

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

Blaydon-on-Tyne

LEA area: Gateshead

Unique reference number: 108413

Headteacher: Mr M N Zarraga

Reporting inspector: Terence Parish  
15465

Dates of inspection: 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> March 2003

Inspection number: 249772

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 19

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Croftdale Road  
Blaydon-on-Tyne

Postcode: NE21 4BQ

Telephone number: 0191 499011

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Dr A L Gibson

Date of previous inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> March 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
15465	T Parish	Registered inspector		<p>The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well are students taught?</p> <p>How well the school is led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p> <p>How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?</p>
9572	K J Anderson	Lay inspector		<p>Students' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its students?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
10316	N Bertram	Team inspector	Geography History	
1547	G Clarke	Team inspector	Biology Chemistry	
15940	N Godfrey	Team inspector	Art and design Business education	
22906	B Hodgson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
31100	G Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics	
13122	S Matthews	Team inspector		
18950	C Rodney	Team inspector	English	
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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>PART D: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>25</b>
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?</b>	<b>29</b>
Assessment	
Advice, support and guidance	
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>30</b>
Leadership and management	
Resources	
<b>PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>32</b>

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St Thomas More Catholic School is an 11-18 comprehensive school for boys and girls. With 1,436 pupils and students it is much larger than average. As a deemed Technology College, it is required to place emphasis on technology, science and mathematics. Its Beacon School status means it has special qualities which are shared with other schools. Very recently a City Learning Centre has been integrated with the school site and provides very high quality information and communication technology (ICT) resources for learning for St Thomas More, other schools and adults. Most pupils and students in the school are white; very few have a mother tongue that is possibly not English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below average; the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is below average. The socio economic circumstances of pupils are average. Their academic attainment when they start at the school is now above average, higher than in previous years.

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

This is an excellent school. Well above average standards of work across all years are confirmed by high national test results, GCSE, vocational and GCE results. These standards are a testimony to the very hard working, dedicated, staff at all levels of the school – teaching, administrative, technical and maintenance - and the excellent attitudes and behaviour of pupils. Teaching is very good overall and pupils achieve very well by the ends of Year 11 and Year 13. A high number of lessons are excellent. The level of pastoral care is excellent and much appreciated by pupils and parents. Leadership and management are excellent. The school provides very good value for money.

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

This school does everything well or better. What makes it particularly special are

- Frequent and regular assessment and monitoring of pupils' work so that they know how well they are doing.
- Intensive mentoring and support of pupils so they are helped to do better.
- Exemplary developments in teaching so that it gets better, enabling pupils to learn more effectively and standards to rise.
- The exceptionally high quality of leadership and management, which foster a drive for improvement amongst staff and provide the structures by which they can succeed.
- The school's capacity to share its expertise with others to help them develop and in turn reflect upon and refine its own practices.

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

- No significant areas for improvement in the 11-16 school were found in this short inspection. The rigorous and ongoing self-evaluation, monitoring and pupil and staff support systems lead the school to constantly improve itself. The future possibilities opened up by new facilities, such as the sports centre and the city learning centre, now need to be fully considered within whole school planning.

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

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

The school was last inspected in March 1997. Standards were high then and have since got better; the trend in improvement is higher than the national trend. Issues for improvement identified in 1997 have been addressed. The school is now a Beacon School and is successfully helping other schools to improve. Teaching and learning are even better now. Improvement since the time of the last inspection is excellent.





## 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				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	2000	2001	2002	2002	
GCSE examinations	A*	A	A	A*	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	N/A	A	*		

*\* National comparison data for AS / A Level results in 2002 are not yet available*

There are no significant weaknesses in any of the school's test and examination results. At the end of Year 9, English, mathematics and science national test results are all well above average; science results are a touch better than those in English which are a little better than mathematics results. Girls and boys have attained similar results over the last three years, girls' results being slightly better than boys. At GCSE there are no significant weaknesses either; pupils achieve very well by this stage. Almost all subjects show a very high proportion of A\* – C grades, and many subjects have high proportions of A\*-B grades. Overall, over the three years prior to 2002, boys have done better than girls, which is opposite to the national picture; however, girls did significantly better in 2002. Trends in national test results and in GCSE results are better than national trends; the school's results are improving faster.

The school's target for the proportion of pupils likely to get 5+ A\*-C grades at GCSE in 2002 was exceeded by a small margin, whilst the target for the average points score was missed by a small margin. The school sets challenging but calculated targets. GCSE examination standards have risen to a point beyond that which might be reasonably expected of pupils with the broad range of ability in this school.

This was a short inspection and the work from all subjects was not scrutinised in depth. More English, mathematics and science work was seen than that in other subjects. Standards in English, mathematics and science are well above average by Year 9 and Year 11. This is consistent with standards in examinations. Overall standards of work across all other subjects are securely above average by Year 9 and moving towards well above average by Year 11. Pupils achieve very well between Year 7 and Year 11. In English, pupils are particularly strong at analysing texts so that they have a clear understanding of writers' use of language as illustrated in their responses to "To Kill a Mocking Bird". They also engage very well with poetry and literature from other cultures. In mathematics, standards in algebra are particularly high across the school whilst high attaining pupils in Year 11 tackle problems in trigonometry very well indeed. Pupils are very adept in many aspects of science; they can recall and use facts about such things as conductivity to answer 'on the spot' questions about testing products of displacement reactions. They have admirable practical skills from half way through Year 7 onwards; reactants are mixed with great care, small groups of pupils work very well as a team, results are recorded meticulously and analysed, if appropriate, through using spreadsheets and graphs.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Very well motivated pupils who enjoy being at school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Exemplary. Very well mannered, polite, helpful and a pleasure to eat dinner with.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils take up any opportunities offered. They mature quickly into young adults and work very well with each other and with school staff.
Attendance	Well above average.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching in English, mathematics and science is very good across all years; more lessons were seen in these subjects than in others. Only a proportion of teachers are seen in a short inspection, maybe for only one lesson each. There were no significant teaching weaknesses in any subject area inspected and this observation is supported by the well above average GCSE results in all those subjects. It is clear that most teachers across many subjects have a lot of strengths in their teaching which lead to very good learning. All teachers particularly insist on very high standards of behaviour. Pupils, who consequently are enabled to do a lot of work in class, respect this. Teachers have high expectations of the standard of work that should be produced. Pupils' excellent attitudes to work mean they are willing to make the effort needed to succeed; they are interested and work very well together to tackle problems. Teachers assess pupils' work very well indeed and pupils clearly understand how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. Support and collaboration between pupils and with their teachers illustrate the very high level of care in the school and the desire to do better. Teaching is continuously improved by a rigorous and effective in-house observation, training and coaching process whereby teachers help each other to get better; this is popular and valued by many teachers. This work has gone on since the last inspection and improved teaching and learning is reflected in rising examination results.

There are relatively few pupils with special educational needs. Specialist teachers and classroom assistants meet the needs of these pupils very well ensuring success in examinations. Pupils who are particularly gifted or talented benefit from the mentoring and support provided for all pupils and are known to teachers. High attaining classes are set particularly challenging work in lessons, as in a Year 9 science class where the teachers very good planning and methods of working meant pupils had to apply lots of intellectual effort to test out ideas about reactivity.

There are very good approaches to developing pupils' literacy skills across all subjects. A strong emphasis on text and sentence level work makes a strong contribution to rising standards. A common approach to introducing and reinforcing the use of number into many subjects contributes to pupils' high standards in numeracy.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. There is a very good range of vocational options in Years 10 and 11, which feed into sixth form work, and a very good range of technological subjects within Years 10 and 11. The most able pupils may be better served by other courses than GCSE. There is scope to review opportunities for physical education and sport now that the sports centre is open.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. The relatively small numbers of pupils are very well served both in a 'base' and within classes and their progress is very well monitored. Pupils do well in GCSE and vocational courses.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Pupils become very responsible young citizens and adults. They carry their excellent attitudes and behaviour outside the school and this is recognised by local shopkeepers and places of work experience. They work extremely well together and well appreciate the ideas and beliefs of others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. The level of pastoral care, linked to academic monitoring is exemplary. This is matched by the very high levels of personal care and commitment to the well being of the individual and the community.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. Standards across all fronts have risen due to the excellent processes in place to monitor, evaluate and support teaching and learning and wider management issues. This is coupled with outstanding leadership, widely recognised in the wider social and educational community, committed to making things work better.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors enable the school to do its job and ensure money and other resources are correctly and wisely spent. All statutory duties are met. More governors might consider involving themselves with particular subject areas.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. Analysis of and debate about national test and examination results and how they might be improved through curriculum change and reviews of teaching and learning styles is exemplary. The school also reflects on and refines its own practices through sharing expertise.
The strategic use of resources	Money, staff and other resources are very well deployed to assist standards to rise. Best value questions are used to determine whether the right curriculum is offered and what options there might be.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High expectations of standards of work and effort</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed</li> <li>• The teaching is good and children make good progress</li> <li>• Behaviour is good</li> <li>• The school is helping children become mature and responsible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small proportion tends to think their children do not like school</li> <li>• Homework provision</li> <li>• Information about pupils' progress</li> <li>• A few think the school drives pupils too hard</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees with the positive comments. No child admitted to not liking school during the inspection, indeed most were enthusiastic. Standards of work and behaviour are high and some pupils may find this challenging, though the support for those who genuinely struggle is very good. Homework is substantial and, coupled with 10 week testing, significant work outside school is needed. This does help GCSE standards to be driven above and beyond what might be expected. High academic and behavioural standards come at a price but, as most Year 11 pupils stay on into the sixth form, they appear to accept this as a price worth paying. Information about pupils' progress is better than in most schools.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form is much larger than average with 293 students; the proportion of females to males is about 3:2. Almost all students were pupils in the school when in Year 11. Their attainment on entry to the sixth form is above average overall. The high number of students with very high GCSE results gives an exaggerated picture of what standards they might achieve; A\*-B grades at GCSE do not necessarily equate to high grades at A-level. A very good range of vocational courses is offered alongside A-level. These are in the main AVCE courses, which have not been as accessible to students as earlier GNVQs and BTEC courses; academic demands and workloads appear sometimes too high for them. The retention of students to courses and within the sixth form as a whole is very high; very few leave before their studies are completed. AS examination scores are not 'cashed in' until the very last moment. The sixth form has expanded over the years and is about at capacity. The new City Learning Centre, integrated with the school, is providing exciting opportunities for the development of ICT, including internationally recognised technical courses.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form is very good overall and has excellent features. It is very cost effective. Standards of work are, overall, well above average. Teaching and learning are very good overall; a high proportion of lessons are excellent. Leadership and management are excellent. The achievement of students, from when they began at school in Year 7, is very good. Very high post-16 examination standards most often reflect pupils' high standards at GCSE. Students have excellent attitudes to work, develop extremely well as people and enjoy excellent relationships with each other and with teachers. Over recent years the sixth form has maintained high standards and improvements in provision, which have been brought about through an evolving curriculum and better accommodation and resources. The sixth form meets the aspirations of students well, which is why so many pupils join it from Year 11. Students like the high quality teaching and the high levels of support they get. The national vocational curriculum is not currently meeting the academic needs of all students in this school. The school recognises this and is looking to change provision; modern apprenticeships and significant work related courses are being developed.

**Strengths**

The strengths in the sixth form are the same as those in the main school. In addition:

- There is excellent guidance for careers and higher education that follows through from the guidance offered to pupils in Year 11; those who want jobs are helped to get them
- The opportunities for independent study and supported self-study are more expansive, for example, through the opportunities to pursue a course in ICT which is not fully taught.

**What could be improved**

The review of the style and range of vocational courses offered needs to continue apace so that potential students can quickly benefit from national changes and new opportunities.

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

## THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Very good.</b> Students are achieving well as a result of very good teaching. They enjoy their mathematics and achieve standards well above the national average.
Biology	<b>Very good.</b> Students' well above average attainment results from very good teaching complemented by excellent relationships between students and teachers and very effective management.
Chemistry	<b>Excellent.</b> Students' very high attainment results from very good teaching complemented by excellent relationships between students and teachers and very effective management.
Business studies	<b>Very good.</b> Very good teaching supports very good achievement and above average standards.
ICT	<b>Very good.</b> Students achieve well from relatively low prior knowledge, skills and understanding relating to ICT. Teaching is very good and learning is very well supported by resources for independent study.
Health and social care	<b>Very good.</b> Very good teaching enables relatively lower ability students to achieve very well and obtain a nationally recognised qualification.
Art and design	<b>Very good.</b> Teaching is very good and supports a range of student achievement from good to excellent.
History	<b>Good.</b> Good teaching sustains good achievement that is supported by commendable student' attitudes to work.
Geography	<b>Excellent.</b> Very high standards due to very good teaching and learning which sustains pupils' high levels of achievement from GCSE.
English	<b>Excellent.</b> Very good quality teaching and learning support systems coupled with students' high level of application to their work, contribute to sustaining a high level of attainment.
French	<b>Very good.</b> Well above average standards due to sustained very good student achievement and very good teaching.

Two lessons of AVCE science were also seen. Standards were average, students' attitudes very good and teaching and learning very good. The increased popularity of this course has led to larger classes, which makes it harder to deal with a wide ability range and harder to find students appropriate work placements.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are provided with very good care and support. Careers guidance is of a high quality. The same tutors work with students throughout their time in the sixth form; academic progress and personal development are very carefully monitored and recorded and much guidance on how to improve is given. Additional pastoral support is provided through the chaplain.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are excellent at school and sixth form level. High standards of work are promoted through attention to detail; students' academic progress is linked to teaching and learning and steps put in place to improve both where necessary. The effects of curriculum provision are closely monitored and changes introduced, to benefit students, as quickly as possible. Beneficial links with universities and industry are exploited to the full. Both students and teachers are driven hard but they obviously thrive on it.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice of courses and information about them</li> <li>• The quality of teaching and opportunities for independent study.</li> <li>• Assessment and marking</li> <li>• Activities available outside lessons</li> <li>• They enjoy being in the sixth form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice and support</li> <li>• Information about progress</li> <li>• Their treatment as young adults</li> </ul>

The points for improvement above were registered by small but significant numbers of students who answered the questionnaire. When these points were discussed with students there was little support for them. Inspection shows that the level of advice and support and the regular information about progress are about as good as they get. The sixth form is more monitored and controlled than many, though very few students indicated they did not enjoy being in it and almost all appear to be prepared to give up the perceived greater freedoms of a college for the 'guaranteed' high standards in the school. There is scope for more development of the sixth form forum so that students can contribute better to decisions related to them.

## 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**

#### **Frequent and regular assessment and monitoring of pupils' work so that they know how well they are doing.**

1. Procedures for monitoring and assessing students are very good. Every ten weeks, right through the school, pupils are assessed by test. They have to revise for these and departments organise tests around modules of work so that they are focussed. Pupils review their results with teachers and new work may be modified to deal with any weaknesses. Parents are kept informed of results through interim reports and are able to help their children with new targets for improvement.

#### **Intensive mentoring and support of pupils so they are helped to do better**

2. The pastoral team has developed impressive systems for monitoring and supporting pupils. Based on the successful school house system, they involve frequent target setting and reviews. Pupils' academic progress, together with personal development and attendance, are carefully recorded. Pupils, tutors, teachers and heads of house are all closely involved in this process. Pupils review their progress with their tutor and then set their own targets for the following module; they have a thorough knowledge of what they have done well and what they must do to improve. A system of pastoral mentors achieves a close bond between academic and pastoral support. Each house is allocated a pastoral mentor who is available to provide additional support when required. This may take the form of providing a study support club, creating small working groups, or the pastoral or learning mentor giving advice. Parents are kept well informed and receive a copy of the pupils' review sheet; pupils are encouraged to discuss this with their parents. This intensive system enables tutors and staff to detect problems quickly and to provide specialist help to pupils, so that any issues are resolved before they become an obstacle to learning. The success of the system depends on frequency of testing, quick and accurate analysis of results and very good relationships between pupils and their teachers. All staff work extremely hard in order to ensure that the ten-week cycle runs smoothly. Because pupils receive such high quality support, they are able to make the best possible progress.

#### **Exemplary developments in teaching so that it gets better, enabling pupils to learn more effectively and standards to rise.**

3. "The development of high quality teaching and learning will be central to the work of the school," (school handbook). Senior managers and heads of department have worked together to create innovative ways of making teaching and learning better. They are moving towards a coaching model of staff development, where expert teachers guide others in the process of self-improvement. The process started several years ago with work related to literacy. The school researched work going on in other institutions and talked to heads of department about their needs. One of the main thrusts of development in teaching and learning are 'Teaching Methods Groups', where a group of teachers will meet to discuss an aspect of teaching and learning. This regularly running activity was originally based on work within 'Closing the Learning Gap' by Mike Hughes, and the activity has been completed by three-quarters of teachers within the school. Groups have also been run about many other aspects of teaching and learning including: 'Thinking Skills', 'Mind Mapping', specific skills in the sixth form, and classroom management. Most teachers have been trained in lesson observation in which groups of three teachers undergo peer observation; in these groups one teaches, one observes and the other acts as the buffer between the two. A recent innovation is the use of a video camera in lesson observation, allowing the group to analyse lessons in



detail, good lesson features to be identified and weaker ones to be eliminated. Three teaching and learning co-ordinators have been appointed to work with teachers to ensure best practice is identified and communicated to others. The school, in a teaching and learning handbook, publishes good practice; this is updated every year and completely reviewed every three years. Developing new lesson plans and approaches to teaching takes time and heads of department have been given an extra double lesson each week to manage the work. Each department has to have at least one new development each year focused on teaching and learning. New schemes of work are monitored by peer review; other teachers look at them to see if they will do what is intended well. Newly qualified teachers, who have not been exposed to this work in the school, are surprised at the level of debate about teaching and learning in department meetings. The school is now working with external practitioners to develop coaching (the raising of teaching standards through the acquisition of specific skills from an expert).

**The exceptionally high quality of leadership and management, which foster a drive for improvement amongst staff and provide the structures by which they can succeed.**

4. The Thomas More School Management Handbook and associated documents is a definitive guide in how to run an effective school. Although sections are similar to those in used in other schools, this is a high quality document with excellent clarity and detail. It not only gives procedures to be followed but how these will lead to high academic and social standards. Teachers and managers have strategies for planning and instructions on what to do laid out for them; monitoring of these processes is also specified. No document, however, gets the job done, people do. What makes leadership and management excellent is that all involved do their jobs willingly, and achieve what is expected of them. Senior managers have “created a culture that: recognises the supreme importance of the staff in the success of the school; motivates the staff to contribute as much as they are capable of in pursuit of the school’s aims; and enables the staff to apply their talents successfully, in pursuit of the school’s aims.” (Taken and amended from the School Handbook).

**The school’s capacity to share its expertise with others to help them develop and in turn reflect upon and refine its own practices**

5. This school helps other schools get better. It does this through a variety of mechanisms. It is a Beacon School; this means it enables collaboration between a number of local secondary and primary schools and facilitates the sharing of good practice between them. The new City Learning Centre, built onto the school, provides outstanding ICT facilities used by other schools and, indeed business organisations. School expertise is sometimes used alongside these resources to help others. This school is also helping a neighbouring school to recover from significant difficulties. The most significant support is through the headteacher, he is the acting headteacher of the other school too. His outstanding reputation began the process of turning the other school round. The use of other St Thomas More managers and management tools is substantial and makes an excellent impact on hastening the process. Through these three areas of sharing expertise this school also gains; each link adds to the experiences of staff and helps them reflect on what they do. They can adapt their practices having seen them from another angle. Other schools and this school are better for it.

## **WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO DO IN ORDER TO IMPROVE**

There are no significant issues in the main school.

### **Sixth form**

In their action plan the governors and school should:

- (1) Continue their review of the range of vocational courses offered to students so that students can quickly benefit from new opportunities arising from changes to national provision and take advantage of local opportunities, such as the school's strong links with the Health Service and engineering companies.  
(Paragraphs: 21, 37, 41)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	51
	Sixth form	47
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		28

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	7	27	11	6	0	0	0
Percentage	14	53	22	12	0	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	10	20	16	1	0	0	0
Percentage	21	43	34	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 for Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1 143	293
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	113	N/a

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	17	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	114	3

<b>English as an additional language</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1	0

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	41

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.7
National comparative data	7.8

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	103	128	231

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	83	84	93
	Girls	119	106	116
	Total	202	190	209
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87(83)	82(86)	90(90)
	National	66(64)	67(66)	66(66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	61(59)	70(67)	67(69)
	National	32(31)	45(43)	33(34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	84	83	96
	Girls	118	108	119
	Total	202	191	215
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87(82)	83(92)	93(90)
	National	67(65)	70(68)	67(64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	63(53)	72(69)	74(71)
	National	32(31)	44(42)	34(33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	83	109	192

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	66	79	84
	Girls	103	108	108
	Total	169	187	192
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	88(90)	97(99)	100(100)
	National	50(48)	91(91)	96(96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	55.8 (57.1)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	59 89.8
	National	N/A

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates			
	Average point score per candidate	( )	( )	( )
National	Average point score per candidate	* ( )	* ( )	* ( )

		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						
	Average point score per candidate						
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

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

\* National comparison data for AS / A Level results in 2002 are not yet available

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	12	100
	National		85

**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	1424	2	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	5	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

## Teachers and classes

### Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	89.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.1

### Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	453

### Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.2
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### Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.9
Key Stage 4	22.1

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	3 850 368
Total expenditure	3 900 628
Expenditure per pupil	2 834
Balance brought forward from previous year	305 602
Balance carried forward to next year	255 342

## Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	22.6

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

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*



## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	800
Number of questionnaires returned	400

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	54	10	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	51	43	3	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	54	40	3	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	62	14	1	1
The teaching is good.	58	39	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	51	12	2	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	44	6	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	78	21	1	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	69	30	1	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	49	4	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	27	47	8	0	17

### Other issues raised by parents

Parents at the meeting were almost unanimous in their enthusiasm for the school and the level of support it offers. A few at the meeting expressed concern about ICT. The inspection found that, whatever earlier provision was like, the ICT curriculum is now moving on apace. Other concerns were raised about design and technology. Standards were found to be appropriate; the school is aware of the need to develop post 16 courses. Parents appreciated the interim reports about their children's progress given to them every 10 weeks. They felt homework is well integrated with classwork but is sometimes too much. Parents felt the 'moral fibre' of the school fed through to outside – very good behaviour in the school is maintained in the town. A very few parents question strict discipline in the school and/or the GCSE 'hot house' but the vast majority of parents approve of the outcomes. Parents also thought the school, and pupils, dealt very well with sensitive issues, such as bereavement.

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

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

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

6. There is no national analysis for 2002 post 16 examinations yet available. The analysis for 2001 examinations is very favourable. The average points scores attained by both male and female students taking AS or A-level examinations were well above average. If advanced vocational qualifications are included in the analysis, then the average points students attained was still well above average. The school's results were also well above average when compared to all providers of sixth form education: schools, further education colleges, sixth form colleges and independent schools. The average points score attained depend on the number of post 16 examinations students take; three A-levels or equivalents is typical. This school does not add a fourth examination by offering a general studies course to boost individual pupil's point scores. Consequently all points are earned through the principal courses of study. The average points, per subject earned, are very high due to the high proportion of A and B grades.

7. In 2001, of the 14 courses entering sufficient students for statistical analysis of results, three, chemistry A-level, geography A-level, and art and design VQ, rated an A\* grade. These results were very high in comparison to results in other schools and were amongst the top five per cent of national results. A further eight A-level courses, biology, business studies, English literature, English language, design and technology, mathematics, physics, and religious studies, rated an A grade; results were well above average compared to all schools. History A-level results were average, and the results of a small number of students taking A-level art and design were, overall, well below average. One of the few AS levels available for analysis was mathematics; a C rating, average, is given for this. However, this is misleading, as students pursuing an A-level in the subject do not reveal their AS level results until the last moment. Most AS level candidates took mathematics further, only a few 'cashed in' results. These students were dropping mathematics as their 'fourth' course; hence the C was given to the results of relatively weaker mathematics candidates.

8. Examination results in 2002 were similar to those in 2001 and there is no reason to think national comparisons are less than the A grade given in 2001. Forty seven per cent of A-level results were grades A and B, against a national figure of typically 36 per cent. Biology, chemistry, English language, further mathematics, mathematics, and physics were particularly strong. Fewer AS results are available for analysis, for the reason explained above, but of 54 entries, 39 per cent were A or B grades, 67 per cent were A-C, and only two entries, 4 per cent, were unclassified. Vocational A-level results were less successful; of 72 entries, 11 per cent were A or B. This rises to 17 per cent if the high number taking vocational ICT is removed; this course had a high proportion of D grades.

9. The attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is typically high according to their GCSE grades and points scores. This is because this school is very successful at enabling pupils to do very well at GCSE, even many of those with modest results in earlier national tests. It is accepted by the school that there is a degree of 'over-achievement' at GCSE, which has to be taken into account when minimum entry requirements for post -16 courses, are drawn up. Neither are the most able the only pupils who enter the sixth form; typically 85 per cent of all Year 11 pupils do so. From starting the school in Year 7 to leaving it in Year 13 the overall achievement of students is very good. From Year 11, students who attain very highly at GCSE tend to sustain those high standards at A-level but some do not. The school is well aware of those students who might be challenged post 16, despite significant success at GCSE, and mentor them towards appropriate courses. Unfortunately, the group of courses

in which these students did succeed in previous years was nationally replaced by AVCEs. Some students have not been as successful in these. As a result the school has thoroughly investigated new courses emerging onto 'the market' and is looking to make a different offer in the near future.

10. Standards of work in the sixth form, compared to national standards, based on the 11 subject areas inspected, range from very high in chemistry to average in ICT and in health and social care. Standards in English, French, mathematics, biology, and geography are well above average. Standards in history, art and design, and business education are above average. At this stage in their courses, students are broadly achieving at least well. They are achieving very well in English, French, geography, business education, and health and social care. Achievement is satisfactory in biology, though this picture is more complicated than in the other sciences as there is a broader range of attainment when students start. If the number of students taking each course is taken into account then standards in the sixth form are well above average overall and students' achievement is currently on the cusp of good / very good.

11. The great majority of students are very well able to research, read, make notes, produce cogent essays, use mathematical data, draw graphs and charts, and make effective use of ICT. They are very capable in all key skills due to thorough and intensive teaching and learning before they begin their sixth form course and continue to develop these further whilst in the sixth form.

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

12. Students' attitudes to their school are very impressive. They talk with enthusiasm about what they are doing and take genuine pleasure in showing visitors round. The majority of students say that they like school. Attendance rates, which are well above the national average, would seem to bear this out. All pupils wear their uniform with pride. Students treat their school with respect. Students enjoy the privileges of being in the sixth form. They make good use of their new common room and seating area in the dining room. Students maintain their excellent behaviour when visiting the local shops during their lunch break.

13. In lessons, students listen quietly, are confident to answer and ask questions and are not afraid to make a mistake. They display excellent levels of concentration and are bright and lively in discussions. Students learn to work both individually and in groups. On these occasions social interaction and collaborative skills develop well, for example, in a Year 12 health and social care lesson where groups of students were working on producing a 'role play' presentation about communication. Students expressed their views with confidence and responded very well to challenging scenarios. The standard of 'role play' was very high. The others listened attentively and gave good feedback afterwards.

14. Students follow a religious education programme throughout their time in the sixth form. This covers a wide range of topics including the beliefs and faiths of others. As a result, students are growing in their awareness of wider issues in the world. The uptake of a broad range of extra curricular activities is also very good and balances students' academic work.

15. By the time they leave school, students show high levels of initiative and responsibility. This prepares them well for adult life. When given the opportunity, they take on responsibilities willingly and carry them out with enthusiasm. Examples are acting as Head Boy and Head Girl, prefects and house captains. The part they play in supervising, for example, movement between lessons and break times has a positive impact on maintaining an orderly school community. The sixth form forum gives students some opportunities to make tangible changes to their school. Recently the forum has been responsible for making

decisions about decoration and furnishing of the new sixth form common room. As students progress through the sixth form, they take increasing responsibility for their own learning. They show a high level of independence and willingness to undertake additional work; for example reading widely round units of work in English. They keep their own diaries and make good use of the library and ICT resources. Some students are taking an ICT course which requires them to learn much themselves, with on line support. Student academic diaries are extremely well used and provide a very good opportunity for students to develop organisational skills.

16. Relationships between each other and between students and staff are excellent and so the school functions as a supportive and extremely orderly community. Teaching is based on excellent relationships, mutual respect and support. Because of excellent relationships, students are willing to convey any concerns to a member of staff so problems can be resolved.

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

17. Most subjects were inspected and, if a subject has several courses, for example art and design, all courses were seen. Forty-six lessons were seen for a significant period of time and a few more were visited. No lessons were unsatisfactory, two-thirds were very good or excellent, and the rest good. This is an outstanding lesson profile, which is mirrored in the rest of the school and due to both individual teachers' hard work and the very effective teaching developments that the school has fostered. The lesson profile is a significant part of the evidence base related to teaching.

18. Teaching and learning are judged against a set of criteria. Judgements are given in the range excellent to very poor. No subject was placed in any criterion at less than *good*. Most criteria were met as *very good*. A high proportion of teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which gives them an edge on making the work interesting, and challenging to students who receive up to the minute knowledge. A high proportion of teachers also manage students in an excellent fashion. This is not at the level of behavioural management; these students do not need that. Teachers manage learning so that students are able to work independently when appropriate and as pairs or groups when that is better. Students respond to this 'management' by being very productive; they work hard and acquire a lot of knowledge, skills and understanding in the process. Teachers' assessment of work is very thorough and done in partnership with students so that students know exactly how well they are doing and what they need to do to get better. Intensive mentoring and support follows them through the sixth form. Students are provided with appropriate resources to effectively learn in class or out of lessons. Increasingly this is through ICT; teachers and students are becoming adept at using new technology well. Interactive whiteboards are a feature in some rooms. In others, learning is sometimes hindered, as resources are not to hand, for example in health and social care. Very new resources, in the city-learning centre, are supporting vocational ICT courses well, as teachers are expert in their use.

19. Key skills, such as the use of words and numbers, working with others, and the use of ICT are taught within subjects and within the core work done by all students. They are effectively taught and students have high standards in such skills, though the use of number is not as well reinforced as other skills - unless a student is taking a number rich subject, like physics.

20. Exemplars of very good teaching are given in the subject report sections.

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

21. The sixth form curriculum is well conceived and aims to meet the learning needs of all students, whatever their background and aspirations. The philosophy is embedded in the provision of a wide range of courses, with suitable routes for their accreditation. Provision to support the academic and personal development of all students, including those who have special educational needs is very good. The school has made every effort to meet students' needs within a diverse, yet highly cost effective, curriculum. The curriculum is constantly under review and subject to regular detailed challenges. For example, managers are aware that the AVCE course structure and corresponding accreditation criteria are not entirely suitable for many students wishing to follow a vocational education route. Therefore consideration is being given to replacing AVCE courses with the new OCR nationals. The quality of the management of the curriculum by the head of sixth form, supported by senior managers, is impressive.

22. Courses are offered at GCE AS-Level and A-Level and also AVCE. The sixth form prospectus identifies 18 advanced level courses and six advanced vocational education courses. In addition a very effective 'core studies' course is offered which supports academic work in the sixth form. 'Core studies' is designed to broaden students' range of experiences by addressing their spiritual, moral, physical and social needs through a programme that includes religious education, leisure activities, community involvement, and computer skills (accredited through CLAIT – Computer Literacy and Information Technology). No accredited courses are available in physical education despite the fact that GCSE examination results are above the national average and student interest in sport is high.

23. Key skills (literacy and numeracy for example) are integrated into schemes of work in all subjects. Students who did not achieve a Grade C at GCSE in English and mathematics are encouraged to follow a separate Key Skills course. The quality of provision for numeracy is not as effective and influential in raising students' abilities in basic skills, as is the provision for literacy and for ICT.

24. There are opportunities to work in local industry, business and services. Students on AVCE courses benefit from four or five weeks of work experience and A-Level students are encouraged to organise some relevant work experience themselves. Students have access to an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, educational visits, fieldwork and opportunities to travel overseas. The Duke of Edinburgh Award, outward-bound courses, and entry into public speaking contests are also available.

25. Students are given very effective careers advice. There is excellent guidance on opportunities for progress into further and higher education as well as into employment or training. In 2002, seventy-four per cent of students transferred into higher education, four per cent further education, and 22 per cent entered into training and employment. Strong links exist with partnership institutions that support academic work and foster students' entry into higher education, for example work with Newcastle, Durham, and Northumbria universities. Industrial links have been developed with Vickers, MGM Ltd, Newburn, AGIE, and Newcastle Tool and Gauge Ltd. Such links are creating opportunities to pursue modern apprenticeships. Links have also been forged between vocational health and social care courses in school and local health care institutions such as the NHS Alliance, local hospitals, care homes and Age Concern. From September 2003, students will be tutoring health service staff in ICT skills.

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

## **Assessment**

26. Procedures for monitoring and assessing students are very good. The underlying strength of assessment is in the structure and organisation of it. Around every ten weeks students are assessed; where possible departments try to match this to the end of sections or units of work. Making use of the results, students and teachers review the work that has been completed and set targets for the forthcoming work. This process is very effective, as teachers, both academic and pastoral, know their students very well. These targets are shared with parents, and the three way process, student, teacher and parent enables students to set realistic and achievable targets. This process is repeated, and occurs three times in the year, leading up to full and detailed reports to parents. The same provision is made in the 11-16 school and this is described in the section of the report 'What the school does well'.

27. In all subjects, teachers make very good use of mark schemes and examination board syllabuses to ensure that students meet requirements laid down for their subject. In science, very good assessment means that students know exactly how well they are doing, and what they need to do to improve. In mathematics, units of work are tested and marked to exam standards and grades. Clear targets are set in ICT, particularly in tutorial time allocated for students taking the AVCE six-unit course. The procedures in English for modular assessments are very good, with ongoing assessment making good use of timed essays and target setting.

## **Advice, support and guidance**

28. Students are provided with very good care and support. This high level of support, guidance and encouragement the school gives its students has a very positive effect upon their progress. Most students are confident that they can rely on strong and sensitive support and guidance from the school when personal problems arise. In the words of one, "tutors and staff are very helpful and supportive – you know who to go to if you have a problem".

29. The director and assistant director of sixth form provide dedicated, enthusiastic and supportive leadership to the impressive systems for monitoring pupils, progress and personal development. These enable effective diagnosis of student's learning needs and result in very high quality educational and personal support. Students' academic progress, together with personal development and attendance, are carefully and regularly recorded. Students, tutors, teachers, heads of house and the director of sixth form are all closely involved in this process.

30. Induction procedures are well thought out and result in a smooth transition from Year 11 to Year 12. Whilst the majority of pupils continue their studies in this school a small number transfer from other schools. These pupils are included in the induction process that starts in July. They "find the school very welcoming" and say, "It has been very easy to settle". The school, from the outset, acknowledges the importance of choosing the correct subjects to follow. Much guidance is given to students and their parents, based on GCSE results, career aspirations, and a thorough knowledge of the abilities and nature of most potential students.

31. Tutors work with the same students throughout their time in the sixth form. This enables them to know their students well, and be very sensitive to their differing needs. The chaplain is always available to offer very good guidance for those students who require additional pastoral support.

32. Careers guidance is of a high quality. In Year 12, all students have a meeting with the careers advisor and follow up meetings can be arranged if required. The 'Centigrade' programme is available to help those students who are unclear about what they want to do. The 'Connexions' service provides very good advice, both on higher, further and vocational courses. Pupils have access to a wide range of careers literature and software in the library. Excellent help is given to those few students whose results fall short of expectations enabling them to gain university placements through the clearing process.

33. The school makes every effort to ensure that students work in a clean and safe environment. Health and safety procedures, together with systems for the administration of first aid and child protection, are implemented well and recorded meticulously.

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

34. Sixth form students are very supportive of their school. This is reflected in the numbers who stay on after GCSE, their active involvement in school life and excellent attitudes to work. Those who have joined the sixth form from other schools are pleased to be here and many students say "it is better than college". The results of the students' questionnaire were mostly very positive. Some students though felt that they did not receive enough advice and support, get sufficient information about their own progress and that they were not treated as responsible young adults. However when discussing these findings students were surprised at the results and did not support these negative views.

35. Parents continue to support to the school's values and standards. They are particularly pleased with leadership and management and the high standard of teaching in the school; students are expected to behave well and work hard. This is reflected in parental encouragement for students to continue their studies in the sixth form. There is a significant minority of parents who feel that they are not kept sufficiently informed of their child's progress. Inspection findings do not confirm this. Evidence shows that the information parents receive is detailed, regular and informative. As part of the ten week target setting and review system, parents receive copies of review sheets and are encouraged to discuss these with their child. Staff are available and willing to talk about any concerns parents may have.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SIXTH FORM LED AND MANAGED?**

### ***Leadership and management***

36. Leadership and management of the sixth form are directed through the school's senior managers and the director and assistant director of sixth form. The rationale for the sixth form – the vision for its ongoing development – and the strategic management of it to ensure academic standards are maintained at a very high level and students do as best as they can, are excellent. The sixth form is not divorced from the main school; it is an extension of it. The same very high standard of care and attention to detail, evident in the main school, continues into the sixth form. The headteacher recognises that students are older and need more responsibility. New dining facilities have enabled a new sixth form common room and a separate area for them to eat. The student forum gives some opportunity for them to voice

opinions. There is scope for further development of avenues for student participation in decisions that affect them.

37. High academic standards have been maintained for some years and various types of vocational courses have been adopted as national provision has changed. Earlier courses were more successful than present ones and the school challenges curriculum provision constantly; it is always seeking to improve provision so courses best fit student aptitudes. Recent developments related to engineering and modern apprenticeships, and links with the National Health Service, enabling students to enter work or make educational links, are two cutting edge developments.

38. Governors work very well with the school and the chair is particularly knowledgeable about sixth form developments. Governors particularly value the continuity; pupils become students and their excellent attitudes influence pupils. As in the main school, more links between governors and aspects of school work may be beneficial.

39. The rigorous pattern of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, which exists in the main school, follows through to the sixth form and is linked to teachers' performance management very well indeed. Underpinning this, are the extensive staff development and coaching opportunities, which exist throughout the school. Weak teaching has been eliminated and the school is in the process of providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to make most teaching very good. Results in subjects are thoroughly analysed. They are compared with students' performance elsewhere within the school. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance is very good.

40. The school improvement plan sets out targets for improvement that are clear for all staff. A logical series of steps is set out in a calendar and are very impressive in their attention to detail. Individual teachers, subject heads, and senior managers all have their roles to play and the questions asked of themselves, or of groups, are focussed on teaching and learning and their effect on student achievement and standards.

41. Money received for the sixth form is very well used. The sixth form is very cost effective; money provided for the sixth form is all spent on students. Some courses operate with small numbers, five or six, but not lower, whilst others have numbers of around twenty. Teachers manage to cope with such numbers at present and part of staff development is to share sixth form teaching, so several teachers might take a course through. Students like this, as they get a greater breadth of views and expertise than otherwise. Some vocational courses, like science, are growing beyond the point where it is easy to find work experience placements. A feature of the high level of equal opportunities fostered by the school is how much curriculum provision is challenged and how new learning pathways, such as NVQ, are approached. All in the school want students to follow the post 16 route best for them and, if appropriate, for the local economy.

### **Resources**

42. Staffing is very good. There are sufficient and qualified staff both in teaching and non-teaching areas and the school has also invested in support for teaching. Staff are engaged specifically for mentoring and for supervising examinations, so that teachers have adequate time for preparation and administration. There is also a supporting infrastructure of skilled administrative staff to underpin the smooth running of this successful school. Resources and accommodation are good overall; very good in English and Art and design. In health and social care role-play work is inhibited by the smallness of the teaching areas available.



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

In the inspection, 11 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 2002.

**GCE A level and AVCE**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	26	100	*	57	*	7.7	*
Further Mathematics	9	100	*	67	*	8.4	*
Chemistry	18	100	*	63	*	7.8	*
Biology	26	100	*	44	*	6.2	*
Physics	19	100	*	47	*	7.4	*
Science AVCE	12	100	*	8	*	5.2	*
Business studies	24	100	*	28	*	6.2	*
Business Studies AVCE	12	75	*	0	*	3.0	*
ICT AVCE	43	95	*	7	*	3.6	*
Health and Social Care AVCE	1	100	*	0	*	4.0	*
Art and Design	5	100	*	40	*	6.5	*
Art and Design AVCE	4	100	*	100	*	8.5	*
Music	2	100	*	0	*	6.0	*
Geography	6	100	*	50	*	7.7	*
History	8	100	*	50	*	6.5	*
Christian Theology	12	100	*	36	*	6.7	*
English Language	17	100	*	72	*	8.2	*
English Literature	24	100	*	35	*	6.4	*
French	9	100	*	22	*	5.8	*
German	3	100	*	50	*	6.7	*

\* National comparison data for AS / A Level results in 2002 are not yet available

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection is mathematics, chemistry and biology. Physics is also popular and very successful but was not seen. Two lessons of AVCE science were seen. Standards were appropriate and students are keen.

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- The department is very well staffed and led.
- Teaching is very good.
- Students enjoy mathematics and think very highly of their teachers.
- Students are very well informed about their progress and how well they are doing.

##### Areas for improvement

- Some students are not rigorous enough when marking and correcting their work.

43. Students receive a well balanced diet of mathematics. In Year 12 all study pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. In Year 13 they can focus more on either mechanics or statistics with the additional offer of decision and discreet mathematics if they wish for it. More able mathematicians take the full GCE A2 examination after one year and further mathematics in Year 13. The report refers to all mathematics.

44. Results in 2002 for GCE A2 level are similar to those in previous years, which have been well above the national average. Only the results of students who discontinue their mathematical studies are published for AS level; these students are likely to be relatively weaker mathematicians. Hence results appear to be in line with national averages but are actually better than that.

45. Standards of work are well above average. Students' achievement overall, in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form, is good because almost all maintain the high levels of performance evident in their results at GCSE and earlier in the school. High standards are achieved because teaching is very good and students know what they have to do in order to be successful. Students think extremely highly of their teachers and enjoy mathematics.

46. Excellent student attitudes and behaviour make a strong contribution to students achieving so well. The students feel very well supported by their teachers. They feel free to approach them when they are in difficulties. Relationships in the classroom foster an atmosphere in which discussion is welcomed, and ideas can be freely shared with no fear of being made to feel foolish if a mistake is made. This reflects an improvement on the last inspection when discussion work was viewed as weak.

47. Students in Year 13, studying statistics, produce interesting coursework showing very good descriptive and analytical qualities. Correlation and hypothesis testing are very well used. Those who have chosen to study mechanics for further mathematics can apply the principle of moments and find the centre of gravity of a hemispherical bowl. Most Year 12 students sketch graphs of a range of algebraic functions well and are coming to terms with using the calculus. Higher attaining students, in particular, begin to show a very good grasp of trigonometrical identities and of the use of radian measure in geometry.

48. Teaching and learning are very good. Students gain a very good grounding in their advanced studies of mathematics because lessons are very well prepared and taught by enthusiastic teachers with excellent subject knowledge. Teachers make the students think. In a very good lesson on arithmetic series, for example, the teacher enabled Year 12 students to work out for themselves how to find the sum to  $n$  terms by using challenging questions and examples. In an excellent lesson on solids of revolution, Year 13 students were made to think hard about how to avoid complicated integration techniques by choosing the better axis for the revolution.

49. Tests and examinations are very thoroughly marked to GCE standards by teachers. Students are expected to mark their own work from day-to-day with excellent fully worked model solutions available to them on most courses. Students speak very highly of these arrangements. They are clearly most helpful in ensuring that they are each aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. Teachers also retest and if necessary teach again any elements of courses that are generally not well understood. Students keep very useful records showing exactly which parts of the courses they have followed and whether or not they have understood the work. For most, these arrangements are extremely effective. A minority of students is not, however, taking full advantage. These few do not correct and annotate wrong work as rigorously as they ought.

50. An able mathematician leads the well-qualified and very competent team of teachers very well. Major issues are dealt with as a team so that the department has coherence and morale is high. Very good leadership and organisation is further demonstrated by the way in which three new members to the profession have been inducted over the last four years. These teachers now make a major contribution including involvement in the cyclical arrangement for teaching at AS and A2 level year on year.

51. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards remain well above national averages and progress remains good. Numbers opting to study mathematics have risen. Overall the position is a very strong one that is set to improve further.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Standards in examinations and in work seen are very high. Very good, focused teaching, clear expectations and meticulous assessment, results in very effective learning that sustains students' very high levels of attainment when they began the sixth form course.
- Students' very high attainment reflects their deep understanding derived from very good practical experience and grasp of theoretical knowledge.
- Teachers' expertise in the subject, high expectations and very well taught lessons result in effective learning.
- Advantage is taken of excellent student-teacher relationships to foster a desire to learn, and high levels of participation and endeavour.

### Areas for improvement

- Arrangements to coordinate extension work for exceptionally high attaining students rely on approaches by individuals and informal contacts rather than emerging from a formalised, scheduled programme of guidance and support by subject teachers.

52. Standards in GCE advanced level in 2001 were very high compared to the national average with three quarters gaining A or B grades. There is no information about national averages available for 2002 but results are not dissimilar to 2001. In 1999, most students

started the course in Year 12 with A\* grades in GCSE science and others with grade A. Over two thirds gained grade A in the 2002 A level examination, which is a significant level of achievement. A minority, particularly girls, achieved results at grade C, which is not quite as high as their prior attainment would suggest they should.

53. Standards of coursework and in lessons are well above average and some are very high. By Year 13, higher attaining students give lucid explanations of phenomena, helpfully illustrated with diagrams, representative models and graphs, and often relate them to practical findings. Their notebooks reflect excellent research and competent laboratory skills. A small minority of students, however, fail to provide the precision and depth of treatment needed for the highest attainment at A-level. For example, misuse of terms, or inconsistency and inaccuracy in practical work in Year 12, and in Year 13, the omission of essential detail from reports and explanations.

54. Teaching quality in both Years 12 and 13 is very good overall. Teachers' expert knowledge is effectively used to realise the purpose of the lesson. The best lessons are characterised by outstandingly clear exposition, well chosen and presented demonstrations, considerate support and good use of questioning to consolidate learning. Homework is used well to give further reinforcement. Of particular note is the way excellent student-teacher relationships are fostered and exploited so that students' show a marked desire to learn, become fully involved in lessons and contribute both questions and answers. For example, in a Year 13 lesson about acids, bases and buffers, a combination of practical demonstration and clear presentation successfully engaged students in understanding the rationale of the pH scale. Similarly, Year 12 students studying catalysis in ammonia production were encouraged through a very appropriate piece of drama that modelled the process to relate prior knowledge in explaining steps in the reaction. This is collaborative learning between teacher and students of the highest order. Students value their teachers' support highly, both in the help given in lessons and when they seek it privately. In turn, they are diligent and industrious, make clear progress and want to succeed. Some aspects of teaching make a major contribution to students' social development, as seen in the Year 12 lesson above where the lesson led to understanding of the role of the catalytic converter in car exhausts. However, approaches to extending the knowledge and understanding of the highest attaining students rely upon an individual teacher's initiative, rather than being shared between the teachers responsible for each group.

55. The new head of department is leading well and managing the subject very effectively. There is strong team spirit in the department, although greater coordination to exploit the expertise available and enrich opportunities for extending the learning of the most able is needed. Arrangements for monitoring teaching are thoroughly well established and have contributed to improving approaches. Students' work is very diligently assessed using examinations criteria meticulously. Their abilities are well known and effective support is given informally. However, as within the science faculty generally, these arrangements do not have the structure of a systematic, scheduled approach for giving subject-specific guidance to all students

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- Well above average attainment reflects students' understanding and ability to relate first hand practical experience with theoretical knowledge.
- Teachers' expertise in the subject and well planned lessons result in effective learning.
- Teachers' high expectations, fostered by excellent supportive relationships, lead to high levels of participation and endeavour.

### Areas for improvement

- Subject teachers link on-going analysis of students' attainments to an informal rather than a formalised, scheduled programme of guidance and support.
- Standards in examinations and in work seen are well above average. Very good teaching, coupled with meticulous assessment, results in very effective learning that sustains students' high levels of attainment when they began the sixth form course.

56. Standards in GCE A-level in 2001 were well above national average with half gaining A or B grades. There is no information about national averages available for 2002 but results were not dissimilar. In 1999, students joined the course in Year 12 with well above average GCSE attainments in science and almost half gained grades A or B in 2002, reflecting a consistently high level of success. The school analyses results carefully and identifies reasons for differences in performance.

57. Standards of coursework and in lessons are well above average. By Year 13, higher attaining students have excellent research and practical investigative skills together with competent laboratory skills. They reach a clear understanding of complex principles by using strongly developed skills of analysis, inference and evaluation. A small minority of students lack sufficient incisiveness for high attainment at A-level. For example, their written work shows an inability to be selective when drawing upon information sources because it contains irrelevancies. Their results of practical investigations are not adequately supported by appropriate mathematical skills and in turn findings and conclusions are cursory.

58. Teaching quality in both Years 12 and 13 is very good overall. Teachers' expert knowledge and effective management of a range of well-structured activities successfully realise the purpose of lessons. Clear exposition, well presented demonstrations, considerate support and good use of questioning and homework reinforce learning. They have very positive attitudes towards their work that are fostered by excellent teacher-student relationships. They become fully involved in lessons, are diligent and industrious. Students value their teachers' support highly, both in the help given in lessons and when they seek it independently. In turn, they make clear progress, for example in Year 12 lessons on heart anatomy where they built on prior learning to relate structure with function, and in a Year 13 genetics lesson where an effective use of modelling increased their understanding of mechanisms of inherited characteristics. Some aspects of teaching make a major contribution to students' social development, research and literacy skills, as seen in a Year 12 lesson where groups collaborated very well to research and make oral presentations on major world diseases. However, approaches to teaching social and moral aspects of the new course do not yet adequately focus attention onto key points or relate them to the underlying biology. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on issues of genetic screening and counselling, activities were not sufficiently directed to help students understand and present clear arguments.

59. The subject is led well and managed very effectively. The new biology course has been appropriately chosen after careful consideration. Teachers working with the same group collaborate and evaluate their approaches effectively, reflecting the strong team spirit in the department, although further joint planning to improve the teaching of up-to-date matters is needed. Arrangements for monitoring teaching are thoroughly well established and have contributed to improvements and high levels of learning and attainment. Students' work is very diligently assessed using examinations criteria meticulously. In turn their abilities are well known and effective support is given informally. However, as for other science subjects, these arrangements do not have the structure of a systematic, scheduled approach for giving subject-specific guidance to all students. Clearly, the need now is to formalise the situation, for example to deal more proactively with students whose achievement is falling behind expectation.

## **BUSINESS**

The focus of the inspection was on business studies.

### **Business studies**

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

#### **Strengths**

- The quality of teaching is very good. Lessons are very well planned, expectations are high and therefore progress is very good.
- The attitude of students is excellent and helps the development of skills, knowledge and general understanding be very good.
- The quality of management of the subject is very good providing a clear vision and high expectations.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- There are insufficient visiting speakers to provide students with beneficial connections to the impact of business on society.
- There are no computers with Internet connections in classrooms.

60. Business studies is offered as a GCE AS, an A-Level and as an AVCE. The GCE A-Level and vocational business examination results in 2001 were above the national average. In 2002, results for GCE A-Level fell below the results achieved in 2001 in the proportion of students achieving higher grades, however all students achieved at least a pass. The AVCE results were similar to those achieved in 2001.

61. Students' work shows very good achievement and considerable 'value added' when consideration is given to the relatively low prior attainment of a significant number of students, particularly those taking AVCE. In lessons, students' progress is very good due to effective teaching, which, coupled with excellent student attitudes, are raising standards. Portfolios are well organised and provide evidence of good research skills and some analytical ability when dealing with hypothetical situations in business. In all lessons seen students engaged in discussions on a range of issues which demonstrated reasonably well-developed skills in forming and defending opinions. Students in both years, but particularly in Year 13, are generally adept in planning their own work when researching and completing assignments. Assignments provide evidence of the effective use of computers and AVCE students are expected to submit all completed assignments word-processed. Where students convert raw data into graphs and a variety of charts and download images into their assignments, work is impressive. There are no significant variations in the standards attained by males or females.

62. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject; fostering interest and understanding in students through carefully planned lessons. Key skills are integrated into lesson plans and therefore students are improving their general competence in numeracy and literacy. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent, promoting high levels of mutual respect and understanding. Teaching strategies are carefully orchestrated to promote knowledge and understanding through whole class and small group activities. Teachers draw upon the experiences of students who have part-time employment or who have been out on work experience to discuss and illustrate business concepts and procedures. Expectations are high and the work is challenging, allowing students to experience the complex nature of business. Students are given effective tuition and advice, which prepares them for their unit tests and examinations.

63. All students have academic targets and they are capable of discussing their progress towards achieving them. A number of students interviewed also have career plans and are knowledgeable and articulate when discussing their work. They fully appreciate the quality of teaching, support and guidance given to them by their teachers.

64. The management of the department is very good. Two teachers share the responsibility for the GCE course and the vocational education courses. Both share the same clear vision, promote high expectations and are knowledgeable about the present and future development of the subject. Teachers work as a very effective team, sharing best practice and supporting each other. Student assessment is detailed and very effective, being used to influence the planning of lessons. Students have a clear understanding of their progress, attainment and future expectations. The curriculum has been reviewed and plans are in place to provide alternative vocational courses as the school does not see the current AVCE course as particularly successful in meeting the needs of students. Students would benefit from greater exposure to the business community through the introduction of visiting speakers. Accommodation is good and learning resources are good overall; computers with Internet connections are not available within classrooms used for business education.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The focus of the inspection was on information and communication technology.

### **Information and communication technology**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Teaching is very good.
- The relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Students are very interested in the subject and have very good attitudes.
- Leadership and management are very good.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The range of accredited courses does not include GCE A-level and timetabled support for the single AVCE is less than typical.

65. ICT is offered as a range of AVCE's, of different unit length accreditation and as two different industry qualifications, including CISCO. The six-unit AVCE accreditation is largely taught through self-study support systems. Students' results in the AVCE ICT examinations in 2002 are satisfactory, and represent good achievement, as many students did not take any ICT course in Years 10 and 11.

66. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average for students in Years 12 and 13. Their achievement is good, as many students had limited knowledge of ICT prior to starting advanced courses. The standards achieved and the progress made by students is a result of consistently very good teaching and students' attitudes towards learning, which are very positive.

67. In Year 12, students create effective and attractive web sites, showing an understanding of the audience they are designed for, and how to use font, colour and layout. To create these sites students have had to learn how to use complex professional web site software. The high quality of teaching, making very good use of peer evaluation, has a significant effect on students' learning. Students in Years 12 and 13, taking a computer maintenance course, make significant progress in learning about both hardware and software. This is because of well-structured teaching, one to one tutorial time, and a good computer simulation programme. Students are helped to learn about computer architecture, and how to trouble shoot computer problems.

68. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge, and the quality of their explanations helps students make very good progress in their understanding of spreadsheets and databases. Students are beginning to understand the complexities of conditional formatting when working out profit and loss in a tuck shop, although not all students fully understand the modelling and prediction possibilities of spreadsheets at this point in their course. Students make very good progress in learning how to improve the quality of their presentation in data base projects. Paired teaching means that students become effective learners. They quickly learn different aspects of presentation, and then teach their partners. Good evaluation sheets prepared by the teacher consolidate learning at the end of the lesson. Students are confident about their presentation skills, although less so when using more technical aspects of databases and spreadsheets. However good progress is made in visual basic programming, where students create short programmes, about pizza delivery orders and other projects. One student has created a particularly good programme to help primary school pupils improve their spelling.

69. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Opportunities for students to take advanced courses in AVCE ICT and 'Cisco Systems' have been created relatively recently, with the first AVCE results in 2002. The AVCE course is a popular choice for many students. Students taking the twelve units, equivalent to two A-levels, have fully timetabled lessons. However many students who take the six unit course, equivalent to one A-level, do so with less taught time, but are well supported by teachers with tutorial time. In Year 12, students have a short ICT course of approximately six weeks, where they use a range of skills including PowerPoint presentations, to complete set tasks. There is no GCE A-level course. There has been good progress since the last inspection; accredited courses are now available for sixth form students.



## HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on health and social care.

### Health and social care

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

#### Strengths

- Very good teaching enables students with relatively lower ability to achieve very well.
- Work placements are well organised and effective.
- Outside agencies are very well used to enhance learning.
- Students have a very good attitude to work and want to do well.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students do not always have access to computers when needed.

70. Both the AVCE in health and social care for one student and the BTEC in caring services were inspected. In 2002 one student entered AVCE and achieved an average grade. In 2000 and 2001 all of the students entered for BTEC and all were successful in gaining the qualification. They proceeded either to higher education or to employment in the caring sector. The drop out rates for the BTEC course has been low but was high for the AVCE course when this was introduced. Few males have chosen this subject; it attracts girls, mainly of relatively lower ability.

71. Standards of work are average. This represents very good achievement for these students who entered the sixth form with low and in some cases very low prior attainment. Teaching is very good and inspires students to attain standards above forecasts; they learn very well. This includes the few students with special educational needs who choose this subject. Students have well organised and well presented files of work. They use ICT effectively for a variety of purposes including, research, data handling and to aid presentation. Students display literacy and numeracy skills that are sufficient for the needs of the subject.

72. Students views are very positive about the help and support they receive from teachers. Very good classroom relationships exist which are the foundation of very good attitudes and behaviour; these lead to very good learning.

73. All teachers are very well qualified and up to date subject specialists. Courses are well structured to provide a wide range of educational experiences and to meet examination board requirements. Students benefit from numerous community links, which the department has established. They are able to visit and work in a very good cross section of caring establishments including hospitals, care homes for the elderly, and schools. This results in students developing high-level practical skills such as how to talk to and get information to and from a wide range of people. They also increase their understanding of theoretical aspects of the work, including legislation and the need for client confidentiality.

74. Care professionals visit lessons. A symposium was observed when students from all years came together to put questions, which they had prepared previously, to a panel of experts. The level of debate illustrated the interest and depth of understanding that these students possess. However, in another lesson, students in Year 12 were less successful when asked to recall first aid procedures that they had been taught previously. In another Year 12 lesson, students were thoroughly briefed about forthcoming community placements. They used good teacher-generated materials to help them understand important criteria to include in placement diaries to help them get high marks.

75. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Systems are in place to promote and monitor high achievement. Assessment of work is excellent and students receive very good feedback on their work. There has been good improvement since the last inspection as a result of effective leadership. Accommodation is not ideal for some activities like role-play because it is cramped. The subject base is not equipped with computers and students are not always able to access them elsewhere when required and this mitigates against effective learning at the time.

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

The focus of the inspection was on art and design.

### **Art and design**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Standards continue to improve due to the high quality of teaching and the range of opportunities available to students.
- The attitude of students and their relationships with their teachers are excellent' providing an effective learning partnership in lessons.
- The quality of leadership and management provides clear vision and high expectations and is having a positive effect upon students' achievement.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Students would benefit from the experience of working with visiting artists and to have more opportunities to go on organised outside visits.

76. Art and design is offered to GCE AS level, A-Level and AVCE. All courses are commented on below. Standards have improved since the last inspection. In 2001 and 2002 the number of students entered for the GCE A-Level examinations and AVCE were small for statistical comparisons with national averages although all students entered gained a pass; A-level results were well below average. The results for GCE AS Level and A-level examinations in 2002 were better than those in 2001; the proportion of higher grades was bigger. All seven vocational art and design students gained a distinction in 2001. In 2002 all four students attained the higher grades of A and B in AVCE examinations.

77. The quality of students' work confirms that standards continue to improve; some is impressive. Portfolios and personal studies show that students have carried out thoughtful investigation and creative exploration of ideas. Some students' work, in both Years 12 and 13, shows flair and imagination; they are producing work of high quality and originality. The majority of students are confident when working with a variety of materials and resources. They are articulate and can discuss their work with confidence and have pride in their achievements. Their attitudes towards the subject are excellent and contribute to the quality of the work produced in their portfolios and displayed throughout the art and design department and around the school. By the end of Year 12 and in Year 13 their achievement is at least good, when account is taken of the relatively broad range of their attainment when students began courses. Students with learning difficulties make good progress. There are no significant variations in the results attained by males or females.

78. Teaching is very good and students learn very well. Lessons are challenging and very well planned providing all students with opportunities to progress. Classroom organisation and management are extremely effective. The relationships between teachers and students

are excellent, providing a pleasant atmosphere in lessons. Some team teaching takes place in AVCE lessons, where teachers take responsibility for teaching certain units of work. This is effective in exposing the students to a variety of teaching styles. Regular references are made to the work of significant artists and cultures in order to raise creative and visual appreciation. Students rise to challenges set by teachers and use their time well, often working outside set lesson times in their own designated area within the department. Effective use is made of computers to develop ideas, conduct research and enhance the quality of assignments. Students support and help each other through mutual discussion. There is a very good level of independent learning as a consequence of teachers' encouraging students to attempt to solve their own problems. This generates reasonably good levels of originality in finished work. Work is monitored on a regular basis. Assessment includes a certain amount of student self-assessment and therefore students are well aware of teachers' expectations and their own strengths and weaknesses. Many students speak highly of the support provided by their teachers. Assessment is particularly effective as an influence on future curriculum development and lesson planning.

79. Leadership and management are very good. Very effective planning promotes high standards in lessons. Teachers work as a very effective team and therefore students receive effective advice and support. Schemes of work are well designed. They include clear aims and objectives, well-defined assessment criteria and deadlines for completion. Key Skills are promoted and integrated into lesson planning. The quality of teaching, students' work and their progress towards targets, are all well monitored. The quality of students' work on display is impressive, promotes high standards and interest in the subject and celebrates achievement. Resources and accommodation are good. The department makes good use of an electronic white board and several computers to help teaching and learning. Opportunities for students to work with visiting artists and to experience more organised outside visits would be beneficial.

## HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography and history.

### Geography

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

#### Strengths

- High standards of attainment sustained over the years.
- Very good teaching and learning.
- Very good relations between staff and students supporting very good attitudes to work and motivation to strive for the highest standards
- Very good management and team ethos focussing on high levels of attainment

#### Areas for improvement

- There are no significant areas for the department to improve.

80. In 2002, of the six pupils entered for A-levels three gained the highest grades of A or B and all fell within the grades A to E. This is a pattern that has been maintained over many years with numbers entered normally in single figures; results in 2001 against national standards were judged to be outstanding. In AS examinations in 2002, of the seven students entered, four gained A or B grades and all were successful in the range A to E, which is similar to the results of the previous year. The retention rates have so far been 100 per cent. In 2003 some 22 students have opted to take the AS examinations, a considerable rise over previous years.

81. Standards of work are well above average and students achieve very well. They have very good attitudes to work and very good relationships with each other. They appreciate that the requirement for them to learn independently has increased over the last two years. They are motivated to investigate thoroughly and research topics so that they can illustrate their theoretical learning with appropriate examples. Their descriptive work is detailed and accurate, as in the environmental study of the coastline around Druridge Bay. Students identify the different plants that grow in the changing conditions successively from the sea line, and account for the differences. Beyond this they apply statistical methods with assurance, enabling firm conclusions to be drawn, for example about the conditions needed to bring about the succession of plants across dunes. In their work on the environmental effects of dam building in varied parts of the world they write at length using well-known examples and evaluating their impact on economically more developed countries and less well developed areas. Knowledge of the causes of world climates and use of climatic statistics enabled an able group to work out the reasons for the pattern of nomadic life among the Fulani people of Ivoire. The intense group work and lively discussion got to the bottom of the topic.

82. Teaching is very good overall; some lessons were excellent. Clear structures ensure that students know exactly what is expected from them in terms of learning and standards. Teachers' high standards of subject knowledge are shown not only at the factual level, but also in the nature of the questioning that the students experience. One lesson used the normal population displays for most of the learning, but then challenged students by showing a new and different form for them to interpret trends in population across the continents and the world. Marking is thorough and diagnostic in a way that both encourages and stimulates students to do better. Very good relationships allow swift changes of approach during any one lesson and involve students in thinking constantly throughout. All students learn very well. Their attention is rapt and concentration on spoken and written work is strong. They come from a very good knowledge base for the most part, having attained high GCSE grades previously, although there are some without a GCSE in geography.

83. The department is very well led and this cultivates a close co-operative approach. Assessment and monitoring of work is very thorough. There are high expectations both of the team of teachers and of the students that instil an excellent learning ethos. This has improved on the high standards that were a characteristic of the last report.

## History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

### Strengths

- Good levels of attainment at A-level sustained over the years
- Students achieve well
- Teaching and learning are good

### Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities for a wider range of discussion of historical topics to help improve historical perception

84. In 2002, of the eight students entered at A-level, half gained the highest grades of A and B and all attained in the range A to E. Of the fifteen students at AS level, six gained A to B and all were successful in the range A to E. In most years all or the great majority are awarded a grade A to E. Most students who study history at AS go on to the higher level

examination. In comparison to standards nationally in 2001 history performed satisfactorily. Results in 2002 were better.

85. Students did well at GCSE and begin their post-16 course with high levels of historical knowledge. By the end of Years 12 and 13 they achieve well, as shown by the standard of their class and folder work. They work assiduously, and with high levels of concentration in oral and written tasks in class. In groups and in whole class sessions they co-operate with both their classmates and their teachers. Their high level of independent work shows well in essays and research, as, for instance, in addressing varied aspects of the reign of Philip II of Spain as a monarchical ruler. Their skill at balancing arguments develops well over the two years, so that the very highest attainers not only develop arguments, but also do so with some literary style.

86. In work seen during the inspection standards are similar to those shown at examination level. Students understand the complexity of historical perspectives, how to use primary and secondary source material and how to present a reasoned case or account of events. In Year 12, students are well in command of the sequence of events in the reformation of the English church under Henry VIII. They also know the social forces that drove the system and the prominent figures in the proceedings. The most able are aware of the need to check the views of historians, and then examine the reasons for their views. This historiography is one of the touchstones of high quality work by the most able students. Essays by the higher attaining students show a fluency of argument that improves as they get older

87. Teaching is good overall and characterised by authoritative knowledge of history and examination presentation. This is seen not only in the examples and wider allusions in the lessons, but also in the way that questions are put to ensure that answers are illuminating and bring out students' own good knowledge and understanding. Very good marking helps students strive for higher standards by showing them what they did well and in some detail how the standard of work could be raised still further. This expertise is born of teachers' substantial examining experience allied to their knowledge of the subject.

88. Students work well in a good atmosphere for learning. Their good attitudes to and interest in history are demonstrated through high levels of concentration and the large amounts of work they do. Their listening and speaking skills are at a high level and help ensure that their learning is thorough. There are good relationships between students and teachers, which stimulates informed exchanges and develops ideas.

89. Management of the subject is good, with close working relationships supporting a common approach to learning consistent with the school's expectations. Standards have been maintained at a high level in the years since the last inspection. Regular and rigorous testing and assessment help students raise their standards higher as they progress through their course. The curriculum provides very different areas of study than those in GCSE; consequently, students learn about a completely different period of history.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English and French.

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- Results in the A-level courses have been consistently high over a period of three years.
- Students' reach high standards in their interpretation of literary criticism and application of linguistic concepts.
- The quality of teaching is very good, with teachers having a thorough knowledge of their subject and using a range of interactive strategies effectively.
- Students learn very well; they are very good at working independently and collaboratively.
- The department benefits from excellent leadership and a committed team of teachers.
- Effective procedures for supporting, monitoring and evaluating students' progress.

#### Areas for improvement

There are no outstanding areas for improvement.

90. The focus of the inspection was on the provision of the AS level and A-level English language and English literature courses in Years 12 and 13. GCSE English is also offered to a few students who wish to improve their grades; most achieve an improvement of one grade.

91. Over three years, A-level results in English language and English literature have risen substantially showing sustained and improving performance since the last inspection. Standards are high and a higher proportion of students than is seen nationally attain grades A and B. In 2001, the percentage of students achieving the higher grades in both subjects was almost twice the national average. The 2002 results in English literature were lower than in previous years but in English language, a very high proportion of students gained grades A or B. Attendance and retention rates are very good.

92. The department vigilantly reviews standards and has recalled and analysed the AS literature papers to identify areas of weaknesses. This has rightly led to changes in teaching and learning with a number of students who did not achieve the predicted A or B grade re-taking a specific module.

93. All students begin the A-level English courses in Year 12 with attainment that is well above the national average. The standard of work seen in lessons and folders confirms sustained standards in both subjects throughout Years 12 and 13. Students display positive attitudes and work conscientiously, with tenacity and dedication as part of a whole class, individually or in groups. Folders indicate that students work productively: independent learning is very good and research work makes a significant contribution to their achievement.

94. Speaking and listening skills are of a high order. Students use group work effectively to engage in critical appraisal of their work, exchanging ideas and providing informative feedback when presenting their ideas. Attainment in reading and interpretation is very good. Students read widely and independently in order to increase their awareness of other writers' viewpoints and use this knowledge to shape their response when presenting a consistent argument. The best textual grasp and appreciation, for example, in a higher attaining Year 13 student's work on Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, demonstrate a very

confident exploration of ideas and autonomous reading when considering critical responses. Critical analysis is well taught and as a result, students show a clear understanding of the way in which writers use language and literary forms to express meanings. This was also well illustrated in the work of higher attaining students on the English language course. These students show a very good understanding of linguistic concepts as seen in their work on editorial writing or '*Genderlect*'. Overall, students, whether exploring linguistic concepts or interpreting a literary text, show perception and a consistent application when supporting their views with reference to texts, well known linguists or literary critics. The best writers are outstandingly good. These students write with precision and insight, demonstrating flair and assurance. Their essays are fluent, well structured and ideas are well argued. Students use a mature and extensive vocabulary with middle attaining students writing engagingly with conviction and understanding.

95. The quality of teaching and learning are very good. Teachers know their subject very well and have a thorough knowledge of the requirements of examination criteria. They use the assessment criteria consistently well to challenge students to reach a high standard of work. Teachers are skilled at making complex subject matter accessible and interesting by using interactive methods, group work and wide reading resources. For instance, in a Year 12 language lesson on gender, students quickly grasped the concepts of overt and covert prestige after their teacher gave a clear exposition of the terms, and set challenging targets for them to work through a series of activities. As a result, students were able to make very good progress in identifying and applying the key features of the concepts. Planning is exemplary and teachers use the four-part lesson (a national model) effectively, to ensure that students make very good progress. Teachers make very good use of starter activities to provide a 'big picture' of the breadth of the work. The well-structured approaches to reading and analysing texts contribute to students working efficiently, accurately and at full stretch within a given time. This increases their independence and critical thinking skills. The quality of teachers' marking is very thorough, maintaining a running critical commentary throughout students' work, often referring to the assessment criteria, with a final diagnostic comment. Relationships between teachers and students are very supportive and productive. There is a strong and shared understanding of high achievement in all year groups.

96. Leadership and management of both courses are excellent. There is close teamwork and a strong commitment to the subject. The partnership work is valued; teachers are well supported and work is delegated accordingly. Monitoring of teaching and learning is fully embedded in the work of the department as is the analysis and use of data and target setting to improve the curriculum and teaching and learning. Very good improvements have been made since the last inspection. Under the new management, students have a wider choice of courses. The subject continues to attract the largest number of sixth form students; teaching is a strength and now uses a range of activities and interactive methods. There are very good opportunities for staff to participate in a wide selection of professional development. A clear strength of the department is the monitoring and evaluation of students' progress and the very good support they receive when undertaking Internet research or analysing a text. Provision for personal development is very good: gifted and talented students are encouraged to show originality and creativity. The planned enrichment activities support the development of students' cultural, moral, social and spiritual understanding.

## French

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

### Strengths

- Standards attained at AS and A-level are well above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good and enables students to make very good progress.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards their learning and excellent relationships with their teachers.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.

### Areas for improvement

- Focus more closely on particular language and structures in lessons in order to ensure all students get sufficient practice with new language to feel confident.

97. Examination results in French at AS and A-level in 2002 were well above recent national averages, with a high proportion of students gaining A and B grades. This represents good achievement in relation to prior attainment.

98. In work seen, students currently studying French to AS and A-level attain well above average standards overall. In Year 12, standards are well above average; students build very effectively on previous knowledge, consolidating and extending their understanding of grammar and deepening their knowledge of the French-speaking world. They write using a wide range of vocabulary and structures, for example, to discuss racism and issues related to smoking. They justify their views with reference to relevant, up to date statistics, relating to France. They respond appropriately and promptly to questions and instructions in French and communicate their ideas, for example, about techniques used in advertising, to each other with a good degree of fluency, lower attaining students using notes to help them. Reading skills are well developed, students identify the main points from short texts taken from a variety of sources and in doing so increase their understanding of links and patterns in the language as well as their range of vocabulary.

99. In Year 13, students are confident linguists and standards are high. They write at length and in detail on a variety of topics and for a variety of purposes using a wide range of vocabulary and structures to communicate their ideas. Standards attained in writing are very high. They display an excellent understanding of grammar and register, they speak and write confidently and link their ideas very effectively together to construct cogent arguments on a variety of contemporary and moral issues and to give detailed accounts. In lessons they respond spontaneously and accurately in discussions and manipulate the language very effectively to communicate their ideas. They have a very good understanding of the themes, characters and literary techniques used in Moliere's play 'L'Avare' and explain their views with close reference to the text.

100. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and leads to very good progress in lessons. Expectations are high. French is used routinely to conduct lessons. The teachers' command of French is excellent; students benefit from excellent role models and their listening skills are very well developed as a result. Teachers set challenging tasks, which enable students to develop their skills using and manipulating the language for themselves, and as a result students increase in confidence and competence in using a wide range of vocabulary and structures. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students responded spontaneously to statements about the role of men and women in looking after children, justifying views which were not necessarily their own. In a Year 12 lesson, students made very good progress, increasing their range of vocabulary and structures and refining their



explanations of techniques used in advertising through a series of pair and group work activities. Teachers monitor students' progress closely during tasks and intervene appropriately and sensitively to ensure all make appropriate progress. However, there is scope to focus more closely on particular language and structures in lessons in order to ensure all students get sufficient practice with new language to feel confident in using it in tasks set. Resources were used to very good effect to clarify and explore the main characters and themes in Molière's play 'L'Avare'; for example, students matched quotations with characters in the play and explained their reasons. This was very effective in provoking discussion, deepening their understanding of the characters of Harpagon and Cleante and the way Molière used them to underscore the main themes of the play.

101. Students are very well motivated and concerned to do well. They work very well together and maintain excellent relationships with each other and their teachers. In lessons they are mutually supportive and participate with enthusiasm and interest. They work confidently together in pairs and small groups, use the Internet and other resources to research topics they are studying and display a high degree of independence in their learning.

102. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent. High standards have been maintained and the department is committed to raising standards further. The subject curriculum is excellent, giving students a wide range of learning opportunities, both in lessons and outside school. Strategic planning is focussed clearly on increasing students' independence both in lessons and in their private study. Assessment is used very effectively to plan and evaluate progress and students are very well informed both about their progress and how to improve. The department supports its students very well and students appreciate the help and time they are given both by their teachers and by the language assistant. They also appreciate the opportunities they have to participate in exchange visits, attend courses and conferences at universities and the arrangements the department has made to enable them to use specialist language resources at Northumbria University.