

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST ROBERT OF NEWMINSTER ROMAN
CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

Washington

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 108870

Headteacher: Dr J. H. O'Neill

Reporting inspector: Mr R. Drew
7281

Dates of inspection: 4th – 6th November 2002

Inspection number: 249770

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Biddick Lane
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Rt. Rev. Mgr. P. Carroll

Date of previous inspection: November 1996

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7281	R. Drew	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and students' achievements How well are students taught How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students How well the school is led and managed What the school should do to improve further
9710	R. Burgess	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students How well does the school work in partnership with parents
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18447	R. Cohen	Team inspector	Politics Religious education	
19586	W. Easterby	Team inspector	English language	
27416	T. Howard	Team inspector	Mathematics	
21785	V. Kerr	Team inspector	Biology Psychology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Robert's is a very large 11 to 18 school, which has expanded from 1275 on roll to 1705 since the last inspection in 1996. It has 555 sixth-form students and 1150 in the main school. It serves parishes in and around Washington, an area with higher unemployment than nationally, but only 10 per cent of the school's pupils are entitled to free school meals, a lower level of disadvantage than average. The great majority of the pupils are white (U.K.) in origin, with small numbers from several ethnic minority communities, notably Black (African), Indian, Chinese and white (non U.K.). Eight pupils have English as an additional language, with three at an early stage of language acquisition. There are 157 pupils on the register of special educational needs, a below average proportion by national standards, and fewer than average have formal statements of special educational needs.

National tests conducted in their primary schools and other assessments in Year 7 show pupils to have above average standards of attainment on entry to the school.

Since the last inspection, a large proportion of the school has been rebuilt and other new accommodation added. Many national educational initiatives have been adopted and a City Learning Centre occupies part of the school site, offering excellent additional facilities to the school's pupils and students.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with some very good features. Standards of attainment are well above average in Year 9 and Year 11 and pupils achieve well. Teaching, learning and the quality of leadership and management are all good. Spending per pupil is broadly average and the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Relationships between staff and pupils and between different groups of pupils are very good.
- The school provides very effective spiritual, moral and social guidance for pupils.
- Attainment amongst Year 9 and Year 11 pupils is well above average.
- Pupils make good progress in lessons and make good long term achievement during their time in school.
- Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in a significant minority of lessons.
- Pupils behave well and show positive attitudes.
- The school is well led and managed.

What could be improved

- Assessment and target-setting arrangements in Years 7 to 9 have insufficient beneficial impact on pupils.
- A minority of teaching and learning lacks the quality seen more in the school as a whole.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning and the work of heads of departments is unsatisfactory
- The relatively short and complex school day reduces teaching time per week and presents difficulties for teachers in planning consistently.
- Standards in modern languages are well below national averages.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good overall improvement since the last inspection of November 1996. It has acted on the key issues raised at the time, making noticeable gains on some matters, such as the gap between boys' attainment and that of girls, and partial improvement on

others such as restructuring the science department. Registration procedures in the sixth form are better but the following up of absences is not ensuring adequate attendance levels.

However, the school has made very good improvement on other crucial matters, notably standards of attainment for pupils and students of all ages, and in expanding the size and range of courses in the sixth form.

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	A	A	A	A
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' results in National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in English, mathematics and science were well above average. In the last four years they have been either above or well above average and the 2002 results confirm a strong upward trend. When all subjects studied by Years 7 to 9 are considered, overall standards are again well above average. This indicates that pupils achieve well, building successfully on their already above average attainment on entry to the school. This attainment is matched by good progress in lessons, reflecting consistently good teaching.

By the end of Year 11, public examination results are well above average. In 2001 this was true both in terms of pupils' average points scores and the proportion who gained five or more A* to C grades. In both respects standards are rising noticeably, with the 2002 results confirming this trend. Results such as these at the end of Year 11 indicate that pupils are achieving well across Years 10 and 11.

Standards seen during the inspection were also collectively well above average and pupils made good progress in lessons. The good quality teaching and positive attitudes of pupils has helped the school surpass its 2001 and 2002 targets of 60 per A* to C passes at GCSE. Since the rate at the time of the last inspection was 48 per cent, the school's figure of 61 per cent in 2001 represents very good improvement in this area. Boys' attainment at the end of Year 9 is lower than that of female students, especially in English, but the school's gap between boys' and girls' performance is narrower than the national one. The same is true at the end of Year 11, and in the two recent years, boys matched girls' performance at GCSE.

Pupils with special educational needs receive valuable support and make good progress across Years 7 to 11. There was insufficient evidence to assess the progress of pupils using English as an additional language. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress, but they do not consistently receive the additional challenge they require and the school's proportion of A* and A grades is slightly lower than average. Pupils' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) competence are generally good.

Standards and the achievement of pupils at the end of Year 11 are particularly impressive in English, design and technology, history, mathematics and physical education, but in modern languages results have been well below average in recent years.

In the sixth form, students enter with below average prior attainment. At the end of Year 13, attainment has been just below average in most recent years, but in 2001 points scores at A and AS matched the national ones and results improved further in 2002. This represents good achievement overall, but work seen during the inspection indicates that standards are continuing to rise and that lessons are characterised by good progress. Results contain more unclassified grades and fewer A and B grade passes than is usual; these shortcomings are the result of limited use in the past of rigorous assessment and target-setting procedures.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils are positive in their manner, attend well and are rarely excluded. They are responsive to the hard work of their teachers. Some, but not all, are quick to take responsibility and initiative in lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. In lessons pupils behave well, often very well. Moving around school and in social areas their behaviour is good.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils relate very well to staff and to other pupils, reflecting the very positive and supportive attitude adopted by adults and expected of pupils.
Attendance	Good. Attendance levels are above average, and unauthorised absence levels unusually low. Punctuality to lessons is satisfactory overall, but lacks consistency.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching for the school as a whole is good or excellent, with about a quarter of the lessons seen during the inspection having very good teaching. Pupils in general learn well, both in response to teaching quality and as a result of their own good attitudes to study and the schools positive ethos. They are particularly good at extended periods of concentration and at assimilating new ideas and information. They are less successful at independent study and in Years 7 to 9 are less aware of their own standards and targets than they should be.

Teachers show very good knowledge of their subject and are particularly effective in managing pupils' behaviour. This succeeds, because staff work hard to establish very good relationships with pupils. Lessons are clearly structured, but the attention within these plans to reinforcing numeracy and ICT skills is variable. Literacy skills are well taught. Pupils with special educational needs generally learn well in response to good support in class. Higher-

attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 learn satisfactorily, but teaching does not consistently build in the necessary additional challenge to promote the best possible learning by such pupils.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are both good with a slightly higher proportion of lessons having very good teaching than in the school as a whole.

Across the school as a whole teaching is very good in English, mathematics, religious education and design and technology. No subject has unsatisfactory teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. There is a well balanced formal curriculum, enhanced by good extra curricular activities. The school offers additional courses such as drama, media studies at GCSE and Part 1 GNVQ in travel and tourism. The shortness of the teaching week and complexity of the school day detracts from this a little.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Provision is well organised and support in lessons is good.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good assistance is given to the tiny minority of pupils who use English as an additional language.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school invests heavily in policies and personnel to promote these areas, and it succeeds very well in encouraging pupils to be reflective, socially aware and appreciative of their own cultures and those of others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The quality of personal support for pupils is very good and a strength of the school. Monitoring academic progress is currently satisfactory.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher leads the school well, establishing a good working ethos and making this a popular and expanding school. Monitoring of teaching and of the work of heads of department is unsatisfactory.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are well informed about the schools' strengths and weaknesses and provide good strategic support. They fulfil all their statutory duties with the exception of those for collective worship: acts of worship are conducted well but not on a daily basis for all pupils.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The school identifies its strengths and weaknesses well. Action to improve performance in some instances – notably in modern languages, science and music – has lacked sufficient rigour to ensure necessary changes.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The budget is deployed in line with this school's educational priorities, and there has been considerable success in bidding for additional funds. "Best Value" principles are applied well in terms of seeking appropriate supplies of school services. The use of comparisons between this school's provision and that of others is broadly satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>The overwhelming majority of parents are pleased by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the high expectations placed by the school on their children; • the good progress their children make; • the fact that the school is very approachable; • the good quality of teaching; • the good leadership and management; • the fact that their children like school; • the way that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible. 	<p>A small minority of parents would like to see improvement in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the information they receive about their children's progress; • the degree to which the school works closely with parents.

Inspectors fully support the strong parental approval for the many positive features listed above. In terms of the points for improvement identified by a small minority of parents, inspectors rate the information parents' receive as good compared with national practice. Similarly, the school works closely with parents by national standards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

St Robert's sixth form, which currently has 555 students, is one of the largest in the country. It has grown dramatically from 287 at the time of last inspection in 1996. It provides post-16 education for students leaving the school's own Year 11 as well as those from many other schools in and around Washington and Sunderland. About 55 per cent now come from schools other than St Robert's. Retention rates from the school's own Year 11 are above average, and from Year 12 to Year 13 staying on rates are broadly average. There are more female students than male in both Year 12 and Year 13, with the difference averaging about 20 in each year group. The vast majority of students are white of U.K. background with about 5 per cent representing a range of ethnic minority communities. Only two students use English as an additional language and less than 1 per cent are on the special educational needs register. The students come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds, but on balance they are neither advantaged or disadvantaged by national standards. The prior attainment of students is below the average for sixth forms nationally.

The sixth form offers a particularly wide range of A and AS courses – well over 30 – and these are complemented by some flourishing vocational courses. In addition, most Year 12 students follow a structured Curriculum Enrichment Programme.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective sixth form. Standards at the end of Year 13 have recently risen to match national ones. Students collectively achieve well in relation to their GCSE points scores at the start of their time in the sixth form. The sixth form is soundly led and managed, and teaching and learning are both good, with much that is very good. Students receive good guidance and support. Spending is broadly average for sixth forms and cost effectiveness is good.

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are rising and students make good progress in lessons.
- Teaching and learning are good with a significant minority of lessons in which they are very good.
- The school offers an unusually wide range of courses.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form ensure a very positive ethos that promotes learning successfully and enables students to settle in quickly.
- Overall, provision for religious education in Years 12 and 13 is very good and is good in a wide range of subjects.
- There is good careers advice and guidance about options beyond school.

What could be improved

- Too many students fail to gain a pass grade in some of their courses.
- Attendance levels are unsatisfactory.
- Management of the sixth form has not led to sufficiently systematic monitoring of classroom teaching or of students' progress.
- Accommodation and resource levels are unsatisfactory.
- Group sizes are too large on many Year 12 courses and occasionally too small in Year 13.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Very good teaching has maintained well above average A-level results over recent years, with the exception of those in 2001, which were uncharacteristically below average. Students' attainment at AS-level is average.
Biology	Satisfactory. Standards are average and students achieve soundly in relation to prior attainment. Teaching and learning in lessons are generally good and the subject is well led and managed.
Design and technology	Good. Examination results are rising noticeably and standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. Teaching is good and students develop a good understanding of the design and making process.
Information and communication technology	Good. Attainment is above average and the subject well led and managed. Students have positive attitudes and very much enjoy the new course. Electronic learning is only used to a very limited extent at present.
Physical education	Satisfactory. Standards of attainment at A and AS-level are below those predicted on the basis of students' prior attainment. Progress on the AVCE course 'Leisure and Recreation' is good. Teaching is sound overall with much that is good.
Art and design	Satisfactory. Standards of attainment are broadly average and represent sound progress in relation to students' standards on entry to the sixth form. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
Media Studies	Satisfactory. Having made sound progress in the sixth form, students in Year 13 reach broadly average standards, Teaching and learning are satisfactory and the subject is soundly led and managed.
Geography	Good. Results have improved to broadly average. Progress for students over their two years in the sixth form is good. Teaching and learning in lessons is good but use of target-setting and monitoring of students' progress is limited.
History	Good. Results in 2001 were below average, against the generally improving trend. Standards seen during the inspection were average. Students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good.
Religious education	Very good. Standards are well above the national average and students make very good progress across Years 12 and 13. Leadership of the department is very effective and teaching consistently very good.
Government and politics	Good. Good leadership and teaching help students make good progress. Standards seen during the inspection were above average and results have improved to match national norms.

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Psychology	Good. Students progress well across Years 12 and 13 and they attain above average A-level results. This reflects the good teaching and learning typical of lessons and the very effective management of the subject.
English language	Good. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve well: they match national standards by the end of Year 13 having entered the sixth form with below average standards.
English Literature	Good. Very good learning is typical, due to very effective teaching. Standards are above average and are indicative of good progress for Year 13 students.
French	Satisfactory. Results for Year 13 students in 2001 were well below average but improved noticeably in 2002. Teaching and learning are good. Students in Year 12 are achieving well.

In addition to the 15 subjects given more detailed consideration, the following subjects were also sampled: AS/A Spanish, German, travel and tourism AVCE, the AS in combined English language and literature, AS/A physics, chemistry, theatre studies and design and technology (Systems and Control).

Provision in Spanish and German is in small, sometimes non-viable groups with generally below average results; it is sound within theatre studies, the combined English course, physics and chemistry and good in design and technology.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Satisfactory. The quality of careers advice and guidance about study beyond Year 13 is good. The matching of students to courses on entry to the sixth form compares satisfactorily with arrangements in sixth forms generally and the monitoring of their academic and personal progress is sound.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Satisfactory. Leadership and management have been successful in establishing a welcoming and purposeful atmosphere characterised by hard work, very good behaviour and very good relationships. Overall, standards have risen sharply in the last two years in response to these factors and the way leadership decisions have expanded the curriculum range. The monitoring of teaching is limited and aspects of students' progress such as target-setting and attendance rates, have lacked rigour. Group sizes have been allowed to include some excessively large ones and a few which are too small.

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"> • The way course choices allow them to follow their preferences. • The fact that they are challenged to do their best in their subjects. • The sixth form is enjoyable and they would advise others to join it. • The way they are treated as responsible young adults. • The school listens and responds to their views. • The help they receive to study and research independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The careers advice they receive. • The information they receive about their progress. • The advice they received on entry to the sixth form.

Inspectors agree with students about the positive features they have identified. In terms of areas for improvement, inspectors find that careers advice is in fact good, but agree that the printed information and other advice given to students on choosing courses is sometimes too general.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Relationships are very good as a result of the school's very effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural guidance for pupils.

1. Across Years 7 to 11 the formal and informal relationships between staff and pupils are very good. For instance, teaching and non-teaching staff know pupils' names very well and frequently speak to them in a very specific and personal way in the corridor as well as during lessons. Pupils find staff very approachable but are respectful in their dealings with all adults in school. A Year 11 assembly illustrated the successful way pupils and students frequently collaborate: a small group of pupils put considerable effort into rehearsing and performing a short piece of drama to help their tutor illustrate the themes of the assembly. Responsibility for its successful message to the year group lay jointly with tutor and pupils and had greater impact as a result. Pupils relate very well to each other, irrespective of gender, age or the academic or social differences between them.

2. The basis for these very positive features is the school's strong commitment to the gospel values it espouses. More so than many schools the principle of treating all people fairly, with equal respect and value translates into formal policy and day-to-day practice. The school has explored the various meanings of spiritual development and provides many opportunities for pupils to be reflective and develop their own beliefs and interpretations of events and issues. Staff demonstrate through their actions how to treat people with respect. They also demonstrate sociable behaviour as well as teaching what is acceptable and unacceptable. The fact that social, moral and spiritual development is so consistently promoted reflects well on the school's clear policies but also on the existence of a co-ordinator of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the quality of their work.

Attainment at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 is well above average and pupils achieve well

3. In 2001 the proportion of pupils gaining level 5 or above in National Curriculum tests in English was 82 per cent compared with a national figure of 64. Mathematics and science results also exceeded national averages by similarly wide margins. The higher levels (levels 6 to 8) are also attained by a much greater proportion than nationally. For example, 47 per cent reached level 6 or above in science tests, compared with 34 per cent for the country as a whole. While pupils are entering Year 7 with increasingly good scores in the National Curriculum tests for 11 year olds, this only partly explains the impressive standards reached by the pupils at the end of Year 9. The other major factor is that teachers set challenging work for the class as a whole in Years 7 to 9 and create a good working atmosphere. There is scope for pupils to progress even more rapidly since work is not matched to individual needs as often as it might be, and the system for placing pupils in different groups within subjects operates with variable success.

4. Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average. For example, in 2001, 61 per cent of candidates gained five or more A* to C passes at GCSE while the national proportion was 48 per cent. Virtually all candidates – 98 per cent – gained five or more A* to G grade passes, compared with 91 per cent nationally. While pupils are well above average in their attainment in tests at the end of Year 9, it represents good additional achievement to reach such impressive standards at the end of Year 11 across the full range of subjects. Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11, with pupils and staff more effective in their use of assessment to set challenging individual targets for pupils. In addition, teaching groups are generally very effectively settled.

Teaching and learning are good, sometimes very good

5. For the main school – Years 7 to 11 – teaching is good overall and pupils' learning is equally effective. In some subjects and year groups their quality is frequently very good: for instance, in Years 10 and 11, 26 per cent of lessons had very good teaching and learning while in 5 per cent the quality was excellent.

6. Teaching consistently shows certain positive features, such as strong expertise in the subject, careful planning, good management of pupils and demanding overall expectations. The best teaching combines these and offers more. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson with excellent teaching, there was a very prompt and lively start with the onus for success placed on the groups from the outset. The tasks they were given forced them to think for themselves. Skilful use of assessment data showed them what was required to achieve at the highest level and very good support work and encouragement by the teacher ensured that all worked to standards matching their potential. In this and in a Year 8 science lesson, group work was used extensively and led to very secure learning by pupils. In the science lesson, the pupils were required to agree amongst their groups what apparatus was required for each stage of the experiment and gained a thorough, clear understanding because of the discussion. Pace was fast throughout, with the teaching always anticipating when interest levels might flag and changing direction before this could happen.

7. The conspicuous common features of all lessons with very good or excellent teaching are that relationships are particularly strong and lessons clearly identify and meet the varied needs of different pupils. Pupils find they are understood, supported and challenged in these circumstances and appreciate how well the teacher knows them.

Pupils behaviour and attitudes are good

8. The good behaviour and positive attitudes of pupils are particularly apparent in lessons. A minority of pupils lack the self-discipline to sustain high quality behaviour when unsupervised in playgrounds or along corridors. The overall success of the school in this aspect of its work is the result of predominantly good teaching, supported by the wider efforts of the staff to give very good social and moral guidance. In addition, the pupils benefit from the strong parental support secured by the school and the very effective day-to-day liaison between home and school.

The school is well led and managed

9. The headteacher and senior colleagues have been very successful in making this a popular school with well above average standards for Years 7 to 11. They have established a very productive working environment in which staff have high expectations of their pupils and give the support and encouragement needed for pupils to respond positively. As a result, pupils build on the knowledge and skills they bring to the school in Year 7 and attain even higher standards by the time they reach Year 9 and then Year 11.

10. Underpinning this is the clear educational direction provided by the headteacher: the school's central aim of supporting and nurturing of pupils is well understood by the whole staff, by parents and by pupils. He has succeeded in encouraging staff to promote an approach to pupils that demonstrates care, respect and interest in their development. Leaders and managers at senior level have promoted very good links with parents and the wider community to the benefit of the school. Good support from parents is helping promote effective learning; pupils show pride in their school as a result of its values being clearly stated and its successes well publicised.

11. The headteacher and other key staff have also been keen to take up many opportunities to bid for additional facilities and funds or to take part in local and national initiatives. This has enabled the school to improve its provision in many ways. For instance, it has completely replaced most of its buildings and acquired much additional accommodation, equipped to a very high standard. It has also led to an earlier than usual introduction of many beneficial features, such as a strong vocational component to the curriculum and the thorough integration of literacy skills into teaching.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Assessment and target-setting in Years 7 to 9 are unsatisfactory

12. While progress in lessons in Years 7 to 9 is good, there is scope for it to be very good. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 make more successful use of assessment data than in Years 7 to 9. In the latter there is limited awareness of pupils' prior attainment amongst both teachers and the pupils themselves. Knowledge of what National Curriculum levels pupils could be aiming for across all their subjects is weak and as a result so is the awareness of the specific action needed to teach these levels. Detailed and reliable assessment data, reviewed regularly, is also required to help ensure that the grouping of pupils is devised successfully. Currently it is under-used for this purpose and the grouping arrangements are only partially successful.

A minority of teaching and learning lacks the quality seen more in the school as a whole

13. Teaching was unsatisfactory in only one lesson. In this lesson and in others which were already sound by national standards, some of the better features found in so many other lessons taught in the school were lacking.

14. For instance, a Year 9 mathematics lesson with broadly satisfactory teaching and learning had too limited a range of activities for pace and interest to be sustained at a high level. A Year 9 English lesson with clear strengths – such as the well understood objectives – failed to put responsibility for progress onto pupils, with the teacher reading through handouts rather than requiring pupils to do this and then confirm their grasp of it by subsequent questioning. A German lesson in Year 9 had unsatisfactory teaching primarily because pupils were not required early enough to pay close attention. The behaviour of a minority of pupils then remained unsatisfactory for the remainder of the lesson.

Monitoring of teaching and learning and the work of heads of departments is unsatisfactory

15. One of the less successful aspects of leadership and management is that of monitoring. Teaching is not observed as widely and regularly as in schools with good practice, and this limits the ease with which teachers can learn from one another and line managers identify and correct weaknesses. Similarly, while senior managers have taken some action to improve the effectiveness of the science, modern languages and music departments, the monitoring of these areas had not led to early and decisive remedial action. Overall, provision in two of these lags behind the good, sometimes very good, quality seen in the school as a whole, while in science, improvements have yet to include raising the proportion of higher grades and reducing unclassified grades to match the school averages.

The school day is shorter and more complex than it should be

16. In Years 7 to 11, teaching time is planned to amount to 23 hours 20 minutes per week. This is already less than the national recommended minimum, but there are further losses of time in practice because punctuality to lessons is unsatisfactory. Planning lessons successfully when the time allocations vary so widely from one period to another and from day to day is difficult. It significantly hinders teaching in modern languages, physical education, science and several other subjects.

Results at GCSE in modern languages are well below average

17. In 2001, only 35 per cent of candidates gained an A* to C pass in French compared with 47 per cent nationally. Despite measures taken to try and tackle this problem the school's 2002 results show a small decline. While the school enters a far higher proportion of pupils for French than nationally, there is evidence that pupils generally do considerably worse in French than in their other subjects. Managers at both subject and senior level have recognised this problem and its negative impact on the number of students choosing to study languages in the sixth form. However, current strategies for improvement are not having sufficient effect. The school has not yet fully investigated the national preference for grouping pupils into sets at an earlier stage.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

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

- (1) Introduce in Years 7 to 9 the newly revised assessment and target-setting system used elsewhere in the school.
(Paragraph: 12)
- (2) Improve the quality of teaching and subject management in those areas where it is currently below the school's generally good standards by:
 - extending current arrangements for monitoring of teaching and the work of heads of department so that the school has full and systematic coverage;
 - ensuring that rapid and effective action is taken to share best practice and to improve areas of weakness identified.(Paragraphs: 13-15)
- (3) Increase the length of the school day and simplify its structure so that total teaching time meets national averages and teachers can plan for lessons of consistently appropriate length.
(Paragraphs: 16, 157)
- (4) Take steps to raise standards in modern languages at GCSE by reviewing best practice in grouping of pupils in Years 7 to 11 and by ensuring a successful implementation of the new GCSE syllabus.
(Paragraph: 17)

Sixth form

- (1) Take steps to ensure current trends of reducing the failure rate in AS and A2 results are sustained by:
 - completing with maximum speed and efficiency the introduction of the new system for assessment, target-setting and reviewing of students' progress and ensuring it is used effectively by staff, parents and students;
 - taking the necessary steps to ensure that the number of subjects taken by students at AS-level and A2 accurately matches their capacity for attaining appropriate grades.(Paragraphs: 66, 67, 73, 74, 86,94, 98, 98, 101, 102, 104, 106, 113, 127, 143, 149, 159, 161, 162, 164, 165)

- (2) Ensure that attendance levels in lessons reach a consistently good level so that continuity of learning is less significantly disrupted and a clear picture of the viability of courses can be obtained and acted upon.
(Paragraphs: 29, 47, 88, 91, 102, 109, 117, 149, 162-164)

- (3) Improve aspects of leadership and management of the sixth form by:
 - involving sixth-form managers in systematic monitoring of teaching and standards in different subjects in order to identify and spread best practice;
 - establishing an effective system for determining manageable student group sizes.(Paragraphs: 66, 71, 84, 89, 95, 106, 119, 148, 149, 151, 159, 162, 164, 166)

- (4) In line with current plans, press the case for increased accommodation and resource levels to support the growing sixth-form numbers.
(Paragraphs: 90, 103, 111, 119, 152, 159, 166)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	38
	Sixth form	81
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		43

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	8	14	14	1	0	0
Percentage	2.6	22	37	36	2.6	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	18	40	22	0	0	0
Percentage	1.2	22.2	49.4	27.2	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, as each lesson represents more than two per cent for Years 7 to 11 and more than one per cent in the sixth form.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1141	544
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	118	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	20	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	73	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	8

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	113	132	245

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	84	83	93
	Girls	115	109	104
	Total	199	192	197
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (68)	78 (73)	80 (69)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (19)	53 (44)	47 (28)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	73	85	88
	Girls	119	110	103
	Total	192	195	191
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (78)	79 (77)	78 (64)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	45 (44)	50 (45)	44 (24)
	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	101	98	199

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	56	99	100
	Girls	65	97	97
	Total	121	196	197
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	61 (57)	98 (98)	99 (100)
	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	45.9
	National	39.0

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13) in 2001

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	85	87	172
	Average point score per candidate	16.8	17.8	17.3
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4

		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	85	87	172	15	11	26
	Average point score per candidate	14.3	15.6	15.0	14	17.5	15.5
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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	1671	47	1
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	3	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	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	4	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	2	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)	100.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.8

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	30
Total aggregate hours worked per week	905

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.0
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Average teaching group size: Y[] – Y[]

Key Stage 3	25.6
Key Stage 4	19.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	4 650 511
Total expenditure	4 644 704
Expenditure per pupil	2 853
Balance brought forward from previous year	(31 541)
Balance carried forward to next year	(25 734)

Figures in parentheses indicate negative values

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	8.3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	14

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.8
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	1700
Number of questionnaires returned	846

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	49	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	50	5	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	51	4	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	53	10	2	2
The teaching is good.	42	51	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	42	15	2	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	57	35	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	30	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	30	47	13	2	7
The school is well led and managed.	53	38	3	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	40	4	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	38	40	8	2	11

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

19. Students currently enter the sixth form with lower than average standards compared with those found in sixth forms nationally. There are proportionally fewer students with the highest GCSE grades and the school's average point score for students entering the sixth form has been close to 5.7 for several years while the national level has been about 6.1.

20. At the end of Year 13 results in examinations were in line with national standards in 2001. Previously they had been below average, but in terms of average scores per student, results have risen noticeably in recent years. The school's 2002 figure of 20.5 points more than matches the national average for the previous year.

21. Overall, therefore, achievement is good. These improved results indicate that students are making good cumulative gains in knowledge and skills. This is supported by the standards observed during the inspection, which were, collectively, above average. For the 15 subjects focused upon, standards were average in about half and above average in the other half. Progress in lessons is satisfactory and in a majority of the focus subjects it is consistently good. However, it has been a feature of results up to 2001 that the proportion of high grades (A and B) in A and AS results is lower than that found nationally and more students than usual end their courses without a pass grade. The first feature is largely explained by the school's relatively low proportion of students entering the sixth form with A* and A grades at GCSE, since nationally these are the students who account for most A and B grades in Year 13. However, the scope for high attainment in Year 13 also depends on the effective use of finely tuned assessment and target-setting arrangements, and these are only just becoming established.

22. The standards reached and the achievement (or progress) being made by students are primarily the outcomes of good teaching, with a significant proportion – nearly one quarter of lessons seen – being very good. In turn, students adopt a very positive attitude in lessons and their learning is effective.

23. Those leading, managing and teaching in the sixth form have succeeded in creating a very purposeful ethos as well as making it welcoming to the students who join it from other schools. This also promotes the good learning. The breadth of the curriculum is an impressive feature that also permits the vast majority of students to choose the combination of courses that meet their aspirations. In addition, nearly all are encouraged to take five AS-levels in Years 12 and to retain as many as possible as A2s in Year 13. This has a major beneficial impact on the points scores per student, which show standards of attainment in a very favourable light.

24. Students' routes to even higher standards would be enhanced by further improvements in several areas. Assessment, target-setting and reviewing arrangements, whilst satisfactory, have lacked sufficient rigour until their recent modifications. Students and their teachers are only just beginning to gain the sharply focused picture of past attainment and challenging expectations needed to help achieve their full potential. For some, this is allied to poor attendance records, while the advice of subject teachers about students' suitability for remaining on courses is not always acted upon promptly. Collectively these factors result in too many unclassified grades being recorded. This is despite the fact that students entering the sixth form with modest GCSE scores would be likely to record more unclassified grades than average.

25. Female students attain at a higher level than males, as is the case nationally, but the gap is marginally closer than the national one. Both genders make broadly similar progress. Students with special educational needs are very few in number, but their progress is also good. Gifted and talented students make good progress in most subjects: they are particularly well motivated, though they do not often have tailor-made specific tasks to provide additional challenge for them. The very few students using English as an additional language make very good progress.

26. Standards amongst the 15 focus subjects range from well above average in religious education to average in art and French. The consistently successful examination results in religious education reflect very good teaching and the very effective leadership and management of the department. There is a very strong commitment to improvement that has led to a more analytic approach to target-setting and lesson planning than is found elsewhere. The teaching quality is very good in English literature and mathematics and again demonstrated greater attention to setting challenging work for the full range of students than is common in the sixth form overall. Gifted and talented students are more frequently identified and provided with customised work in the subjects with strong overall results.

27. On balance, therefore, the rise in standards indicated in the 2001 and 2002 examination results is continuing. Subjects already making good or very good provision for students are leading this improvement. The 2001 examination results for art and French, which were well below average, indicate that preparation for the specific requirements of the examination, rather than any shortcomings in day-to-day teaching and learning are at fault. In contrast, the subjects regularly enabling students to attain most successfully have a very clear picture of examination requirements and are adept at building this into students' awareness.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

28. Students have good attitudes in the sixth form. They express positive views and most say they would advise other students to join the sixth form in this school. They appreciate their teachers, who set challenging work and are accessible if students have difficulties. They feel they are treated as responsible young adults in the school. In lessons they are generally well motivated, show a good interest in their chosen subjects and put their points of view confidently. They show respect for others and co-operate well; they are very willing to listen and act on advice. There is mutual affection and respect between them and their teachers.

29. Attendance is unsatisfactory. Too many pupils arrive late for the start of the day and for lessons. Some lessons have up to a third of students absent, which affects continuity of learning. This is in contrast to the majority of lessons where attendance is good.

30. Personal development is very good. Students develop good personal and learning skills and demonstrate very good, mature relationships with each other, staff and younger pupils. They are mostly capable of working independently and use the library well for private study. The majority play a full part in the life of the sixth form and the main school. They welcome opportunities to participate in sport, drama and challenging activities. A significant number act as mentors to pupils starting school in Year 7 or undertake training to assist with sex education lessons in Year 9. Students take the lead in many of the school's fund-raising events for charity.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

31. The overall quality of teaching and of learning in the sixth form is good. All lessons seen had at least satisfactory teaching; nearly half the total had good teaching, and in a further fifth the quality was very good. Learning followed the same pattern.

32. Teaching was typified by teachers' very good understanding and knowledge of their subject and very good communication skills. While true of most sixth forms, in this instance the use of non-specialists is even lower than usual and students appreciate the highly authoritative quality of so much of the teaching they receive. It was evident in a Year 13 mathematics lesson, for instance, that the success of this lesson sprung from the finely stepped increases in difficulty in the tasks and examples used by the teacher, reflecting detailed knowledge of the topic "integration" and of the class.

33. Teachers' planning is also very good, with clear structure to lessons building in a range of activities that, in the best lessons, involve students actively. A Year 12 French lesson discussing the place of marriage in French society, made very successful use of group preparation by students, brief well chosen interjections from the teacher, then further group work and so on. Students knew the format and could take the initiative to press on with well-designed tasks without having to await lengthy instructions.

34. It is clear that teachers and students relate very well to each other. While partly dependent on the confidence derived from secure knowledge of their subject coupled with successful planning, relationships are also helped by teachers' readiness to share their own interests and aspects of their personality quite openly. In an English lesson on Chaucer, students' learning was greatly enhanced by the teacher's readiness to challenge them with mock aggression and promote further responses through gentle humour.

35. Teaching across all fifteen subjects given a focus in the inspection showed a good grasp of how and when high-level literacy skills could be reinforced. The scope for developing other key skills including numeracy, ICT, presentational strategies and group work varies but is developed satisfactorily overall. The very small number of students using English as an additional language learn very well as a result of the support they receive.

36. While teaching and learning are satisfactory in the use of assessment, this feature is under-developed compared with the general quality of teaching in the sixth form. Only very recently have teachers had available, and begun to use, a clear statement of the standards students bring with them to lessons at the start of Year 12 and what grade this should lead them to expect at the end of Year 13. Students are just beginning to appreciate the role of target grades in helping them focus and regularly review their efforts. Quite often, however, otherwise extremely well planned lessons lack clear attention to the varied needs of students which good use of assessment would reveal. In a Year 13 politics lesson, for example, the structure was clear and exposition was of very high quality, but there was little scope for independent learning at different levels by students. In a Year 13 physical education theory lesson, in contrast, one of the factors promoting good learning by students was the use of tasks and materials which required independent and group research, carried out at a range of levels dependent on the students' differing potential.

37. Where very specific students' needs exist, care is taken to met these well. For instance, large-print versions of instructions are used by the very small proportion of students with special educational needs.

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

38. The sixth form offers students a very broad curriculum of good quality. With over 30 AS and A2 subjects and a range of Advanced Vocational (AVCE) courses, it allows far wider choice than most sixth forms. In addition, all students in Year 12 follow a Curriculum Enrichment Programme, which serves to complement formal academic study with a focus on practical group work activities and making presentations. Another programme of leisure activities is allocated three periods per week at regular intervals. Vocational guidance is provided outside normal teaching hours.

39. The quality of access and opportunity for students is good. Clear minimum requirements – five or more A* to C passes at GCSE – are applied to students entering the sixth form, but once accepted there is greater flexibility in placing students on specific courses than in many sixth forms. All students follow the C.E.P. and compulsory religious studies AS-level as well as a physical education and leisure programme.

40. The great strength of the sixth form is the remarkable range of formal courses. In addition to all National Curriculum subjects being continued into post-16 study, the sixth form offers most of the well-established additional subjects, such as law, further mathematics, economics, sociology and philosophy and the more recent popular courses, such as media studies and psychology. This breadth generally leads to high levels of satisfaction amongst students and strong commitment to their chosen courses. This range of options is sustained in Year 13 by timetabling in such a way as to allow Year 13 students to begin a new one year AS course to study alongside their A2 subjects. As a result, the curriculum in both Years 12 and 13 is good at allowing students to build on their prior learning or diversifying into new areas. The curriculum is also responding to local circumstances well. It is a church school, chosen by students and their parents for its emphasis on Catholic values and, rightly places religious education at the heart of the curriculum. The City Learning Centre, occupying part of the school site, also allows students to support and benefit from the superb ICT and business orientated resources, which exist to jointly promote community and school needs.

41. An otherwise excellent curriculum is weakened in several respects yet remains good overall. Teaching group sizes range from 37 to three. In the large teaching groups there is a marked lack of the use of detailed questioning by teachers and group work by students compared with the best practice in the sixth form. The very small groups lack sufficient size for students to discuss and learn from one another as they do very effectively in the school's larger groups.

42. Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. In addition to the school's compulsory provision for curricular enrichment in Year 12, there is a very extensive range of activities to broaden the experiences of students. Physical education provision extends to leisure activities during school time and there are many team activities both official and unofficial. There are very popular retreats and pilgrimages to Lourdes and Rome, organised to enhance the spiritual side of life. Academic studies are well supported with a wide range of field trips, residential events and support lessons. For example, biology field trips, the art visit to Amsterdam, politics students' visits to London and to hear politicians speaking locally, add to the quality of students' learning. Social and cultural development are supported with drama productions, a choir, film-making and school and community service projects. Almost 70 per cent of students feel that the school provides a good range of activities. The school produces a booklet advertising many of the activities on offer, which include clubs and societies open to all age ranges as well as those specifically for sixth-form students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

43. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and the course objectives. Students' work is assessed regularly and accurately. Students are given helpful advice on how to improve their work. Consequently, they know what they have done well and how they can do better.

44. Arrangements for assessment in the sixth form have recently benefited from the introduction of minimum target grades. However, in its current form arrangements are too new to have had their full beneficial impact in helping students achieve their full potential, helping subjects to analyse results and develop courses or in tracking students' progress closely enough.

Advice, support and guidance

45. The educational and personal support and guidance for students in the sixth form is satisfactory. They include good careers education and guidance for future courses, study or career opportunities. Students have particularly good access to information, support and guidance on higher education. The careers library is part of the main library and has plenty of information on future courses in literature or through computers. An entire week is given over to higher education advice and guidance, and university admissions tutors attend the school. As a consequence, over three-quarters of Year 13 leavers went into higher education courses in 2001. Students expressed positive comments during the inspection about the quality of careers advice and guidance. In addition, a careers consultant offers more specialised time to target support to those who need it. However, the matching of students to courses on entry to the sixth form and the monitoring of their academic and personal progress are sound rather than good.

46. The quality of support and guidance for students' personal development is good. Throughout their time in the sixth form, students are given responsibilities and are monitored in carrying out those responsibilities. Some of the sixth formers are prefects, and their duties are effectively co-ordinated by a sixth-form council. All sixth formers do community service, and they take seriously their responsibilities inside or outside school. Outside school, they are involved in charity work, particularly, but not exclusively, with handicapped children. Inside school, the sixth formers engage in varied activities which range from paired reading to mentoring sex education programmes with pupils in Year 9. Those students involved in the latter volunteer to undertake a twenty-hour training course. Personal development is given a high priority. The school provides the sixth formers with a residential retreat at Ushaw. This is a significant and most popular aspect of their personal development that is successful in producing students who are mature, cheerful and positive.

47. There are constructive and purposeful strategies in place to ensure high levels of attendance and low levels of unauthorised absence. All students are formally registered and there are effective guidelines to ensure their regular attendance. Students are required to inform tutors when they are late and to notify staff when leaving the school premises. The head of sixth form systematically monitors all absences and ensures that the information is used effectively to pursue absentees and set targets for further improvement, particularly to reduce levels of unauthorised absence. However, attendance patterns and punctuality, particularly at the beginning of the day, are somewhat erratic.

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

48. Parents of sixth-form students are very supportive of the school and recognise that it offers a well led, caring environment in which their children can achieve. They are pleased with the guidance offered to students and the range of opportunities provided to visit universities and become involved in social activities. The inspection team shared the positive views that were expressed about the sixth form. Nevertheless a number of parents express concern about the rapid expansion in numbers, and the effect that this has on standards and teaching in some subjects. They are worried about the accommodation available for the sixth form and the strain on resources, a concern shared by the inspection team, which judges both to be unsatisfactory.

49. Parents are provided with good information about the school and the sixth form. They receive regular reports about their children's progress and have formal and informal opportunities to discuss achievement with teachers. The sixth-form brochure gives information on courses and there is a clear expectation that parents will support the school ethos. They are fully involved in the induction of students into the sixth form and continue to support their children in making decisions about their future. Parents of sixth-formers are well represented on the School Association committee, and attend fund-raising and social events. They give good support to extra-curricular events, such as school drama productions and sports matches.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

50. The sixth form is securely and soundly led and managed. There are strengths to this feature and, crucially, the students' personal development and academic achievements are both successful. More could be done, however, to ensure all students are helped to maximise their potential.

51. The head of sixth form, assisted by his deputy and the numerous sixth-form tutors, has established a good ethos. Students find the sixth form welcoming and accommodating and a place where the focus is on work. The head of sixth form is quick to show his pride in students' academic successes, in their contributions to the community and in the ambitious social events they organise. This helps set a positive tone and helps define the high expectations he has of sixth formers. He leaves students in no doubt that good academic results and personal development are to be their goals.

52. The leadership team has been successful in seeing a major expansion of the sixth form. Numbers have risen dramatically in recent years from 300 in 1998 to over 550 in 2002. A major factor in making the sixth form so attractive has been a series of decisions to broaden the curriculum. The vast range of A, AS and vocational courses now on offer enables virtually all sixth formers to find the combination they prefer.

53. Leadership has promoted good relationships in the sixth form and this has a beneficial impact on learning in lessons. The students entering the sixth form from up to a dozen schools quickly assimilate and the head of sixth form and his colleagues make themselves accessible to students and very supportive of their personal development.

54. The rising standards of recent years owe much to the curricular breadth, pursuit of high personal and academic goals and positive ethos promoted by the head of sixth form and his colleagues.

55. There is scope for greater effectiveness in some aspects of leadership and management. Students sometimes remain on courses when subject specialists have been convinced of their unsuitability for the course or when their attendance has been poor for too long. In general, reviewing students' progress has lacked rigour until very recent changes to the system. This has limited scope for staff and students to set accurately defined expectations and is one factor explaining the greater than average proportion of unclassified grades at A and AS-level. Despite much improved arrangements, data analysis is not yet used as fully as in other sixth forms to monitor and evaluate the emerging strengths and weaknesses of departments as students progress through their courses.

56. While the decision to accept over 550 students this academic year has some benefits, the planning around this decision has been unsatisfactory. As a result, too many very large teaching and tutor groups exist in which the staff and students cannot establish the supportive relationships on which the sixth form has so far flourished.

57. Attendance is currently unsatisfactory: far too many lessons have significant absence levels and identifying absence patterns and following them up effectively has proved difficult in such a rapidly expanding and over-crowded context.

58. Governors and the school's senior management team have a knowledge of the sixth form's strengths and weaknesses. The governing body has planned for a further expansion of sixth-form accommodation, and strategic advice is sound. Short-term advice on the current phase of expansion has been found wanting. In terms of statutory responsibilities towards the sixth form, the governors fully meet requirements.

Resources

59. Accommodation for sixth-form students is unsatisfactory. In some subjects, such as religious education, politics and sociology, accommodation is good. Teachers have a dedicated room as part of a subject suite. The rapid increase in student numbers, however, has put additional strain on existing accommodation and, in many areas, has resulted in some groups being too large for the rooms allocated to them. In history, for example, the work of one group of 28 students was constrained by the small classroom. Similarly, one small room allocated to geography restricts student movement around the area. Rooms for the teaching of English are spread over a wide area of the school and some are shared with other subjects making access to resources difficult. In addition, the lack of adequate office space does not provide sufficient focus for the work of the department and hinders effective communications. Accommodation for modern languages is unsatisfactory because the recent re-allocation of one study room to mathematics has restricted the space available, and in some other areas overhead projectors cannot be used effectively because of inadequate blackout facilities. Media studies facilities are inadequate because the available editing facility is housed in a small storeroom with no ventilation. With AS-level groups of 33 and 35 there is simply not enough room. Outdoor spaces for physical education are good but the subject does not have a classroom base for theory work and this causes additional work for teachers in transporting the equipment and resources needed for two large teaching groups. Biology does not have enough laboratory space. Where subjects have dedicated rooms, they contain good displays of informative material that supports students' work.

60. Similar pressure has been placed on social areas available to sixth-form students. To supplement the existing common room area the school has adopted the imaginative solution of erecting a large heated marquee in the enclosed central area of the school. Until plans for a permanent building can be implemented, this is providing a satisfactory temporary solution to the problem. The school is aware that tutor groups are too big but does not have sufficient space to reduce numbers by creating additional groups. Various strategies have been

adopted to overcome the shortage of social areas, including making classrooms available during breaks and lunchtimes, allowing students to leave the premises at lunchtime and reducing the amount of private study time on the timetable.

61. The pressure of increased numbers of students entering the sixth form has led to inadequate learning resources in many areas of curriculum. Resources are good in mathematics, design and technology, modern languages, physical education and religious education. In English, biology, geography, history and media studies they are unsatisfactory. In other areas they are satisfactory. Students have good access to ICT and computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment in design and technology but general consumable resources are low. ICT is also readily available to students in religious education. The study of the subject is supported by good textbook provision and a good section in the library. Physical education has new equipment such as heart rate monitors, and an up-to-date stock of books. Poor access to ICT is limiting opportunities for students in other areas. In English, politics and sociology, more computers are needed in teaching areas. There are insufficient computers in biology and data-logging equipment is outdated. There is a limited number of computers available in geography and no weather recording equipment. In addition to limited access to ICT and poor editing facilities, there are not enough materials and hardware for the number of students in media studies.

62. Students have good access to study areas in the library and resource centre that are reserved for their use but the general level of books available to them is low.

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

In the inspection, 15 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
Biology	5	100	52	0	2	1.2	0.8
Religious education	1	0	8.5	0	26	0	2.4

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	45	69	87	31	43	4.5	5.8
Biology	17	88	88	18	34	4.6	5.2
Chemistry	10	80	90	0	43	3.6	5.9
Physics	22	86	88	23	40	4.4	5.7
Design and technology	33	79	91	27	30	4.2	5.4
Communication studies	26	96	93	23	31	4.6	5.5
Art and design	14	93	96	21	46	4.7	6.6
Music	5	80	93	0	35	2.8	5.7
Geography	34	100	92	32	38	5.9	5.7
History	23	61	88	13	35	2.6	5.5
Sociology	15	93	86	20	35	5.1	5.3
Religious education	10	100	92	50	38	7.0	5.8
English language	29	96	93	34	30	5.3	5.3
English literature	14	86	95	36	37	5.4	5.9
French	12	83	89	0	38	2.3	5.6
German	6	100	91	0	40	4.3	5.8
Spanish	5	80	89	20	39	3.2	5.7
Classical studies	1	100	95	100	49	8.0	6.5

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and biology. In addition, chemistry and physics were sampled. In both subjects teaching is good and the numbers of students taking the courses are rising. Over recent years, the standards attained by relatively small numbers of students have been below the national averages. The most recent results are better and match the national figures for both A-level and AS-level.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the subject leads to insightful teaching.
- Support for students' individual learning is good.
- Students regularly attain well above average results at A-level.
- Relationships with student groups are good.

Areas for Improvement

- Assessment procedures require development to identify means to improve individual student performance.
- Although teaching is already very effective, students' are given fewer opportunities for independent learning than they should have.
- Increase the use of computers in A-level courses to provide broader learning opportunities.

63. The inspection covered A-level, AS-level and double mathematics A-level courses.

64. In 2001, A-level examinations, students gained results that were below the national average. This was a disappointing fall in a trend of 'well above average' results in the preceding years. Results in the 2002 examination have returned to the high standard of preceding years. In the years to 2002, female students performed better than males in their examinations, but this was reversed in 2002. In 2001, AS results were above average, but this fell in 2002. In 2001, one third of AS students failed to gain a pass grade and in 2002 this fraction increased to one half of students. Overall, in 2001, students' achievement was below average at AS-level and satisfactory at A-level. In 2002 achievement remained below average at AS-level but was very good at A-level. The main contributory factors have been inappropriate recruitment to the mathematics course and a too difficult A-level module being studied in Year 12. The department has tackled these two features, starting in the current academic year. Results of those studying double mathematics at A-level show continued success but numbers are too small for national comparisons to be valid. There is no evidence to suggest variations in the performance of different groups of pupils.

65. The standard of A-level work seen in folders and lessons is good. High-attaining students in Year 13 work fluently, showing well-expanded answers when working with inequalities, and they demonstrate a mastery of the algebraic techniques required. Students on the single A-level course make good progress through their modules of study and achieve well during lessons. A significant feature to most A-level students' work is the presentation of solutions with mathematical rigour and accuracy as opposed to random mental jottings. This is a feature throughout the work of students and reflects their good attitudes to the subject and to their teachers. However, students are often too accepting of teachers' exposition and

little challenge of the ideas being put forward was seen. Students studying the AS course achieve well in class but some of the lower-attaining mathematicians lack the basic algebraic skills required to sustain good achievement. This was observed in a Year 12 group studying differential calculus, when the progress of a small number of students was limited by their inability to recall basic rules of indices or sign rules from their GCSE course. Pupils from different heritages and those for whom English is a second language are performing very well, making progress in line with their ability.

66. Teaching is very good. Teachers' very good knowledge of their subject ensures insightful delivery of new concepts to students. Good student-teacher relationships within the classroom and the willingness of teachers to assist students at any time provide the students with confidence to seek help whenever it is needed. Although very effective, teaching styles are mostly directed by the teacher, which constrains the amount of input possible from students. A wider variety of teaching styles - to develop students' independent learning and to enrich their learning experience - is needed if teaching is to become excellent. Calculators are used wisely and efficiently. However, there are no planned opportunities for use of computers as tools or for extension activities. The day-to-day assessment of student's work is very good but the use of assessment to monitor progress against their potential final grade is less well developed.

67. Management is good and ensures a well staffed and resourced department. There has been a positive response to the fall in A-level grades in 2001, which has resulted in returning students' attainment to high standards. Corrective measures - introducing more appropriate modules of study to Year 12 and seeking to recruit students more suited to the course - are in place to improve students' attainment at AS-level. However, there is a need to develop assessment procedures and data analysis in order to set the highest possible targets and to identify intervention strategies to improve individual student performance.

68. Since the last inspection the school has maintained A-level results that are well above national averages (with the exception of 2001), has increased the uptake of the subject and is currently matching the courses more closely to students' needs. Improvement has therefore been satisfactory.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Good teaching, based on very good knowledge of the subject and the demands of the examination, is resulting in good learning.
- There are good relationships with students arising from a high level of commitment to their academic and personal welfare.
- There is good coordination of the work of the several teachers who share the responsibility for teaching the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of students' progress, both within the subject and across the rest of their academic commitments, is unsatisfactory.
- The procedures and criteria used for admission to the course are resulting in a small number of students, who lack long term commitment, starting the course but failing to achieve standards indicated by their previous attainment.
- The existing means for allocating the very large numbers of students opting for the subject in Year 12 results in some groups being so large that progress is limited.

69. The A-level results have varied over recent years. Standards were close to the national average in 2000, but below in 2001. In 2002, results were better than the previous year, but are likely to be below the national figures (not yet published). When the results of individual students are compared to their previous attainment, 90 per cent gained at least their predicted grade and a third exceeded expectations. These results represent good achievement. Since the national changes in the sixth-form curriculum, very large numbers have taken AS-level in biology (over 70 in 2001). Results have been below the national average and not as good as the standards achieved in A-level.

70. Standards in A-level groups are average. Most students are working at levels that should secure at least pass grades and approximately a third are in line for a higher grade (A or B). Experimental skills are a particular strength and were well demonstrated by Year 13 students competently using capillary tubing to measure changes in gas volumes as part of an investigation of respiratory quotients. Students' notes show they have been compiled individually and are largely written in their own hand, supplemented by useful published material. All work is set at the level needed for an A grade. Standards in Year 12 AS-level classes after half a term of study are more variable. Students in one group were able to complete a practical to measure the effect of pH (acidity/alkalinity) on the reactivity of an enzyme. All obtained results that showed the accuracy of their work, but not all could explain fully the theoretical basis of the experiment. In another class completing a unit of work on cell structure, some students could recall information from previous lessons quickly and accurately, but others needed a great deal of prompting. In some instances, students demonstrated an insecure grasp of concepts learned at GCSE.

71. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use their very good knowledge of their subject to plan lessons that are stimulating and challenging. The use of an inter-active white board connected to a computer programme brought alive a section of the syllabus that can be very dry. It also gave students a much better understanding of the complex, three-dimensional relationships between the parts of cells than is usual with more orthodox teaching methods. The teaching of experimental techniques is particularly good. Very skilled and dedicated technicians provide a high standard of prepared equipment that is supplemented by good printed instructions and effective individual teacher support. Relationships between students and with their teachers are good. In every lesson observed students worked well together and clearly held their teachers in high regard. Learning is less effective in the larger classes (often over 20 and occasionally approaching 30) occurring in Year 12. Teachers are unable to give sufficient individual support to all who need it.

72. The leadership and management of the four well-qualified teachers who share the work in biology are good. They work closely together and the learning of different parts of the syllabus is well co-ordinated. They form a mutually supportive team who share ideas and constantly evaluate their work.

73. Monitoring of students' progress is unsatisfactory, particularly in Year 12. Prior attainment is not fully used to set high but realistic targets for individuals, nor are students given sufficient guidance on how well they are performing in relation to their targets. Unsatisfactory progress is not detected quickly enough, nor are there effective systems in place to then evaluate a student's performance across the range of subjects taken (often five AS-levels) and to take appropriate action.

74. Very large numbers of students choose to start AS biology. Some have insufficient understanding of the nature of the course and its potential value for their future career ambitions. A few of these students subsequently show lack of commitment and do not perform as well as their GCSE attainment indicates they should.

75. Since the last inspection there has been satisfactory improvement. Standards have been maintained while numbers taking the subject have doubled and teaching has become more varied and stimulating.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus for this inspection was AS/A-levels in design and technology product design, but design and technology systems and control was also sampled. In systems and control, two lessons were seen and the teaching in both was good. This, together with thorough planning and organisation, has enabled students to reach above average standards. Examination results have shown an improving trend over the last three years but lack of strict controls on the suitability of candidates undertaking the course has resulted in a higher than usual proportion of lower grades and an average points score close to the national average. The growing popularity of the subject has resulted in increased numbers in Year 12, and a greater proportion of female students has created a better gender balance.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and thorough course organisation have enabled students to reach above average standards.
- Good student attitudes enable good working relationships and a good working atmosphere in lessons seen.
- Examination results are improving.

Areas for improvement

- Securing the long-term progress of the subject through continued staff development.
- Improving students' discussion skills through development of teaching strategies.

76. Examination results in 2001 were below average but this was an improvement on results for 2000 and a reversal of the previous downward trend. Unvalidated figures for 2002 indicate a further increase, bringing the average points score per student to well above average. This has been achieved in part by more carefully matching students to the requirements of the course and by careful structuring of course materials. This resulted in a greater proportion of students gaining A and B grades and most candidates achieving grades well above their minimum target grades. The course is becoming more popular with female students and latest examination results indicate that they are beginning to match the performance of male students.

77. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average and show that students are developing good understanding of designing and making techniques and express ideas using good freehand sketching techniques. Students make good use of design folios as developmental sketchbooks. These clearly outline the progress of their ideas. Presentation techniques are creative and colourful and folders contain a good balance of hand-produced graphics and computer generated techniques. ICT is used effectively to improve both the content and presentation of work. Students' research skills are good and they use a wide range of sources to gather information in support of a project. This often includes consideration of the social and moral issues surrounding design decisions. Case studies are detailed, well presented and make good use of ICT to produce progress charts as an aid to time management. Some students do not compile sophisticated design briefs and identify a design project in terms of what they are required to make and not as a 'need' arising from the investigation of a design situation. Some students are not good at making

oral contributions to lessons and, whilst they may have good knowledge of individual pieces of information, they do not readily combine them to form a coherent view. For example, students in a Year 12 lesson knew the key characteristics of various periods in design history but lacked the experience and 'overview' to use them to compare and contrast styles with confidence. Students are working at above average standards and this represents good achievement.

78. Students' learning is good overall. Good teaching enables students to learn rapidly and make good progress. Lessons have a good structure and each builds on previous work on the given topic. Year 13 students, for example, developed a good understanding of how compiling a design specification could help to shape the formulation of design ideas from two consecutive well-taught lessons. Students receive good individual help and advice and their work is assessed and monitored thoroughly. The recently introduced practice of discussing minimum target grades and amending them in the light of students' progress will become an important factor in raising standards.

79. The leadership and management of the course are good. In the absence of the head of faculty, the course is currently the responsibility of an appropriately experienced deputy headteacher who has provided positive leadership and co-ordinated the team effort to revive standards and minimise the potential negative effects of a temporary leadership vacuum. Teachers have skills and experience appropriate to this level of work and training on new technologies is kept up to date. Students have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities and the school has achieved notable success in national events such as 'Young Engineers'. Resources for ICT and computer-aided design and manufacturing are good, and students make good use of them. There is no specific accommodation for sixth-form students and this puts pressure on workshop space throughout the department.

80. Since the last inspection, good improvements have been made in reversing a downward trend in examination results, in providing and using ICT and computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment, and in improving the popularity of the course.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Results in the AVCE examination are above average.
- Teaching is good, as are students' attitudes to their work.
- The department is well led and teachers work well together as a team.

Areas for improvement

- There is little use of electronic learning (e-learning) to support study.
- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching to share good practice.

81. In Years 12 and 13 the school offers ASVCE and AVCE courses in ICT. Though no national figures are yet available with which to make comparisons, initial indications are that they have done well as a majority of students have gained A or B grades. This is a very popular course and has attracted large numbers of male and female students.

82. Standards in the current Year 12 and 13 classes are above average and students are achieving well overall. Students are acquiring good levels of knowledge and understanding as required by the examination syllabus. Their practical projects are well conducted and cover a good range of ICT systems. Students work well with a suitable range of industry standard software. In a project that involves web-page design they show a good grasp of the relevant

terminology. They research their projects well and are developing good skills of analysis. The evaluations they conduct are mostly satisfactory but some are not sufficiently systematic in their approach.

83. Teaching is good in all examination courses. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject that is effectively shared with students. The department works well as a team and organises courses so that the individual strengths of teachers are appropriately utilised for the benefit of the students' learning. Marking and individual feedback are good and students are kept well informed of their progress and of ways in which they can improve on performance. Learning is well supported by the very good range and quality of support sheets produced by teachers. The department has developed a website that contains information about courses offered by it. It is considering adding the support material to the site to develop e-learning so that students can access the site at any time, thus enriching learning. Teachers make sure that the objectives of lessons are shared so that students know where their learning is leading. Planning is very good and gives good direction to learning. During the inspection, the level of participation by students in lessons varied, but at its best they were assured and knowledgeable, extending ideas well and making good use of presentational software. These activities make a valuable contribution to literacy in the sixth form. Relationships between students and teachers are very good and this leads to good dialogue that advances learning well.

84. There is good leadership of the department and this contributes directly to the good results obtained by students and to the popularity of ICT courses. Results compare very favourably with the other results gained in the sixth form. The head of department has a good knowledge of what is going on in the department though there is a need for regular monitoring of teaching in the department to share the good practice that is happening.

85. There has been good improvement in ICT since the last inspection. A good number of students are taking up further study in ICT and the gender balance has improved. Resources are now good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on physical education. In addition, observations were made on the 'Leisure and Recreation' AVCE course, where attainment is above average and, compared with physical education, much more in line with individual expectations with higher-attaining students gaining appropriate A/B grades.

Physical education

The quality of provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Some of the teaching is good and staff exhibit good knowledge of their subject.
- Provision for gifted and talented students is good.

Areas for improvement

- More demands for students to research topics are needed.
- Closer monitoring of student responses to independent study is required.

86. At the end of Year 12 the number of students gaining A to E grades in AS-level is average. The most recent results show an improvement with nearly all of the students from a larger cohort gaining these grades by comparison with the previous cohort in 2001. At A-level the number gaining passes at A to E grades in the school's first group dropped to just less

than two thirds. This represents satisfactory achievement for the majority of students during the one or two year courses. However, the proportion of students gaining A/B grades is disappointing with some higher-attaining students achieving below expectations based on prior attainment. There is no marked difference in the overall results for male and female students.

87. Standards in the work of the students are average overall, but vary widely. Students show appropriate knowledge and understanding of physiological and psychological factors affecting performance. Knowledge and understanding of contemporary and historical issues in sport and society is sound. In a Year 13 session, students were studying the characteristics of sport and leisure from a historical perspective and it was noticeable that they made good links to previous learning. In Year 12 students showed a readiness in learning technical language associated with identifying movement at specific joints.

88. However, students at both levels need to develop a more positive approach to independent follow-up work by researching topics thoroughly and being prepared to contribute a more informed view on issues such as the impact of 'personality' on sports performance. While the attitudes and values of students to the subject at AS and A-level are generally positive there is little evidence that their capacity for independent study is being fully developed. Attendance at A- level sessions in Year 13 seen during the inspection was poor.

89. Teaching is at least satisfactory with much of it good. Session outcomes are clearly outlined at the start to lessons and teachers provide stimulating examples and demonstrate good subject knowledge. There is good pace, a variety of challenging tasks and well-considered progressions in the best teaching. Some teachers know their students particularly well and in Year 13 direct questions appropriately in order to enhance learning and test knowledge of the topic. Teachers' expectations of their students are sometimes not high enough and greater demands should be put on students in both Years 12 and 13. This should be underpinned by the encouragement of a research culture through the use of their individual files in which students are expected to independently research topics and provide evidence that they can relate theory to practice. Some aspects are supported by well-produced handbooks but many students have become over reliant on them and their contribution is limited to passive note taking. With the increasing popularity of the subject at this level the management of courses, admission of students, monitoring of subject performance and general coherence are not good enough.

90. 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. This would help students and improve their willingness to follow up tasks. Some sixth-form students make an invaluable contribution to the extra-curricular programme by assisting teaching staff in coaching and administrative duties. The provision for gifted and talented students is very good with the availability of the 'Sports Bursary Programme' which helps toward training needs and participation in relevant sessions at the University of Sunderland.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on art and design and media studies.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Results at A-level showed a marked improvement in 2002.
- The subject makes a good contribution to students' cultural development.
- Students' research is thorough and lively.

Areas for improvement

- Results at AS-level were not as good as expected in 2002.
- Students lack confidence when working from observation.
- There is a lack of a sense of urgency, and a slow pace in some lessons.

91. Results in examinations for students in Year 13 were well below average in 2001, although they showed marked improvement in 2002. Results reflect the variations in the attainment of students at the start of the course, which vary between well below average and average. In the AS-level examination in 2002, students did not do as well as expected, because there were problems with interpreting examination requirements, and the attendance of some students was poor.

92. The standards of work of Year 13 students seen during the inspection were average. Their research is thorough, and they produce lively study sheets, which effectively investigate the work of a wide range of artists. These include Vincent Van Gogh, Albrecht Durer, and Anthony Gormley. Their colour work is carefully considered, and they use colour and tone well to achieve high contrast and striking effects in their compositions. Higher-attaining students show a delicate touch when using colour washes in their still life work. Students are less successful when working from observation; they lack confidence in their recording skills, and prefer to rely on working from photographs, or from memory and imagination. In addition, while their approach to painting is careful and considered, it lacks a sense of adventure, and there is a lack of bolder, broader approaches. As a result, students' broader media handling skills are not fully developed.

93. These standards indicate satisfactory achievement during Years 12 and 13, since those students now in Year 13 entered the sixth form with broadly average GCSE results. Students make sound gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject.

94. Learning is satisfactory. Students learn particularly effectively when they receive good individual advice and coaching from teachers during lessons. This is a frequent feature of the teaching, which is satisfactory overall. Students listen intently to teachers and relationships and attitudes are good. Students learn to improve their skills as a result of teachers' good knowledge of their subject. This emphasis on individual advice means that students can develop their work in different directions, and this produces good application and good learning in the best lessons. However, in some lessons, there is a lack of a sense of urgency, and a rather slow pace, and students' learning is no better than satisfactory as a result. Assessment criteria are shared with students in lessons, but not in enough detail. This means that they are not clear on what they need to do to gain the best possible marks in each area.

95. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a clear educational direction in the work of the department, and the subject makes a good contribution to students' cultural development. A wide range of artists is studied, the programme of gallery visits is well planned, and includes a visit to Amsterdam. Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, however, is not as thorough or frequent as planned, and the department's reviews of its performance are not closely enough linked to a consideration of national standards.

96. Improvements since the previous inspection have been satisfactory. A-level results showed a marked improvement in 2002, and this improvement has been maintained in the standards seen in the work in the school.

Media studies

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

Strengths

- Good use is made of ICT in students' practical work.
- Recent results show a steady improvement.
- A good proportion of teaching uses strategies which provide good opportunities for extending students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- Raise attainment at both AS and A-level by:
 - more consistent use of assessment to inform future learning;
 - more careful preparation and planning for some lessons;
 - improvement of the attendance of students.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory for the numbers of pupils involved in media studies.
- Resources for practical work are not adequate for the numbers of students.

97. Results in media studies are average. Results in A-level media studies over the last three years have been in line with the national average for the subject. The number of students achieving A and B grades at both levels is below the national average. Male students' performance in media studies has been consistently better than that of female students at both AS and A-level.

98. The standard of work seen during the inspection was average. There was evidence of the good use of ICT in students' work: word-processed essays, reviews supported by material downloaded from Internet sites and research using Internet sources. Some students have a sophisticated understanding of ICT and use it well to support their course work and practical work. Higher-attaining students do not always use the technical language expected in order to achieve the higher grades at AS and A-level.

99. Achievement in media studies is satisfactory. The students who enter the sixth form have GCSE grades C or above and of the present Year 12 only five students have not had previous experience of media studies at GCSE level. From this base-line, standards at the end of Year 13 show that students achieve grades at A-level which are in line with predictions, and they are thus making satisfactory progress. A small number of students have not studied the subject at GCSE but have at least Grade C in five subjects. The grades achieved at A-level are also in line with AS-level results achieved.

100. Teaching and learning in media studies are satisfactory. Where teaching is well planned and lessons well prepared, learning is also good. Students are actively engaged and show enthusiasm for the tasks set. In some lessons, planning, preparation and the teacher's knowledge of the subject were very good. Timely and relevant examples, related to the

students' own experiences, resulted in students actively participating in discussion. Very good use was made in two Year 12 lessons of radio recordings made in preparation for a study of news values. Work sheets enabled students to focus and provided them with a frame on which to record their analysis. Lower-attaining pupils in a Year 12 class made good progress in developing their understanding of the concept of news values in radio news bulletins as a result of carefully led questioning by the teacher. They discussed the way in the presentations targetted specific audiences. When used with a higher-attaining group, a faster pace was adopted, and the teacher's questions were more open and investigative. This good example of careful preparation resulted in two very different groups learning more effectively. In work seen all students showed a growing understanding of media concepts. Higher-attaining students develop a more sophisticated understanding and use of technical language.

101. Insufficient account is taken of students' learning need in some groups, which results in lack of focus and concentration. There is some inconsistency in the notes made by students and guidance given. Some marking is detailed and gives students feedback that is helpful and results in improvement. The students' use of technical language is not always reinforced, even in work by the higher-attaining students.

102. The attendance of students in the lessons observed was unsatisfactory with up to 20 per cent of students absent or arriving late. This has an impact on continuity with students not completing preparation and coursework on time.

103. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The present head of department was appointed in September 2001 and has rightly identified a number of areas as currently too limited and in need of improvement. These include the under-use of lesson observation, unsatisfactory accommodation and resources for practical work, scope for improved liaison with local media industries (television and radio) and the small size of the departmental budget for consumables and small items of equipment. Managing the practical work for large numbers of students in Year 12 (and also GCSE) with limited accommodation and resources presents a challenge and has an impact on teaching. The lack of resources disadvantages students who do not have access in their own homes to editing and computer facilities.

104. There has been no monitoring of students' work except for examination moderation. The use of assessment data is still developing and is not yet being used effectively to inform teaching.

105. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall. Media studies was not inspected separately in the last inspection. It was very briefly mentioned as part of the English report. Examination results have steadily improved at AS and A-level, following the national trend. The number of pupils and students opting to study media studies has increased substantially. The retention rate at Year 13 is good, with a large number of students continuing to study the subject at A-level.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography, history, religious education, government and politics and psychology.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership ensures a well-motivated team with a professional approach to their work.
- Good teaching resulting in good learning.
- A-level results of male students in 2001 were above average.
- Results have risen since 1999.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support and extend learning is too dependent on individual students rather than being an integral requirement of a cohesive key skills component.
- Assessment data is used in a generally satisfactory way, but fails to encourage teaching strategies that will challenge students to extend their grades.
- The poor attendance of some students hampers consistency of learning.

106. Results in examinations for students in Year 13 are about the national average. In 2001 the school's average points score was slightly above the national average and this is repeated in 2002 confirming the trend. All students were successful in achieving an A-level grade but the proportion achieving grades A and B is well below the national average. However, in 2001, the results of male students were above the national average, but those of female students were well below. This is contrary to the national pattern and reflects the particular characteristics of the group in that year. In 2001 five students were ungraded in AS-level examinations and nine under-achieved. This suggests that better guidance could be provided on entry and students counselled about more appropriate courses.

107. The standards of work of Year 13 students seen during the inspection were average. Students make good use of case studies and those examining the tropical seasonality in West Africa had a clear understanding of the topic and satisfactory background knowledge of the area. Many Year 12 students produce good individual studies showing understanding of fieldwork techniques applied to local hydrological studies. Many of the students produce well-structured and analytical reports. Some make excellent use of ICT but this is left to individual students rather than being a standard feature of the work that helps to develop their key skills. In some cases students do not make full use of all the material that they gather during their studies and work can be superficial and inadequately developed. This is also true in oral work when opportunities are sometimes missed to ensure greater clarity of thought. The presentations that students have to make to their colleagues are helping to extend their thinking.

108. These standards indicate satisfactory achievement during Years 12 and 13. The department's statistics show that many students achieve their projected minimum target grade. However, in 2002 a significant proportion of Year 12 students under-achieved and did not receive an AS grade. Five students raised their projected grade from a D to a C. Overall the department is successful in recruiting students and geography remains very popular. The department is not involved in the recruitment process and this results in some students being admitted to courses for which they are not totally suited. Whilst most students achieve their

projected grade few achieve better and more could be done to extend the higher-attaining students. In lessons observed, there was little evident difference between male and female students and this is true in the examination results.

109. Learning is good throughout Years 12 and 13, partly as a result of the efforts of the students, who deal well with the vast amount of material provided, and partly as a result of teaching that shows concern for students. Students learn well when they are given opportunities to share ideas and discuss together in small groups. This was evident in the Year 12 lesson on flooding where students used Ordnance Survey maps, newspaper articles, photographs and textbooks to study the management of flooding in Keswick. However, attendance at lessons observed during the inspection was not good. Most of the lessons had fewer than 85 per cent of students present and this has an impact on long-term learning.

110. Teaching is good because the department has a well-qualified team that consists of enthusiastic teachers who have very good geographical knowledge. They show their commitment, enthusiasm and enjoyment in the subject and communicate this to students. The department is keen to demonstrate the value of geography to further study and to employment. Lesson planning is good with clear objectives that are usually made explicit to students and there are opportunities to evaluate work and to assess progress. The relationships between staff and students are very good and this positively aids their learning. In most instances teachers have high expectations of students but some lessons need to move at a faster pace. The lesson looking at the developments in Newcastle's greenbelt moved slowly and ended without an unsatisfactory conclusion to be taken up in the next lesson. Marking is thorough and usually helpful.

111. The leadership and management of geography are very good. There are clear aims and support for all staff and a sense of professionalism and pride in the department. The analysis of assessment against national benchmarks to establish targets is at an early stage. The use of the minimum target grade is being sensibly used but could be more positively focused to promote the idea of achieving even higher grades. The resources in the department could be vastly improved. Students are encouraged to purchase their own textbook but there is still a need for considerable use of photocopied material. The department has inadequate ICT facilities lacking up-to-date weather recording equipment or easy access to interactive whiteboards or the Internet.

112. Since the last inspection there has been satisfactory improvement with a consistent level of attainment. Over the last three years results at A-level have risen to reach the national average.

History

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

Strengths

- Good teaching helps students to achieve well.
- A consistency of approach results in the average point score normally being at the national average.
- Students reach standards higher than their target grades.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The limited use of ICT restricts the opportunities for students to improve their learning and develop their key skills.
- The large size of some groups places unacceptable demands on teachers to ensure that students are not penalised.

113. Results in examinations for students in Year 13 were well below average in 2001. In recent years, results have been about average and the 2002 results confirm this trend. The difference between male and female students varies from year to year. In 2001, whilst both were below average, males out-performed females, and the male students' results were well above the national average. In 2002, the results of the female students were much better than those of males, and the female students' were well above the national average. Over recent years, not all students have obtained a grade at A-level and in some years a significant proportion of students were ungraded.

114. The standards of work of Year 13 students are average. Samples of work show a wide range of attainment. Some of the individual studies show maturity of language and good analytical skills. Others are more descriptive or do not always support arguments with sufficient detail. In their studies on the rise of Hitler, most students had a good grasp of the chronology of events and commented on particular features. They handled a variety of viewpoints well and discussed their own thoughts on the impact of the Treaty of Versailles. Many Year 12 students have a good understanding of Wolsey and can evaluate his role in the government of Henry VIII.

115. There is some evidence of the teaching of key skills in the way students structure their essays and marshal their arguments. One student noted that this was the best and most helpful part of the course. However, the programme of key skills is not as focused as it could be to extend the more able students and support the others. This is particularly true in the limited use of ICT.

116. Standards indicate good achievement. The school data shows that the department is adding value and in 2002 this was the equivalent to students improving on their minimum target grade by about half a grade. One student achieved an A-level grade B after being ungraded at the end of Year 12 and two students improved by two grades on their predicted minimum grade.

117. Learning is good as a result of the attention to detail that teachers put into their preparation. In some ways they do too much of the work in their concern to prepare students. This results in some students being less able to take control of their own learning. A few challenge their teachers by asking questions and taking their understanding further. Others are reluctant participants. In the Year 12 lesson on "Bloody Sunday" in Russia in 1905, a small proportion of students participated actively and with enthusiasm whilst two-thirds made no significant oral contribution. In lessons, the attendance of students is very low, with a

negative impact on long-term learning. In one class only 50 per cent of students were present and in another the attendance rate was only 80 per cent.

118. Teaching is good because teachers are very knowledgeable and well prepared. They devise exercises that involve students and they show them how to manage a variety of sources and to evaluate them. Teachers' lesson plans are clear and concentrate on learning rather than on content. They use a good variety of methods and question and answer sessions, where they involve the majority of students, are effective and consolidate learning. Often students work in small groups, which clearly helps students to share ideas and support each other, which they do with sensitivity and maturity. The management of students is very good and there are good relationships in the department that help to create a good learning environment. The marking of essays is often very thorough and supportive enabling students to learn from their mistakes.

119. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There are clear guidelines and support that ensure a positive team approach. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is at an early stage and there is no departmental record of pupils' progress, making it more difficult to set targets, track progress and take quick action against under-achievement. There are insufficient resources, especially for the use of ICT, although the library resource centre is well stocked for A-level studies. The budget for in-service training is inadequate. The department has been very successful in recruiting and retaining students but this results in very large groups. This could be expected to have a negative impact on learning and standards, but teachers are dealing with a very heavy workload to compensate and to ensure students do not suffer. In the long term this is not acceptable.

120. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement with a consistency of approach that has ensured that standards have risen and achievement has risen considerably.

Government and politics

Overall, the quality of provision in government and politics is **good**.

Strengths

- Overall standards of attainment are above national averages.
- Students' response is good.
- Good teaching leads to good learning.
- There is good achievement, particularly in areas such as maturation of understanding of political ideas
- The subject leader is a good role model, committed to high standards.

Areas for improvement

- Wider reading is not encouraged.
- Students lack specific examination skills, particularly the ability to recall facts.
- There is insufficient access to ICT.
- Students are not sufficiently involved in a formalised review of their targets and work.

121. Overall, standards of attainment are above average. At A-level, the results in 2001, with a small cohort, were below national averages, since only 14 per cent gained A or B grades. However, at AS-level, 50 per cent of students attained A and B grades, which was above national levels. In 2002, with a larger cohort, figures for A-level showed a prodigious leap, with 50 per cent of students attaining A to B grades. Standards attained by current students, in both Years 12 and 13, are above average in their respective courses.

122. In the AS course, Year 12 students develop an early enthusiasm for the subject and they develop a good understanding of its central concepts. The lower-attaining students interpret political information effectively in a variety of forms. For example, in their studies of voting patterns in the 2001 General Election, they use their background knowledge to show that the overall turnout, at 59 per cent of the electorate, was the lowest figure for over a century. The higher-attaining students build on this and select and organise relevant materials to construct arguments and explanations leading to reasoned conclusions. Thus, for example, they proffer reasoned arguments, based on their wider knowledge and understanding, as to why the voting figures are even lower in constituencies, such as Liverpool, Riverside.

123. In their A-level course, Year 13 lower-attaining students analyse effectively, and evaluate skilfully the relationships between institutions, processes, ideologies and concepts. For example, in their comparative studies of the UK and USA, such students compare the procedures of both countries in enshrining human rights into their processes of law. Higher-attaining students are able to discern integral conflicts in such legislation as the Human Rights Act, which whilst promulgating the right to life, could appear simultaneously to take away individual choice concerning such matters as abortion or euthanasia.

124. Students' attitudes to their learning are good. They students engage diligently with their work. They sustain concentration and have a responsible attitude to the subject.

125. Students with differing learning needs achieve well and there is considerable evidence in both their oral and written work of the acquisition of analytical skills to augment their increasing knowledge. There is particularly good achievement in areas such as maturation of understanding of political ideas. Students' progress in lessons, however, is not fully manifested as success in examinations because of their failure to retain knowledge and understanding over time and because of the lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject. Thus, the higher-order independent research skills are not yet fully developed and there is a tendency to rely too much on the teachers' knowledge and source material. Moreover, lower-attaining students still have relative weaknesses in the retention of facts. There is no evidence of any significant difference in the achievement of male and female students

126. The good response from students and their good achievement reflect the good teaching that they receive. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject, which they present in lively lessons that motivate and stimulate the students and lead, therefore, to good learning. A lack of access to ICT facilities in the department is an important factor that encourages teachers to have a slight tendency to be overly didactic and students are not always encouraged to become independent learners.

127. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department is a good role model as a teacher committed to high standards. In this, she is well supported by her colleague. She is aware that a more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of students' achievement, by involving students in a more formalised review of their targets and work, will support students' academic performance.

128. Since the last report, which made combined general statements about politics, sociology and law, there has been good improvement.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Good teaching results in rising standards and good achievement by students.
- Good management has ensured good co-ordination of a changing teaching force and maintains standards under these very difficult circumstances.
- Students have very good attitudes towards their studies. They work very hard, show high levels of commitment and many continue through to A-level.

Areas for improvement

- The number of suitably qualified teachers is insufficient to meet the needs of this increasingly popular and successful subject.
- The interim arrangements made to cope with recent staffing problems are adequate to maintain standards in the short term, but are not good enough to ensure the quality of provision over the full academic year.

129. In recent years, there has been a dramatic rise in numbers taking the subject through to examination and standards have risen. In 2000 and 2001, results at A-level were below the national average. In 2001, large numbers took the AS examinations gaining below average results. The results obtained in 2002 show a marked improvement. A-level results, with over a quarter gaining higher grades (A or B) and an over 90 per cent pass rate, should match the national averages (not yet published). AS results were even better: more than 40 per cent obtained a higher grade and over 98 per cent passed. When students' results are compared to their previous performances at GCSE, the majority exceed expectations. This level of performance shows good achievement. The smaller numbers of male students who take the subject share fully in this good achievement.

130. Standards evident during the inspection match those of the latest examination results. Year 13 students are starting to master the extremely difficult concepts involved in Marr's "computational model" of perception. Year 12 students distinguish accurately the difference between informational and normative-social influences on conformity. The preparation of Year 13 course work is well under way; all students have a good base of original data and a secure understanding of the statistical techniques that they need to use.

131. Teaching and learning are consistently good. All teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and the guidance given by the head of department ensures that the demands of the syllabus are met in full. Lessons are well planned and based on a range of teaching methods which stimulate interest and encourage active learning. For example, in one Year 12 lesson, a sophisticated blend of group work and whole-class discussions led by the teacher resulted in all students participating with enthusiasm. Their combined ideas produced a set of constructs to explain conformity that exactly matched the account in the textbook. Students were very motivated by their success and gained very secure understanding of the work.

132. Classes in Year 12 now contain more than 20 students. This limits the amount of individual tuition and support that teachers can give. It also compromises teachers' ability to use strategies that encourage active learning. Any further increase will result in teachers having to use more didactic methods. They may have to resort to "lecturing" rather than "teaching". Learning is less effective in the four lessons each week for which there is no qualified teacher. Well-prepared work is always set and marked for these lessons, which are supervised by non-specialist teachers.

133. A combination of an unexpected increase in student numbers in September (130 plus) and staff illness produced a crisis in staffing. The school has been able to find almost enough part-time teachers who are qualified in psychology. At the time of the inspection, the department consisted of the full time and experienced head of department and three part-time colleagues employed from September as long-term supply teachers. All three are inexperienced and have only taught previously in Further Education colleges. Very effective and determined leadership and management have minimised the disruption that could have ensued. The new teachers have been integrated quickly into the work of the department; all are fully committed to their students and to the maintenance of good standards. The considerable and sensitive support provided by the head of department has enabled inexperienced colleagues to become a rapidly improving and effective body of teachers. The Year 12 lessons which cannot be covered by the psychology staff are being used as effectively as possible and organisation ensures that no one group of students is disadvantaged. At present, these arrangements are maintaining standards, but cannot be seen as a long-term solution to the problems. In particular, they are placing an undue burden on the head of department.

134. Since the last inspection, psychology has become a successful subject providing well for an increasingly large number of students. Morale in the department is high and, given a successful resolution of the remaining staffing difficulties, there is no reason why psychology should not continue to make a valuable contribution to the sixth-form curriculum in both Years 12 and 13.

Religious education

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

Strengths

- Public examination results are above national norms, while standards of work in lessons are well above.
- Very good teaching results in very good learning. Lessons are well planned and well delivered.
- There is a good teaching team of religious education specialists.
- Accommodation is good and there is good access to and use of ICT, including the department's own excellent website.
- Students' response is very good and they have very positive attitudes towards religious education
- The management and leadership of the department are very good, effective and efficient.

Areas for improvement

- Targeting and self- review procedures for students are not yet sufficiently developed.
- Strategies to encourage wider and deeper reading by students to enhance their independent learning are not fully utilised.
- Students lack certain examination skills, particularly the ability to recall facts for examinations.

135. In the sixth form, a significant minority of students follow the full A-level course in religious studies. All other students follow a course based on the AS-level syllabus in religious philosophy and ethics in Year 12. They have the option to take the examination. That option is exercised by large numbers, and in 2002, 180 students out of a group of 250 opted to take the examination. The popularity of the subject in Year 12 gives rise to three large groups of students in Year 13. Lessons in the AS and A2 areas were observed.

136. Overall, standards and results in examinations are well above national expectations. In the A-level examinations in 2001, students attained results which, at 50 per cent A to B grades and 100 per cent A to E grades, are above national figures. This is a marked improvement on the figures for the previous two years, and the results for 2002 show 40 per cent A to B grades with a very much larger group of students. Standards attained by students at the end of Year 12 in 2001 were at 35 per cent A to B, above national norms. There was a slight increase in 2002, but as yet there are no national comparative figures for this year.

137. Observations, in the classroom of students in current Year 13, and a scrutiny of their work, indicate burgeoning standards which are also well above national norms. Higher-attaining students are particularly adept at outlining and understanding a range of philosophical arguments that are pertinent to religious interpretation. For example, in their studies of the problem of evil for theists, such students correctly define a theodicy as an attempt to defend God in the face of evil and they effectively detail and compare the theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus. Lower-attaining students lack retention and examination techniques. This leads to a lack confidence when dealing with the complexities of analysis and evaluation when confronting them in tests and examinations and this sometimes leads to attainment falling below expected levels.

138. Higher-attaining students in Year 12, in their studies of Fletcher's theory of decision-making, can analyse, comment upon and give examples of legalism, antinomianism and situation ethics. Their levels of debate when justifying or criticising each of the categories are mature and deeply analytical. Lower-attaining students, whilst recognising the distinctions, are not always able to fully articulate their arguments. A clearly discernable factor in students' varying attainment is the evidence of wider and more in-depth reading around the subject by the higher-attaining students

139. Students' achievement in Years 12 and 13 is very good. Students, fifty per cent of whom enter the sixth form from other schools, enter with an average baseline of skills and knowledge. By the end of this stage of their learning, students have made very good progress and they are skilful at not only selecting and demonstrating clearly relevant knowledge and understanding but also at using them to sustain a philosophical argument. The strength of the students' class work 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. There is little difference in progress between male and female students.

140. Teaching is very good overall throughout Years 12 and 13 and students learn very well as a result. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are very well planned, well prepared and lead to students' learning. A characteristic of teaching in religious education is that the teachers' belief in the value of the subject is reflected in their enthusiasm for it. This has a strong impact on students' very effective learning. Teachers are particularly good at establishing good relationships. In some lessons, teachers tend to be overly didactic and students are not sufficiently encouraged to become independent learners. In the best lessons, however, teachers are particularly adept at using a range of strategies to draw out significant points from material, including the department's own excellent web-site, which is both challenging and exciting and teachers successfully exhort students to become more active participants in their own learning. Lessons are lively, stimulating and enhance students' learning and in those lessons where there were designed participatory elements, the lessons made a major contribution to students attaining appropriate standards.

141. The response of students is very good and they generally show good application to their work. They respond diligently, settle quickly to task and sustain concentration. Their positive behaviour and response, which is often a direct result of very good teaching and good classroom management, is an important factor in their increased learning.

142. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department leads dynamically, effectively and efficiently. She is an excellent role model for a department team committed to raising standards and to the encouragement of students to even higher achievement. In this she is well supported by her colleagues in the department. She, in turn, gives them very good support. She has a vision for the future of the department that is based on a realistic evaluation of its strengths and the areas for its development.

143. There are some areas for development. The department has a comprehensive assessment policy based on sound principles and achievable outcomes. However, the head of department is aware that the setting of targets for students, and self-reviewing by students are still in their infancy and are not yet fully developed. The department has recently appointed young religious education specialist staff who are making a very good contribution to the department's success. However, there is insufficient specialist staffing to meet the major subject commitment across the whole school, and particularly in a burgeoning sixth form.

144. In this denominational school, there were no comments in the previous report concerning religious education.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English language, English literature and French. Spanish and German were also sampled. Numbers taking Spanish have been low in recent years. In 2001, three students gained well below average Spanish A-level results. Currently, the one Year 13 student achieves as expected, but standards are below average. Numbers taking German have also been low. In 2001, German A-level results were well below average. Currently in Year 13, six students are taught well and show interest. The range of attainment in this group is very wide, but most students achieve satisfactorily.

English language

Overall, the provision in English language is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching results in good achievement in relation to the standards of students at the start of Year 12.
- Very good attitudes of students ensure that they do well.
- Good leadership and management ensure this large department runs efficiently and effectively.
- Teaching makes a good contribution to social and moral development.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment procedures do not support students sufficiently.
- Very large numbers in some groups hinder effective teaching.
- The use of computers to support learning is not developed well enough.

145. Results in examinations for students in Year 13 in 2001 were average. Over recent years they have fluctuated from above to below average. Results in 2002 are slightly better than in 2001, with a good proportion of the 30 entries gaining A and B grades and only two

students failing to gain an A to E grade. Students do comparatively better in English language than in their other subjects.

146. Standards of work of Year 13 students confirm standards as average. High-attaining students articulate clearly the reasons why a conversation develops as it does, using technical terms such as “deixis” confidently. Their written investigations are detailed and accurate. Middle-attaining students, the majority, recognise features of language, for instance, in the development of a child’s ability to communicate, but do not analyse them in sufficient depth. Lower-attaining students understand the basic concepts of language, for example, the pragmatics of conversation. They understand the technical terminology used, but need constant reminders. There is some inaccuracy of expression in their writing and they are reluctant to join in discussion. Standards of work of Year 12 are also average. Students begin to develop an awareness of the functions of language, for example, how language can be used to manipulate and persuade. They use technical vocabulary with accuracy, though not yet with confidence. Students in both years use frameworks successfully to guide their evaluations.

147. Computers are not used as much as they should be, either to further research and independent learning, or to present work more effectively.

148. These standards represent good achievement during Years 12 and 13. Students enter the course with below average standards. Achievement is better in Year 13 than in Year 12 because group sizes are considerably smaller, ensuring more individual attention for students and better involvement of all students in discussion. Male students achieve at a similar rate to female students and a good proportion of males elect to take the subject. The gifted and talented achieve in line with the rest of the group, but no special provision is made for them.

149. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject, so that students listen to them with interest and concentration. Skilled questioning develops students’ understanding and constantly assesses whether they appreciate the meaning of the complex terminology used in the analysis of English. Teachers use this terminology regularly and introduce new words carefully. Students ask questions when they are unsure and listen carefully to the answers. Because teachers plan carefully and co-operate well together, time is used effectively and students learn at a good pace. Very good relationships exist, which engender a productive atmosphere. Students work very hard to improve and appreciate that teachers work very hard to support them. Homework is used well to develop work done in the classroom. For instance, an analysis of a persuasive article was started in a Year 12 lesson so that students had a clear idea of what to look for, then completed as independent work at home, so that students had to think for themselves. Where teaching is less effective, not all pupils are involved in discussion, though they listen and make notes conscientiously. This means they are not developing sufficient independence of thought. Sometimes the reason for this in Year 12 is that groups are too large. Poor attendance adversely affects continuity of work in some groups. Teachers assess regularly, both during teaching and in written work and give good advice on how to improve. However, this is not closely linked to the specific criteria for assessment. Neither is it used effectively to monitor the progress of individuals, or to encourage students to strive for the highest grade they can attain.

150. The subject makes a good contribution to the development of students’ moral and social awareness. They come to understand how language can be used to manipulate as well as communicate. Extracts for analysis often offer insights into social problems, such as those used from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

151. The quality of leadership and management is good. The department is efficiently run, promoting good communication between the pairs of teachers responsible for each of the groups. Teachers are given good personal support in their professional development, but there is insufficient formal monitoring occurring, either of the curriculum or of teaching to raise standards still further.

152. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Teaching occurs in a variety of rooms, some of which are too small, inhibiting teaching style, or away from the department, therefore lacking in stimulating display. Resources are inadequate, with too few textbooks and an over reliance on worksheets, and insufficient resources in the library to promote independent study. There are insufficient computers available for students' use. These factors adversely affect progress, restricting it to good rather than very good, for which there is the potential, given the good standards of teaching and the very good attitudes of the students.

153. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. New specifications have been introduced successfully and the subject has become very popular. Progress and teaching remain good.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching ensures that results are above average.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject
- Students make very good progress in lessons.
- Good leadership gives clear direction to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The use of computers to support learning should be improved.
- Accommodation is cramped and some groups are taught in several rooms.
- Day-to-day assessment of pupils' work is inconsistent.

154. Results in examinations for students in Year 13 are above average. In 2001 they were broadly in line with the national average. Over recent years they have been below the national expectation. The 2002 results contradict this trend with results that are above average.

155. The standards of work of Year 13 students seen during the inspection were above average. Students were especially good at analysing such texts as Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice", Chaucer's "General Prologue" and Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath", discussing such social issues as wealth, status, attitudes and the relationships between men and women. They were less successful in understanding form, content, ideas and features involved in real conversation. The students have good listening skills and interact well with their teachers when comparing the ways in which Austen and Woolf explore the role of women in society. They communicate clearly and interact in lively discussion with each other and the teacher. Written work is well presented in essays and extended writing and students are developing good note-taking skills. They effectively explore underlying meanings in such poems as Blake's "The Lamb" and "The Tiger" and the poems of John Donne.

156. These standards indicate good achievement during Years 12 and 13, since students enter the sixth form with good levels of attainment in English. Over the past years more males than females were entered, but this has narrowed and in 2001 an equal number were entered for A-level. In 2002 there was a significant increase in the number of entries,

comprising nine males and 21 females. Females out-perform males and this is an issue the school is successfully addressing, with the differential being narrowed in 2002. The achievement of students from ethnic groups and gifted and talented students is good.

157. As a consequence of very good teaching learning is very good. Teaching and learning are particularly good when students are treated in an adult way and objectives are made clear to the class at the commencement of the lesson. There is good pace and rigour when aspects of the lesson are delivered within time periods. Teachers' secure knowledge and enthusiasm for literature are contagious. Teaching is less effective when the students are given insufficient opportunity for independent learning or are allowed to become passive during lessons. Single periods restrict the development of discussion and written work in literature. Learning is particularly good when students interact with teachers after homework preparation. Students listen well and articulate arguments and courteously defend their point of view. Learning by higher-attaining students is very good. They read with sharp understanding and cogently present a point of view, often with considerable power of persuasion. Lower-attaining students learn well and have good reading and comprehension skills. Male and female students learn equally well as a consequence of good teaching that effectively tackles their different potential. Identification of these discrete groups of students is important in deciding teaching styles that effectively focus on their specific learning needs.

158. Leadership and management of the department are good. The pupils are offered a wide choice of language and literature as discrete subjects and also a language/literature optional choice. Staffing is well managed and teachers are effectively deployed. An appropriate curriculum with adequate time allocation is in place.

159. There is an obvious weakness in the use of ICT, accommodation is frequently cramped and students have to use a number of rooms. Assessment procedures and the use of target grades should continue to be improved. Resourcing of the department is satisfactory. Textbooks occasionally have to be shared and there is a limited number of sixth-form texts in the school library.

160. Improvement has been satisfactory since the last inspection. Standards in AS-levels and A-levels have been maintained and achievement is good. The overall quality of teaching has improved.

French

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

Strengths

- Teaching in the lessons seen was good and most students learned well.
- In 2002, A-level results in French improved over those of the previous year.
- Year 12 students work well together in pairs and small groups and have positive attitudes, ensuring that they make good progress in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Too many students dropped out of the AS-level course in 2001/2.
- Target-setting for lower-attaining students lacks clarity and definite time limits.
- There are no arrangements for study visits or work experience in France.

161. In the last four years, A-level results have mostly been below average. Until 2001, the numbers taking A-level French were very low. In 2001, results were well below average, and several students under-achieved, given their GCSE grades. The 2002 results were better and close to the national average. In AS examinations, students in 2001 performed mostly in line

with expectations based on their GCSE grades. In 2002, the four students who completed the course, out of 12 who began it, did better than expected.

162. Despite weaknesses, the overall standard of the Year 13 work seen was average. However, the range of students' attainment is very wide, and not all achieve as well as they should. In the teaching observed, talented students responded well to the effective teaching that demanded much of them. They achieved well, for example, in recalling the sequence of events in a novel based on life in occupied France during World War 2. They demonstrated high standards in their written work when expressing ideas and opinions. Other students lacked the vocabulary and fluency in speaking and writing to complete the same tasks as successfully. One student performed as well as expected from the prior GCSE grade, but another was unaware of basic grammar and language structure and did not achieve well given the prior GCSE and AS grades. Students are expected to use the Internet for research, but there is very little evidence of word-processing of their own written work. Past work seen in Year 13 exercise books and folders is of uneven quality. Some is very good, but there is also evidence of uncompleted tasks, and under-achievement.

163. In relative terms, overall standards in Year 12 are better than in Year 13. Most of the 12 students in this year gained high grades in GCSE, and they achieve well overall because of the good teaching. The students are only a little way into their course, but they make good progress in lessons. They have already begun to acquire the vocabulary they need to express themselves in new areas. Most have begun to tackle the closer focus on grammatical accuracy well and they keep methodical lists of new words. Many have good accents and intonation, listen carefully as others read aloud and respond positively to the teachers' corrections. They work well together in pairs and small groups, and their attitudes to the subject are good. However, in one of the lessons seen, several students did not arrive on time.

164. Although there are sharp variations, particularly in Year 13, the standards reached in work seen in lessons in Years 12 and 13 represent satisfactory achievement overall. Male students are outnumbered by females in both years; in Year 12, male students' achievement is good, but it is unsatisfactory in Year 13, mainly because of poor attitudes to study. The gifted and talented students generally achieve well, but they have not visited France for study or work experience, opportunities that would help them develop their potential to the full.

165. The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons seen was mainly good. Teachers used French all the time to develop students' listening and speaking skills. They planned their lessons carefully and had clear objectives for every lesson, covering most language skills. They used a wide range of methods and sometimes adopted very imaginative approaches to promote learning. In one Year 12 lesson, the teacher used rapid French to set up an excellent debate on the role of marriage in modern France. Students discussed their ideas in pairs, debated them in open forum, and in groups collected their conclusions in written form. Students showed growing awareness of the need for structure in their ideas and in adopting the right language for different tasks. Teachers generally mark students' work carefully, but do not require students to re-draft their work to help the learning. Teachers usually keep up a brisk pace, but in one Year 13 lesson a weaker student slowed the pace and restricted the learning of the others. All students have valuable opportunities to develop their speaking skills with a very supportive language assistant.

166. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. A new scheme of work effectively reflects the examination requirements. Teachers share good practice whenever possible and an appropriate programme of observation of teaching, under the direction of senior management, has been put in place. The arrangements for logging and monitoring independent listening and reading work, and using the Internet, are not as rigorous as they

should be, especially for the middle-attaining students. The department no longer has its valuable sixth-form teaching/study room, where students, using material suited to their needs, could develop more fully independent and key learning skills.

167. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The number of students taking French has risen, but the examination results have only just begun to improve.