the validity of their sampling methods. Lower-attaining students use a limited range of techniques, and are uncertain about the value of such testing.

204. Overall, teaching is good, occasionally very good, and students learn well. In a majority of lessons, the teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is effectively communicated to the students, who respond accordingly. Their mature and responsible attitudes are shown by the good quality of their coursework. Teachers' expertise and knowledge of examination requirements help them to plan thoroughly to support students in the understanding of increasingly difficult ideas and to develop their examination skills. Small groups encourage an interactive approach. Students are encouraged to think about and find answers for themselves. Questions are asked effectively to develop and challenge. However, this technique is not used enough to encourage extended oral contributions. Whereas Year 12 students explain their ideas confidently, Year 13 students lack confidence in this respect. In one lesson, they relied too heavily on their teacher and were passive learners. Students are given good feedback during lessons, which helps them to move them forward. Marking is sound, but essays lack detailed comments to students to refine their ideas.

205. The management of geography in the sixth form is satisfactory. The curriculum is well planned and ensures good progression from AS to A level. Students are well supported. They feel that good advice from the school and individual help from the head of department have ensured a smooth transition from GCSE and from AS to A level and contributed to their progress. They have good access to departmental resources and to computers. While the department encourages independent study, the library facilities are poor and limit the opportunities for students to read around the subject. Procedures for monitoring students' progress are not clearly established and insufficient use is made of the information available to set targets to improve their performance.

History

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

Strengths

- Staff are knowledgeable and committed.
- The subject is popular and will be viable in the future.
- Pupils' attitudes are good.
- Good added value.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are not high enough.
- There is a lack of variety in teaching styles.
- Marking and assessment are not rigorous.
- Deeper and wider reading by students is not encouraged.

206. Results in public examinations are below average. In the latest published statistics for A level, students did not obtain any A or B grades, whilst the national figure is 36 per cent. Yet at grades C and D, the school achieved 76 per cent, compared to the national figures of 41 per cent. These figures bear testimony to both the strengths and the weaknesses of the department.

207. Year 12 and Year 13 students acquire and effectively communicate knowledge of periods they are studying, but they cannot yet discuss historical issues from different perspectives, nor have they developed historical concepts and understanding involving the need for judgements based on evidence.

208. In both years, standards and achievement are affected adversely by language weakness, both orally, in class work, and, particularly, in written work. There is a lack of wider reading, which often results in students having a good knowledge of the events and people they have studied, but lacking an in-depth historical overview.

209. Teaching is satisfactory. The teachers in the department are knowledgeable and committed to the subject. They prepare and plan lessons well and use the depth of their own experience to promote deeper and wider knowledge amongst the students. Teachers' presentations are skilful, confident and accurate. However, the lessons are too often teacher centred and students are not sufficiently encouraged to become independent learners. Assessment and targeting are not well developed. Marking is not completed with sufficient depth. It is summative rather than formative, and where it occurs, it is often inconsistent.

210. The popularity of the subject means that the Year 12 group is very large. It includes several students whose entry to the subject is based less on prior academic attainment and more on the school ethos of inclusion for those who show commitment and enthusiasm for the subject. The response of students is mostly good, particularly in class, and most achieve satisfactorily from a low baseline at entry. However, they have not yet developed a culture of wide reading, which has a negative impact on their overall attainment

211. The recently appointed head of department has a vision for the department that includes the growth of student attainment to match the current student interest in the subject. She does not yet teach in Years 12 and 13 and this limits the range of teaching styles currently deployed in sixth form history.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The inspection focused on English literature, but one lesson of language was observed. Teaching was very good and students' attitudes excellent. The course is popular and has got off to a very good start. Student groups in French and German have been small, and still are. Average point scores for candidates in A level in 2001 are below the national average in both languages. Results in 2002 show an improvement, with one student of three in French and one of two in German attaining a grade A. Students now in Year 12 have attained high grades in GCSE in French and German. In the lessons sampled in French and German, students' standard of attainment is satisfactory and progress is satisfactory. Teaching is good: over time, students acquire the relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures to enable them to read, understand and write about a range of topics. Students regularly use the Internet to help them with their independent research

English

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well, especially in their facility to think for themselves.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- There are very good assessment procedures to support learning.
- There is very good use of ICT both by teachers and students.

Areas for improvement

- Students have insufficient experience of reading and the theatre to extend knowledge.
- Texts from other cultures are not used extensively.
- There are insufficient resources in the library to support learning.

212. The department offers courses in English literature at AS and A2. AS courses in English language and media studies have begun this year. There is also a course for students wishing to re-sit their GCSE English.

213. In the A level examinations in 2001, results were below average. They were also below average in 2000, but improved greatly in 2002. All students have gained grades A to E for several years, but the percentage gaining grades A and B, has been low. In 2002, however, five out of the eight students gained these high grades. Few boys choose to study literature, but they do as well as do the girls, over time. Students have done as well in English as in their other subjects in previous years, but in 2001, they did less well. In 2002, they did better than in their other subjects.

214. Standards seen during the inspection were average. They have improved because teaching has improved and the course is now much more carefully planned. Assessment procedures have also improved and every student is clear about what standards they have achieved and what they are aiming for. Assessment criteria are regularly referred to. The order of assessments has sensibly been changed so that students begin in an area they are confident in (Shakespeare), before moving on to one they find harder (The Modern Novel). Achievement in the sixth form is good and most students exceed the target grades set for them. All students have to think for themselves and they do regular presentations of their research and analysis to the other students on the course. These are well presented using PowerPoint, and valued by the students. Higher attainers speak and write fluently about literary techniques, for example, those used in Vera Brittain's poetry. They focus on language and style rather than content. Middle attainers can identify and analyse important themes and use apt references to support their ideas. Lower attainers sometimes slip into narrative rather than analysis, for example, of "Antony and Cleopatra", but they know their texts and express themselves accurately.

215. The department organises regular theatre trips and teachers supply information both for background reading and critical analysis, but students do not read beyond and around their set texts sufficiently, nor do they have sufficient experience of the theatre. Students and teachers use the Internet extensively to extend their knowledge about texts, but there is insufficient material available in the school library for adequate research.

216. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and knowledge of examination requirements for the new specifications. Students value their experience and the efforts they put into their teaching. Relationships are excellent, promoting excellent attitudes amongst students, though some are reserved in class discussion. Teachers treat students as young adults and give them responsibility to develop their own learning. In a Year 13 lesson about war poetry, students gave a very effective presentation on a Rupert Brooke poem, during which the teacher added important information on the changing views of society. Students learnt very effectively.

217. Leadership and management are very good. The changes introduced to assessment procedures and the much more rigorous approach to monitoring, both of teaching and the curriculum, have brought about very good improvement to the department.