

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST WILFRID'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL,
SIXTH FORM AND LANGUAGE COLLEGE**

Pontefract

LEA area: Wakefield

Unique reference number: 108297

Headteacher: David Lewis

Reporting inspector: Marjorie Glynne-Jones

2918

Dates of inspection: 31st March - 4th April 2003

Inspection number: 249773

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Cutsyke Road Featherstone Pontefract
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Fr Sean Durcan
Date of previous inspection:	April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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9188	J McHugh	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents and students?
30702	P Bowyer	Team inspector	Mathematics	
3534	A Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
21954	T Chipp	Team inspector	Art and design	
20716	R Grogan	Team inspector	History	
22524	S Innes	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology	
12475	W S Johnson	Team inspector	Music	
20709	D MacIldowie	Team inspector	English	
12897	M Mealing	Team inspector	Health and social care Sociology	
23569	D Nicholl	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Wilfrid's is a voluntary-aided Catholic comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 18, which has Specialist Language College status. With 1452 on roll, and broadly equal numbers of boys and girls, it is much larger than most schools. It is a very popular school which is growing in size, and draws its pupils from a very wide area, most travelling daily by bus. About three-fifths of pupils come from areas where social disadvantage is high, while the proportion eligible for free school meals is about average. When they join St Wilfrid's, pupils' attainment is above average overall. The proportion with special educational needs is well below average and includes 20 pupils working in a Speech and Language unit. Pupils' needs mainly include dyslexia, mild learning difficulties, behaviour difficulties and physical impairment. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and among those whose mother tongue is not English, none is at an early stage of English fluency. The inspection took place while building works were in progress.

Awards: Schools' Curriculum Award, Investors in People, Sportsmark, Quality Standards Work Experience, Technology Trust's Most Improved School Club, School Achievement Award 2002 and 2003.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Wilfrid's is a very good school, with many excellent features. Outstanding leadership and management by the headteacher, together with very effective action by the governing body, have brought about a remarkable recovery in its fortunes over the last five years. Standards are above average by Year 11 and average in the sixth form. Good teaching and learning ensure that satisfactory achievement is maintained over Years 7 to 11, and that achievement is good in the sixth form. The value for money is very good.

What the school does well

- The school community lives out its mission statement to the full, with profound commitment to ensuring the best possible opportunity for every individual pupil and sixth-form student.
- Outstanding provision for the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils and sixth-form students is complemented by excellent personal support and guidance for all individuals in all year groups.
- The vision and strategy for improvement work powerfully together to bring about far-reaching change very effectively.
- Very good governance, rooted in exceptional commitment to the school, has contributed significantly to the school's recovery.
- Consistently good teaching, as well as the very good range of opportunities both within and outside the curriculum in the main school and in the sixth form, help all young people, including those with special needs, to become good, confident and interested learners.

What could be improved

There are no significant areas for improvement.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection in 1997 is very good. The amount of good teaching has risen dramatically, from five in-every-ten to nine in-every-ten lessons. Results are rising at GCSE and A-level, and have been consistently above average in Year 9 tests. On the issues for action identified last time, the improvement is good overall, and excellent in relation to budget issues. The improvement from the school's subsequent low point in 1998, when it was on the brink of closure, 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			
	all schools			Similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	C	B	B	A
A-levels/AS-levels	N/A	B	*	

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

* AS- and A-level comparative results for 2002 are not yet available

- **Year 9** test results in 2002 were above average compared with all schools and with similar schools. Though being maintained at an above average level, these results are not keeping pace with the rise in national results.
- Pupils' science results have been better than those in English and mathematics in the last two years.
- Boys and girls do equally well in Year 9 tests, except in science, where girls were further behind girls' national results in 2002 than boys in relation to boys' national results.
- Standards in the work seen are above average; in relation to pupils' standards when they join Year 7, their achievement is satisfactory.
- **GCSE** results are rising faster than national results. In 2002, the results were well above the average for similar schools for pupils gaining 5 or more A*-Cs and A*-Gs; and they were average for pupils gaining 1 or more A*-Gs.
- The best results in 2002 were in double science, geography, religious education and drama; the least good were in English literature and Spanish.
- Compared with the national picture in 2002, pupils did significantly better in double science, German and religious education than they did in their other subjects; they did significantly less well in business studies, English, English literature, French, history and information and communication technology (ICT).
- In 2002, the school's target for 5 or more A*-Cs was exceeded; the target for 1 or more A*-Gs was met; and the average points scores were considerably higher than the target.
- The work seen shows above average standards and satisfactory achievement being maintained.
- **A-level** results are rising and were above average in 2001. They showed a rise in 2002.
- Strengths in the 2001 subject results were in biology, business studies, mathematics and psychology, where they were well above average.
- Results were below average in 2001 in art and design, chemistry, French, history, physics and religious studies.
- External analysis of the 2002 results shows that the college added excellent value to students' GCSE results.
- Standards are average overall in the work seen and show good achievement from students' standards when they joined the sixth form.
- The strengths are in mathematics and sociology where standards are well above average and students' achievement is very good.
- Standards are below average in health and social care and history and students'

achievement is satisfactory. In history, standards in Year 12 are clearly being improved.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good; this is true for all groups of pupils, including those from ethnic minorities and pupils with special needs. Pupils work very well together; are supportive of each other, and contribute to the very positive learning atmosphere.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good, sometimes excellent. The number of fixed term exclusions is high but falling. Pupils describe the rules as firm but fair; they know exactly where they stand and say behaviour has improved as a result.
Personal development and relationships	Very good throughout the school; young people and adults respond to each other with friendship and respect, a key message of the school's aims.
Attendance	Very good in Years 7 to 11; the rate is well above average and unauthorised absence is well below average. Attendance is satisfactory in the sixth form.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

- The quality of teaching was consistently good throughout the inspection week in each of the three stages in the above table.
- In nine out-of-every-ten lessons in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form, teaching was good or better; in Years 10 and 11 this was true in eight out-of-every-ten lessons.
- In three out-of-every-ten lessons in the sixth form, and in four out-of-every-ten in the other two stages, the teaching was very good or better. One lesson in Years 7 to 11 was unsatisfactory.
- The teaching in English, mathematics and science is good in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11, although the number of mathematics lessons seen was very small.
- There is good teaching of literacy and numeracy skills and the school meets the needs of all pupils and students well.
- Teachers have very good subject expertise, manage classes very well, and deal with assessment and marking very well; these strengths ensure that pupils make good gains in knowledge, put good effort into their work and have a good understanding of how well they are doing.
- In the fifteen subjects inspected in the sixth form, learning and teaching are good in most, very good in mathematics, physics and sociology, and satisfactory in health and social care.
- Where the quality is good, teachers' skills and are consistently good. The particular strengths are teachers' subject expertise, their rigorous use of assessments, and the skilful way they manage student groups. This quality leads to students' consistently good

- learning skills.
- Although satisfactory, there is scope for improvement in teachers' use of homework in design and technology and ICT; and in the range of methods in physical education. In learning, this applies to the effort students put into their work in French; their level of interest in physical education and German; and their understanding of how well they are doing in ICT and German.
- In health and social care, the scope for improvement applies in particular to the range of teaching methods used to support individual learning, and to students' pace and productivity in their work.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good; the required elements in Years 7 to 9 lead on to a very good range of courses in Years 10 and 11 which meet the needs and interests of pupils of all attainment levels. Statutory requirements are met. The range of sixth-form courses caters for students' career hopes and talents very well and is being helpfully expanded to include a stronger vocational element.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good; subject planning is very efficiently and effectively supported by the good, constantly updated information available about their progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent overall and for spiritual, moral and social growth; young people's personal experience is enriched by the provision so that they mature into thoughtful, responsible and caring persons. The contribution of assemblies is a particular strength. Although very good, there is scope for strengthening further the breadth of cultural traditions that pupils and students encounter throughout the school.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good; there is excellent support and guidance for pupils and sixth-formers and excellent arrangements for assessment. There is scope for strengthening the already good attention to improving attendance in the sixth form.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent; the headteacher's vision for the future of the school is rigorously backed up by strategic planning to bring this about. The large leadership team shares his commitment, enthusiasm and rigour.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good; with exceptional commitment and perseverance, as well as attention to detail, the governing body has worked very effectively with the headteacher to turn the school round. Governors have an excellent knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent; this shows in the development plan; the reports of subject reviews; the targets for and tracking of pupils' and students' progress; in the termly review of senior staff targets; and in the minutes of the governing body. Evaluation is facilitated by excellent use of ICT through wireless laptops allocated to each individual teacher and to all support staff who take a lead role in lessons.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent; the school has paid off the £750,000 deficit inherited by the headteacher on his appointment five years ago, while at the same time attracting and utilising funding to effect substantial improvements. The attention to achieving the best possible value is excellent. Staffing resources are good and there are satisfactory learning resources; accommodation is unsatisfactory, including the lack of sports hall, although it is being improved by major refurbishment and a major building project scheduled for the next academic year.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school expects their children to work hard • The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible, and behaviour is good • The teaching is good • Children like school and are making good progress • The school is well led and managed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer working with parents

Parents' views are positive on each of the items in the questionnaire. Inspectors mostly agree with the 440 parents, nearly a third, who completed questionnaires and the 37 parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting. They find however, that the information in the annual progress reports, although good, varies in quality between subjects and year groups. They do not fully agree with the least positive view, finding that the school endeavours to work closely with parents.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form in this large voluntary-aided Catholic comprehensive school is larger than most, with 302 on roll and broadly equal numbers of female and male students. It has grown since the last inspection. There are very small numbers of students from ethnic minority backgrounds, none for whom English is an additional language, and few students with special educational needs. As in the main school, the sixth-form college draws its students from a very wide area, where social disadvantage is often high. Most travel daily by bus. The college offers a wide range of advanced academic courses and a growing number of vocational courses at different levels, 42 in total. It usually requires at least five A*-C grades at GCSE for entry to A-level courses, at least four for AVCE courses, and four D grades for intermediate GNVQ courses. About four-fifths of the pupils in Year 11 continue their studies into the sixth form, and the majority of Year 12 students continue into Year 13. When they leave St Wilfrid's, nine out-of-every-ten students go on to courses in higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very good sixth form, developing from strength to strength because of highly effective leadership and management by the college. Standards are average and students learn and achieve well due to good teaching and good attention to meeting individual needs. Sixth-form costs are covered fully from sixth-form income, and resources are successfully deployed to be very cost-effective.

Strengths

- Excellent leadership and management of the sixth form by the senior staff team.
- Excellent arrangements for assessment, including teachers' use of 'personal' wireless laptops for tracking individual progress, raising achievement effectively.
- Very good provision in mathematics and sociology.
* *provision refers to achievement, teaching and learning and leadership and management*

What could be improved

- There are no significant areas for improvement.

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	Very good: standards are well above average; students achieve very well because very good teaching ensures they learn very well; the subject is led and managed well.
Biology	Good: standards are above average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Learning and teaching are good, and there is good leadership and management.
Physics	Good: standards are above average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Learning and teaching are very good, and there is very good leadership and management.
Design and technology	Good: standards are average and students achieve well as a result of good learning and teaching and good leadership and management.
ICT	Good: standards are average and students' achievement is good because of good learning and teaching and good leadership and management
Physical education	Good: standards are average and students achieve well as a result of good learning and teaching and good leadership and management.
Health and social care	Satisfactory: standards are below average; satisfactory teaching and learning, together with satisfactory leadership and management, result in satisfactory achievement by students.
Art and design	Good: standards are above average and students achieve well because of good learning and teaching; leadership and management are very good.
Music	Good: standards are above average; good teaching and learning mean that students achieve well; leadership and management are good.
Geography	Good: standards are above average; students achieve well because of good teaching and learning and good leadership and management.
History	Good: standards are below average; achievement, teaching and learning, and leadership and management are all good and leading to higher standards in Year 12.
Sociology	Very good: standards are well above average and students achieve very well, the result of very good teaching and learning and very good leadership and management.
English	Good: standards are average and students' achievement is satisfactory; good teaching and learning and good leadership and management are establishing a good basis for raising standards.
French	Good: standards are average; students achieve well because of good teaching and learning; leadership and management are very good.
German	Good: standards are average and students' achievement is satisfactory; teaching and learning are good, and leadership and management, very good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Excellent, both in assessment arrangements and tracking of students' individual progress, and in advice about opportunities when students leave school.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Excellent; notable strength in the team approach for oversight of the sixth form involving the headteacher, deputy heads and head of sixth form which is successfully raising achievement; exceptionally effective in ensuring students' equal opportunity to succeed, shown through the staying-on rate into Year 12, the continuation rate into Year 13, and the numbers going on to higher education.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are taught well and challenged to do their best. • Their programmes suit their talents and career hopes. • Teachers are readily available when help is needed. • There was good help for them to settle into the sixth form. • The thorough assessment helps them know how to improve their work. • They enjoy being in the sixth form and would recommend it to others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The advice about careers and opportunities after they leave school. • The range of worthwhile activities outside their main subjects. • The notice the college takes of their views.

Inspectors fully endorse students' positive views, which were generally confirmed in discussion with groups of students in the subjects inspected. They find that each of the points which showed clearly as 'could be improved' in students' questionnaire returns are strong features of college life, shown by the careers and guidance programme and resource materials, and by the schedule of activities, visits and study support sessions out-of-hours. In discussions with students during the inspection, with cross-course groups in Year 12 and Year 13 as well as subject groups, the comments did not reflect the same level of criticism as the questionnaire returns. Students' returns to the college's questionnaire completed in the autumn term 2002, mainly about courses and teaching, were consistently positive.

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

The school community lives out its mission statement to the full, with profound commitment to ensuring the best possible opportunity for every individual pupil and sixth-form student.

Mission:

'seek to ensure the development of all student's spiritual, moral and academic potential, based on the commitment to Christ and His teachings'

'committed to the common good through the fostering of a cooperative and caring ethos' 'each person's rights and responsibilities recognised and respected and their individual talents nurtured'

'includes the search for academic excellence, within a secure learning environment, where individual and collective achievement is celebrated'.

1. St Wilfrid's is an exceptionally strong community where adults and young people across the year groups show care and concern for others and work together with mutual respect. Older pupils speak of the respect with which staff treat pupils. Very positive relationships are forged which are evident in every aspect of its daily work. These are not only a strength in lessons, but also characterise the good-humoured interaction around the school at breaks and lunchtimes, even when there are bottlenecks caused by the building works. The headteacher's leadership by example invites the best from pupils, students and staff so that confidence and self-esteem grow. High expectations demand the best.

2. The Catholic ethos pervades every aspect of school life and the sense of community makes St Wilfrid's feel like a smaller school than it is, and more like a family. Sixth-formers commented that the atmosphere is excellent; pupils feel that the community is a strength. Within this, the achievement of all individual pupils and students is the focus, in both academic and personal terms. Young people have very good equality of opportunity, for example, to study a range of appropriate subjects and courses in the curriculum, and as a consequence of the consistently good attention to individual needs in the teaching. Individual tracking, using the data on laptops, ensures that all are given good support in working to achieve their potential. There are additional courses and activities to match their personal interests and particular talents, for example in the range of language courses available. Although the school does not highlight particular groups in its tracking, for example those from ethnic minority backgrounds, issues for individuals are picked up through the thoroughness of the tracking system.

Outstanding provision for the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils and sixth-form students is complemented by excellent personal support and guidance for all individuals in all year groups.

Spiritual, moral and social development

3. Assemblies offer exceptional opportunities for spiritual growth through reflection on such values as care for others and forgiveness, and on reconciliation, the theme for the inspection week, viewed at a personal level and from a worldwide perspective. The engagement of pupils and students was absolute as they watched telling images and sayings projected on a large screen, or on another occasion, shared the range of emotions portrayed by pupils and teachers performing together in the drama of the Prodigal Son. The feeling response of sixth-formers to the projection of the school's Holocaust commitment was palpable. There are short, but genuine acts of worship in tutorial sessions, and pupils

reflect on the coming day. Many go on retreats and participate in liturgical occasions, such as Holocaust Day and Family Fast Day.

4. Staff offer a fine model of the virtues of hard work and personal responsibility, and these qualities are reflected in the attitudes of most pupils. They explore issues of right and wrong and consider the nature of good and evil, for example through discussions about Shakespeare's 'Macbeth', and the conflicts leading up to the American civil war. Older students discuss aspects of sexual morality with maturity and perception and look at the Declaration of Human Rights, reaching mature and objective judgements about moral issues raised by the plight of refugees. Pupils and students are expected to consider the needs of those less fortunate than themselves. They respond actively through fundraising, sending large sums to several charities, including Comic Relief and CAFOD. Through the 'Buddy' system and paired reading, both over-subscribed with volunteers, older pupils look after the needs of younger ones. Informal social occasions such as breaks and lunchtimes are characterised by the very strong sense of community shared by adults and young people alike.

5. As a language college, the school places very strong emphasis on the international dimension. Pupils and students benefit from the school's annual International Week which brings together teachers and students from all over the world, for example from Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan and Italy. Their horizons are extended by the Internet and video-conferencing links with schools in many countries which have been followed up by exchanges with schools in America and Italy. The language college contributes substantially to the very good provision for young people's cultural development.

Personal support and guidance

6. There are many ways through which pupils and students are able to obtain individual advice and guidance. The Chaplaincy is always open to all at breaks and lunchtimes for a time of quiet and companionship; those who are grieving or unhappy receive very good support. Individual mentoring by tutors and members of the senior leadership group, the arrangement for sixth-formers to act as bullying counsellors and the system for managing behaviour, all contribute to pupils and students feeling confident that support is readily available should they experience difficulties in any area of their life. Young people, of all ages, referred to the supportive community giving them confidence. Their personal development is monitored exceptionally well through the pastoral support network. Weekly pastoral team meetings, which include form tutors, senior managers and specialists from outside agencies, are very effective in ensuring that each young person is treated as an individual and her or his specific needs met.

The vision and strategy for improvement work powerfully together to bring about far-reaching change very effectively.

7. The vision is for a school where, regardless of prior attainment and social context, all individuals flourish because they can continue successfully into further or higher educational study or the labour market. Where all students are confident that their experience and qualifications are not only appropriate, but also give them flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. This vision shows clearly in the developments already in place for the curriculum as well as in the explorations for the next phase of curriculum developments which are looking at links with higher education institutions. First steps have been taken with the Open University to explore some modules being offered by the college.

8. Fundamental to the headteacher's approach to leadership and management is the belief that it is relationships that make the difference, an emphasis in his comments during the inspection.

9. A number of strategies have been employed. Forging good working relationships through good appointments and a clear statement of staff roles and responsibilities, within demanding and supportive management systems. Attracting funding to bring about key developments for the school in its local context, for example, by achieving language college status, while at the same time paying off the deficit. Attracting funding in order to provide the best technological resources to support teachers in planning appropriately for each individual pupil and sixth-former and in tracking their progress systematically, for example, notably, the provision of wireless laptops for staff. Extending the curriculum to match the vision, now well under way as reported in paragraph 34. Going ahead with a major programme of new build, together with refurbishment already underway during the inspection, to make up for neglect and to bring the accommodation for learning up to date.

10. With such developments in place, the strategy extends to assuring their quality by rigorous checks that they live up to expectations, for example, though the checks on homework and completion of pupils' planners, carried out with exceptional thoroughness and a very sharp analysis of what constitutes good practice. Through substantial subject reviews scheduled on a termly basis, and effective appointments, good provision in subjects is being established with consistently good teaching throughout the school.

Very good governance, rooted in exceptional commitment to the school, has contributed significantly to the school's recovery.

11. The school is fortunate in its governing body. Since appointing the new headteacher in 1998, the governors have worked with admirable fortitude and determination to set things to rights by clarifying the budget situation and then managing the payback of the deficit of £750,000 inherited by the headteacher. At the same time, they have established governing body procedures through which their statutory responsibilities can be carried out fully. The process, though clearly not without pain, has been eminently successful. Timely information from the Learning and Skills Council was received on the first day of the inspection confirming that the school was no longer in deficit.

12. Governors attend all appointments days, which for teaching staff posts include lesson observations as well as interviews. They have made wise appointments at all levels of seniority, most notably that of the present headteacher. In a major restructuring of staff responsibilities, all staff were able to apply for the many new management posts created. Governors have been fully involved in shaping the school's future and determining the strategies to bring this about and are kept very well informed by the headteacher of the findings of the school's monitoring of its performance. They also know what's going on because they check for themselves. Consequently, governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and take a strategic approach to making improvements.

13. Governors hold the headteacher in extremely high regard, support him fully, but also hold him to account for the school's performance. Recent minutes show their thorough scrutiny of his proposal to disapply design and technology from the curriculum in Years 10 and 11, and their deferring of a decision until there had been further exploration of the implications of the proposal. The excellent consideration given to ensuring that the school achieves the best possible value is fundamental to the approach of the governors and senior staff. The school places value on consultation with pupils, sixth-formers, staff and parents. It has a very good idea of how well it is doing compared with other local schools, and takes account of its position compared to national standards. It is now looking to its third catering contract with a view to establishing a profit-sharing financial basis. The level of self-challenge generated by the headteacher, through rigorous checks that the school is doing as well as it could in all areas of its work, is outstanding. Governors check their

effectiveness with the same rigour, as demonstrated by the analytic accounts of the work of committees, prepared for discussion with the inspection team.

Consistently good teaching, as well as the very good range of opportunities both within and outside the curriculum in the main school and in the sixth form, help all young people, including those with special needs, to become good, confident and interested learners.

...consistently good teaching

14. Across the school and sixth-form college as a whole, the quality of learning and teaching is consistent. It was at least satisfactory in all of the 96 lessons observed except one in Years 7 to 11. The quality is good in nine out-of-every-ten lessons, and very good or better in about third. Excellent teaching was seen in four lessons, in Years 7, 10, 12 and 13. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is reported in paragraphs 29-33. In the main school, the inspection observations focused mainly on Years 9 and 11, as the final years in each stage. These observations show that the school is raising the quality of teaching in the main school. Very good teaching was seen in five of the 11 lessons observed in Year 9, and in Year 11, in five of the 13 lessons observed.

15. Excellence showed in the learning and teaching in Year 7 physical education, where eager pupils, confident at leading warm-up activities when asked, had their energy and enthusiasm captured by great relationships and the high demand and challenge of the teaching. Learning and teaching showed excellence in the ASDAN course in Year 10. Through the teacher's skilful communication with the group, using anecdote and humour to enliven the session, all individuals were successfully integrated throughout, gave confident, sensible answers, helped others to give answers, contributed good ideas, drew well on their previous learning, and got down to their own work very quickly, without fuss.

16. The qualities which distinguish very good teaching from good teaching are evident throughout the school. In Years 7 to 11 they are demonstrated by the following examples.

Year 11

- From the start, the teacher's high expectations were clear that pupils would remember the work done in the previous lessons and be able to answer challenging questions on it, showing that they could apply what they had learned. Pupils were kept on their toes because they had no idea to whom the next question would be 'fired'. Some lack of understanding was picked up instantly and careful explanations given to secure it. Pupils were totally attentive and keen to contribute, sparking each other off by their interest and enthusiasm.
- The lesson started with a highly stimulating question for paired discussions. Pupils showed their confidence as learners in tackling it, organising themselves effectively. The task was time-limited, and pupils were expected to summarise their findings, using bullet points, and did so effectively. Laptop records were used by the teacher who made appointments to see individual pupils after school to discuss their progress.

Year 9

- The starter activity required pupils to think about their own learning, and the comprehensive instructions enabled them to get going very quickly. This meant that the lesson moved on at a good pace. The teacher kept a sharp eye on everyone, picking up some signs of inattention and refocusing the pupil in less than a minute. The self-evaluation task, carried out in pairs, asked for comments by partners. Pupils commented that this was to 'reduce bias'.

- Pupils were quick to settle and write down the learning targets, a known routine, and boys and girls were willing to contribute examples. Boy-girl pairs worked quickly to complete the first task by the time deadline. The second task built on the first, but was more complex. The teacher's skilful and searching questioning refined pupils' thinking through drawing out perceptive comments which deepened the learning.

...very good range of learning opportunities

17. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have very good opportunities for studying the National Curriculum and religious education. In each year, there are separate, very well-taught drama lessons and effective arrangements for teaching ICT through a specific subject, for example, in Year 7, through modern languages. This programme leads on to a very good range of courses in Years 10 and 11 which is being successfully developed to meet the needs and interests of pupils across the range of attainment. For example, changes are in place for 2003-2004 to increase pupils' option choices from two to three, through discontinuing design and technology as a compulsory subject. Currently, additional courses such as ASDAN and Latin, broaden pupils' opportunities, as do twilight courses such as dance and Japanese. While most pupils take ten GCSE courses, there is a good range of other opportunities, for example, through vocational courses. In addition to the accredited two weeks' work placement, a small number of Year 11 pupils participate in additional work experience opportunities or follow studies part-time at school and college. Such arrangements support pupils' subsequent move to further education courses such as catering and beauty therapy, which in 2002, involved about 20 per cent of Year 11 leavers.

18. Excellent arrangements for careers advice are well established and considered imaginatively, for example, looking at ways of managing gap years. There is a very thorough exploration at what is entailed in university courses and every support for the application process. About two-thirds of sixth-form students take the opportunity for work placements to support their explorations into careers. It is extremely helpful that pupils and sixth-formers can make individual appointments with the careers advisor on two days a week. Pupils are helped to think beyond gender stereotypes by visiting speakers, including for example, a female engineer. On six half-days each year, all year-groups follow an imaginatively conceived personal and social education programme, which alongside religious education and other departments, incorporates citizenship studies effectively. The school's citizenship audit is complete. The arrangements for the programme, which involve all staff including the headteacher and deputies, give status and emphasis to the programme.

19. The very good range of over 60 activities outside the curriculum involves many young people. There are particular strengths in sports, including swimming, juggling and karting, where pupils are the national champions; and in the arts, including an annual show, usually involving about 150 young people and staff, and for example, an enthusiastic senior choir which makes a rich sound, and a proficient wind band. Over 150 pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. A young editorial group is responsible for the fortnightly paper 'The Fidem Servavi Times' and a youth branch of Amnesty International is established. There is a weekly calendar of liturgical events and pupils and students in each year group have the opportunity to take part in a residential retreat. Pupils and students speak appreciatively of the range of activities on offer, echoing the very positive views of the parents. The range is successful in extending pupils' social and cultural experiences, either through exploring new opportunities or through developing particular personal skills and interests to a high level.

...pupils and students with special needs

20. Young people with special needs are served very well by the school, both through the special unit for those with speech and language difficulties and through the general arrangements for those with learning or behaviour difficulties. They are mostly taught

alongside their peers and well integrated into lesson activities. The positive attitudes of their classmates help to ensure that their views and ideas are valued and that they play a full part in the life of the school community. There are very efficient systems for tracking individual progress in lessons. All staff have ready access to full and constantly updated information about individuals' needs, including their individual education plans, through the records on the laptops. As a result, planning is very effective. It is backed up by very good guidance on specific difficulties to help teachers and learning assistants to provide the best for pupils and students through making it possible for them to do the work for themselves. For example, by talking through mouse movement at a computer, but not taking it over. Pupils whose behaviour gives cause for concern are included in a special programme to help them to fit better into school life and lessons, and so reduce the likelihood of disaffection and exclusion.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	32
	Sixth form	64
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		61

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	2	12	14	3	1	0	0
Percentage	6	37	44	10	3	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	2	17	39	6	0	0	0
Percentage	3	27	61	9	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1150	302
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	103	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	37	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	76	7

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	33
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	52

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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	117	115	232

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	72	85	87
	Girls	93	85	94
	Total	165	170	181
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (77)	74 (69)	78 (77)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	36 (43)	43 (46)	41 (46)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	66	81	86
	Girls	91	87	98
	Total	157	168	184
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (70)	73 (71)	80 (81)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (25)	43 (48)	43 (50)
	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	123	93	216

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	118	122
	Girls	61	87	89
	Total	127	205	211
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	59 (57)	95 (94)	98 (97)
	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	43.7 (43.2)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	57	65	122
	Average point score per candidate	208.8 (N/A) *	247.1 (N/A)	227.8 (N/A)
National	Average point score per candidate	* (N/A)	* (N/A)	* (N/A)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations in 2002			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations in 2002		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	56	61	117	1	4	5
	Average point score per candidate	208.0	257.4	233.8	80.0	90.0	88.0
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

* School figures are not available for 2001 in the new style; national figures are not yet available for 2002.

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

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

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1412	99	2
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	5	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	1	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	12	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 – Y18

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	85.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9

Education support staff: Y7 – Y18

Total number of education support staff	30
Total aggregate hours worked per week	775

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y18

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	28
Key Stage 4	22

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	4 119 806
Total expenditure	4 078 511
Expenditure per pupil	2844
Balance brought forward from previous year	(224 652)
Balance carried forward to next year	(183 065)

Figures in parentheses indicate negative values

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	29

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	4
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3
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	1452
Number of questionnaires returned	440

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	42	6	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	51	43	4	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	52	7	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	53	10	0	1
The teaching is good.	45	50	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	40	49	9	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	52	40	4	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	30	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	37	47	11	3	1
The school is well led and managed.	53	39	3	2	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	42	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	49	35	5	1	9

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

21. A-level results have improved each year from 1998 to 2002 as measured by the 'old-style' points system. In comparison with national results in 1998, they were below average; in 1999, average; and in 2000 and 2001, above average. The 2002 results cannot yet be compared with national results. The pass rate in 2002 was 96 per cent and has steadily improved from 83 per cent in 1999. Steady improvement from 1999 also shows in the proportions of students gaining three A-levels, increased from 53 to 79 per cent; and gaining two A-levels, increased from 81 to 94 per cent. The proportion gaining at least one-level has remained high, 98 per cent in 2002, and the proportion gaining four A-levels has fluctuated, showing however, an overall fall from 1999. Since the last inspection, the number of students in the sixth form has grown by 13 per cent and now includes students from other schools. About 80 per cent of Year 11 pupils stay into the sixth form and most continue their studies through to Year 13. The extent of the college's success also shows in the 94 per cent of students going on to further or higher education in 2002, compared with 67 per cent at the last inspection.

22. External analysis of the value added in individual subject results shows strength generally maintained in 1999 to 2002 in five subjects: biology, classical civilisation, expressive arts, sociology, and either mathematics or further mathematics. The value added by art and design and physics improved in 2002 to become broadly average for the first time. The position of French fluctuates, although broadly average in 2002. Music appears in the lowest 25 per cent in three of the last four years, including 2002.

23. In the work seen in the fifteen sixth-form subjects inspected, listed in the table on page 14, the judgement that standards overall by Year 13 are average balances some variation between subjects. The main reason for well above average standards and very good achievement in mathematics and sociology is the very good teaching and learning in the respective departments. A particular strength in sociology is the development of students' skills of critical analysis and their confident use of concepts and theories to clarify and explain social structures. In mathematics, the working relationships between staff and students are particularly strong, teachers handle question and answer sessions very skilfully, and students know exactly how well they are doing because of the quality of the feedback they receive. In history, where standards are below average by Year 13, the completely new teaching team is raising students' standards in Year 12, which are now average. However, significant improvement has still to be achieved to improve standards in Year 13. Very good planning of courses and detailed feedback on assessed work are establishing good learning in history.

24. Students' achievement in relation to their GCSE results is good in design and technology, ICT, physical education, art and design, music, geography and French. There are different reasons why achievement in the three subjects with above average standards is good rather than very good, some of which are issues for the school rather than for the particular department. In art and design, there is lack of access to studios and inadequate resources for advanced study. Some patchy attendance and non-completion of homework are evident in design and technology. Work is insufficiently varied to match students' differing learning needs in ICT. In geography, the study skills of lower attainers in selecting relevant data for written assignments are not securely developed. Composing skills are less well developed than other skills in music. In French, students are not well enough prepared

for the difference in the level of demand in advanced work compared to the demand at GCSE.

25. In biology, physics, health and social care, English and German the work shows satisfactory achievement. In English, the improvements being set in place by the new head of department have not yet had time to raise achievement by Year 13 and there is scope for students to be more actively involved in their own learning. In German, students' efforts in improving their grammatical accuracy are not always successful and are a limiting factor in their achievement, and the preparation for the demands of advanced study is another. In health and social care, insufficient emphasis on developing students' communication skills, including their skills of analysis and evaluation, is a limiting factor in their achievement. In biology and physics, students generally achieve as expected.

26. Providing the best possible opportunities for each student to achieve well is at the heart of the developments set in place over the last five years. This is realised with considerable success. To raise achievement further, the scope for further development is in increasing the amount of very good teaching.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

27. The very positive atmosphere in the sixth form, generated by the emphasis on Christian values and the valuing of all students as individuals, contributes to students' mature attitudes to their work and their relationships with other members of this strong community. This is true for all groups, including those from ethnic minorities and pupils with special needs. Students are actively involved in the management of the sixth form through the sixth-form council. In the first meeting of the council without a member of staff in attendance, students handled the business effectively, all present participating in the decision-making process. Students' response to the frequent disruption and room changes caused by the building works is mature and thoughtful. When opportunities arise for students to offer ideas, organise and make decisions about their own learning, their response is good, although such opportunities are not provided equally well in all the subjects inspected. Students report an active sixth-form social life: when someone has a birthday, everyone celebrates!

28. The electronic registration system recently introduced is not yet capable of producing fully reliable data on sixth-form attendance. Observations during the inspection revealed a high number of absences from some lessons. There is evidence in the work seen that absence has a negative effect on standards. The satisfactory rate of sixth-form attendance shown by the school's current records is not as good as the rate in the main school. The expectation is that it should be equally as good.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

29. The consistently good teaching across most of the subjects inspected in the sixth form owes much to the monitoring by senior staff, the cycle of substantial department reviews, good staff appointments made through very thorough appointments procedures, the quality of relationships in the sixth form, the enthusiasm and thorough attention to detail of the head of sixth form, and the climate of rigorous improvement reflected in the school's approach to its work. Where teaching is very good overall, in mathematics and sociology, so is students' achievement over time and standards are well above average. In the 13 other subjects inspected, very good teaching was seen in Year 12 lessons, as well as an excellent Year 12 physics lesson. Very good teaching was seen in Year 13 in biology, and an excellent Year 13 lesson was sampled in performing arts. On the few occasions when

students with special needs were observed in lessons, they were fully integrated in the activities and handled the work as well as other students.

30. In addition to the very good teaching seen in mathematics and sociology lessons in both Years 12 and 13, very good Year 12 teaching was seen in biology, physics, design and technology, art and design, music, geography, history, French and German, and included teaching by newly qualified staff. The qualities reflecting the difference between very good and good teaching and learning were:

- a combination of pace and challenge which motivated and involved students;
- students' active consolidation at regular intervals through the lesson of what had been covered, by jotting down key facts of the previous discussion for themselves; this kept them concentrating and thinking ahead;
- the teacher's sustained enthusiasm and inventive approach to utilising resources which enhanced students' learning;
- well-structured teaching, with pace and progression sustained through timed activities, with students' sights raised by high expectations;
- students challenged to make connections between points, using the work scheme very effectively to check on issues, with direct teaching of examination technique;
- very challenging tasks, for all levels of attainment, and good enough working relationships to allow students to feel confident in taking risks in their responses to questions;
- the concluding plenary session did not merely sum up but pushed students further in their understanding of where the topic was heading.

31. In the six lessons, in four subjects, where teaching was satisfactory rather than good, the qualities reflecting the difference between satisfactory and good teaching and learning were:

- students' lack of active involvement; for example, throughout the lesson, they were only required to watch and listen to the teacher;
- challenge was lacking, for example, for students to put forward their own ideas;
- students were not successfully encouraged to think for themselves;
- the teacher's delivery was flat;
- there was a lack of pace and stimulating discussion;
- points were not followed up;
- there were gaps in the planning which were not rectified in the lesson so that there were gaps in students' learning.

32. Excellence was seen in two lessons.

- In the Year 13 performing arts lesson sampled, it was demonstrated by the teacher's fine judgement over when to present a model for students, when to intervene with suggestions, and when to stand back; in the very good sense of partnership between teacher and students.
- It was evident in Year 12 physics, in a fast-moving mental warm-up, lots of challenge and much recall of earlier work, all of which continually questioned students' understanding; in the use of laptop and projector for simulations; and in the stimulating and highly appropriate presentation of subject knowledge in a tutorial atmosphere.

33. In the subjects inspected, the teaching of key skills – communication, application of number and ICT - is mostly good, and satisfactory in health and social care, art and design and history. All subjects give good attention to preparing for essay-writing and synoptic questions in examinations. Students are well aware of points for spelling and grammar. However, the use of ICT beyond word-processing is not equally established across the subjects inspected, and not all plan opportunities for students to make presentations.

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

34. The very good quality and range in the sixth-form curriculum show in the choice of courses which continue National Curriculum subjects to an advanced level, as well as in the new courses introduced. New subject choices include both academic courses such as sociology, and vocational courses such as health and social care. Two distance learning courses in law and government and politics extend the offer and are supported by video-conferencing facilities. The success of these arrangements shows in the high proportion of Year 11 students transferring into the sixth form, as well as in the similarly high proportion continuing into post-school education. This range of opportunities meets the school's aim of an 'open sixth' and serves students very well. A wide-ranging programme of additional activities caters very well for individual interests and supports students' personal development. Over a third take up the opportunity for work experience during Year 12.

35. Most students have a demanding timetable, particularly in Year 12, which leaves very little time for private study during the school day. This is partly the result of the time allocated for religious education, a strong emphasis in this Catholic sixth-form college, and by the very good enrichment programme. Students' non-contact time is monitored by the head of sixth form; the approach is a flexible one and adjustments are made for individuals who find the load too great. Students with special needs are taking appropriate courses in relation to their prior attainment and handle the demands of advanced studies successfully. Facilities for private study across the college are generally satisfactory for the current size of the sixth form, although the lack of provision in science hinders students' work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

36. The comprehensive pastoral system for the sixth form includes the excellent arrangements for assessment through which students' academic progress is assessed and reported at two-monthly intervals. Following individual interviews with tutors, both students and their parents receive an interim assessment record on the first two occasions in the year, and the third leads to a full report from subject departments. Parents are invited to school to discuss these assessments. The records and reports give a clear statement on attainment, with individual targets for improvement. All assessment records are held on computer, are readily available and used very effectively by staff to track progress and pinpoint any underachievement. In some lessons, staff were observed in discussion with individual students using these records on their laptops for monitoring purposes. This school-wide practice is excellent for all students, including those with special needs and is significantly contributing to raising achievement. In the subjects inspected, assessment procedures are very good in biology, physics, physical education, art and design, geography, sociology, English, French and German. Marking of students' work is generally of very good quality, with helpful comments on how to improve, especially in history, English, French and German. Some improvement is needed in biology and physics and there is scope in music for making marking comments clearer.

Advice, support and guidance

37. Students benefit from excellent advice and guidance. They appreciate the strong sense of community in the sixth form. They speak highly of their friendly supportive teachers and are confident that they are known very well as individuals by their tutors. This is the basis for the very good advice and guidance they generally receive before they begin their Year 12 studies. Each student has an interview with senior staff to ensure that their chosen courses

match both their career hopes and their abilities. Entry requirements are clearly published and arrangements are sufficiently flexible to allow a change of course(s) early on if students find their choice(s) are not appropriate. However, written information on the content and expectations of subject courses is not always sufficiently clear to ensure that students know what to expect. For example, in English, some did not feel well prepared for the content of the courses and level of work expected of them in the sixth form. The college has appropriately identified this as an area for development, and guidance is to be published in the sixth-form handbook for 2003-2004. In English, this is being rectified by the new head of department. Careers information and guidance available for students in the sixth form are excellent, as reported in paragraph 18.

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

38. Parents' questionnaire returns clearly show their high regard for the school, the sixth-form college and the language college. The level of response to the questionnaire was high, and all questions received a very positive rating. The school's oversubscription by a third shows how its reputation has recently grown. This was confirmed by parents at the pre-inspection meeting who spoke very appreciatively of the improvements made since the appointment of the headteacher. In discussions in subjects, students' views of the sixth-form college were found to be equally positive. As reported in the sixth-form annex, their comments during the inspection did not confirm the extent of the dissatisfaction indicated by their questionnaire returns. They rate the college highly. The growth in numbers, including those now joining Year 12 from other schools, is a further reflection of the growing reputation.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

39. Excellent leadership and management of the sixth form are exercised at the highest level by the headteacher, with the deputy heads and head of sixth form, through weekly review and strategy meetings. The vision of a sixth form offering all students opportunities for continuing education of high quality, through a wide range of academic and vocational courses at different levels, is being realised with notable success, as reported in earlier paragraphs. This vision, while specific in strategy for the sixth form, is rooted in the values by which the whole school is led, managed and governed. The coherence of the approach is exceptionally strong. It is reflected well in the current development plan for the sixth form. Key priorities for action are targets for results at AS- and A/AVCE-level; raising achievement through monitoring teaching and improving the leadership and management of teaching and learning; and ensuring that there are relevant courses for students of all abilities. Detailed action for each area is appropriate and sharp. Among the priorities, the 'management of teaching and learning' is a wise and highly pertinent one. The consistently good teaching seen during the inspection reflects significant improvement over the last five years. It has been brought about in part by monitoring the quality of lessons. However, the records of lesson observations are not as sharp as other sections of subject reviews. Without strengthening the rigour with which teaching is evaluated, the capability for raising the quality to very good is not sufficiently robust.

40. Part of the vision for St Wilfrid's is about harnessing technology to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of management, in order to sustain the emphasis on raising achievement. The use of technology is excellent. Individual wireless laptops, allocated to and used by most members of staff, combined with the college's intranet facilities, multi-media projectors, video-conferencing facilities and Internet access for research, are substantially improving the quality and efficiency of course provision. The outstanding feature is the use for

assessment and monitoring of students' progress, as reported in paragraph 36.

Resources

41. There is a good match between staff expertise and experience and the needs of the sixth-form curriculum. Consequently, teaching draws on very strong subject knowledge and skills and considerable experience and expertise in examination work. Resources for learning in the sixth form are satisfactory. In the subjects inspected, the stock of books, materials and equipment is at least satisfactory, with strengths in music and sociology, and excellence in languages. However, for many subjects, the learning resource centre/library is not sufficiently well stocked for advanced work. The book stock is helpfully under review and currently being augmented. Accommodation for the sixth form is unsatisfactory, serving the needs of sixth-form students at least adequately in only half the subjects inspected. Deficiencies are well known to the school and will mostly be rectified by future refurbishment and building programmes. However, the current accommodation is unsatisfactory in biology, physics, physical education, art and design, music, French and German. The area available for the sixth form in the Learning Resource Centre is too small for the number of students needing to use it. Each of these areas of weakness is rectified in the architect's plans for new building.

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

In the inspection, 15 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	42	88	*	26	*	31.4	*
Biology	31	100	*	35	*	41.6	*
Chemistry	29	83	*	14	*	29.0	*
Physics	21	90	*	24	*	32.9	*
Design and technology food	4	75	*	25	*	22.5	*
Design and technology product design	7	86	*	14	*	28.6	*
Design and technology textiles	6	83	*	17	*	35.0	*
Business	15	80	*	20	*	29.3	*
ICT	34	62	*	12	*	18.5	*
Physical education	11	100	*	55	*	40.9	*
Art and design	15	100	*	7	*	32.0	*
Music	14	79	*	14	*	27.9	*
Performing arts	13	92	*	54	*	43.1	*
Media	28	89	*	18	*	30.7	*
Classical civilisation	3	100	*	0	*	33.3	*
Geography	8	88	*	13	*	28.8	*
History	26	92	*	15	*	31.9	*
Religious studies	32	78	*	9	*	25.0	*
Government & politics	2	100	*	50	*	40.0	*
Law	18	61	*	17	*	22.2	*
Sociology	17	94	*	35	*	38.2	*
Psychology	49	80	*	18	*	29.4	*
English	13	92	*	23	*	30.8	*
English literature	15	80	*	7	*	23.3	*
French	1	100	*	0	*	30.0	*
German	6	83	*	0	*	26.7	*
General studies	167	62	*	14	*	21.3	*

Spanish	2	100	*	0	*	30.0	*
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* National comparisons are not yet available.

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	32	97	*	47	*	85.0	*
Biology	34	100	*	32	*	78.2	*
Chemistry	16	87	*	31	*	68.8	*
Physics	13	92	*	38	*	66.2	*
Design and technology product design	3	100		0	*	60.0	*
Business studies	13	92	*	46	*	78.5	*
ICT	15	80	*	0	*	45.3	*
Physical education	12	100	*	17	*	68.3	*
Health and social care	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	44.0	*
Art and design	2	100	*	0	*	80.0	*
Music	4	100	*	25	*	70.0	*
Performing arts	11	91	*	36	*	76.4	*
Media	25	96	*	20	*	71.2	*
Classical civilisation	3	100	*	33	*	80.0	*
Latin	1	100	*	0	*	80.0	*
Geography	8	100	*	62	*	95.0	*
History	19	100	*	16	*	70.5	*
Religious studies	8	100	*	25	*	77.5	*
Sociology	11	100	*	27	*	80.0	*
Psychology	26	100	*	31	*	80.0	*
English literature	10	90	*	20	*	68.0	*
French	6	100	*	33	*	86.7	*
German	3	100	*	33	*	66.7	*
Spanish	4	100	*	50	*	100.0	*
General studies	16	94	*	7	*	55.3	*

* National comparisons are not yet available.

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	6	100	*	33	*	0	*

Health and social care	6	100	*	0	*	0	*
Leisure and tourism	12	100	*	0	*	8	*

** National comparisons are not yet available.*

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, further mathematics, biology and physics. No lessons in other subjects or courses were observed. The courses available are A-level mathematics, A-level further mathematics, and a GCSE resit class where this can be arranged on the timetable. Students have no choice in the modules that make up A level mathematics and further mathematics.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Students' very good achievement
- Very good teaching leading to very good learning
- Very strong relationships between students and teachers creating a very good working atmosphere to support learning.

Areas for improvement

- Scope for extending the arrangements for monitoring lessons, which are at an early stage of implementation.

42. The standards of work seen by Year 12 are above average, and by Year 13 are well above average. There is little difference between the standards in the work of female students and the work of male students. Students' work in Year 13 shows confidence in the use of mechanics and statistics, with appropriate applications of calculus and algebra to these two strands. The 2001 A-level results were well above average; the figures are maintained in 2002, although no national comparisons can yet be made. There is a rising trend in examination results, which in past years have been consistently above average. A very small number of students each year study A-level further mathematics. In this subject, the results and achievement are good with all students who follow the course passing the final examination.

43. Students' achievement from their average standards when they join the sixth form to their A-level results is very good. The majority continue their mathematics studies into Year 13. All students make very good gains in knowledge and skills. All value the A-level course and the teaching they receive. They are particularly appreciative of teachers' approachability and the very clear guidance they are given. All students are sufficiently engaged with the subject to ask intelligent questions in lessons and to discuss ideas with their classmates. This is especially noticeable in Year 13 where students show very mature and positive attitudes.

44. Learning and teaching are very good. Lessons are very well planned, and teachers have good knowledge of the subject. The relationships between students and teachers are very strong and, combined with teachers' high expectations, generate a very positive working atmosphere. Teachers use very effective question and answer sessions to draw all students into discussion and to check their understanding. As a result, students work hard in lessons, are fully involved, enthusiastic about the subject and make very good progress. However, there are some occasions where opportunities are missed for students to predict the next stage of the topic themselves. Most marking of work is good; comments are helpful and show students how to improve. However, this good practice is not in place consistently

across the department. Students have a clear idea about how well they are doing, for example, through homework assignments and frequent tests, which are very effective in consolidating what they have learned. Reports to parents are very clear, showing exactly how students are progressing and indicating how they might improve.

45. Leadership and management by the new head of department are good. The A-level courses are well organised and all teachers are clear about how to teach them. While staff discuss ideas about teaching approaches informally and teachers observe each other's lessons, formal monitoring of teaching is still at an early stage. There are up-to-date textbooks and teachers make good use of equipment such as overhead projectors and displays on laptop computers. The use of ICT facilities for teaching A-level is at an early stage.

46. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Results then were average and have been raised to well above average.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Enthusiastic, committed teachers with very good subject knowledge
- Very good relationships between students and staff
- Well-planned and challenging lessons, drawing on a wide variety of contemporary sources and leading to interested and well-motivated students.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient and poor quality laboratories and lack of study space for students
- Not enough written comment in the marking of work on how to improve standards
- Lack of opportunities for students to develop independent research and learning skills.

47. By Year 13, standards in students' work are above average, while average in Year 12. Achievement over time is satisfactory for all students, despite their differing speeds of working. There is little difference between the work of female and male students, or between students from different backgrounds. No students with special needs are taking biology. Students' files are detailed, comprehensive and neatly presented; their written records are cogent and accurate, and allow higher attainers to show their strengths. Talented students show their skills in high-quality drawings and diagrams; gifted students incorporate greater detail in their writing. Students' oral communication is fluent and accurate, although not always using correct vocabulary. Their presentations to fellow students build their confidence. No experimental work was seen during the week. In 2001, the A-level results were above average. There was a slight improvement in 2002, but no national figures yet for comparison. In both years, all AS-level candidates gained an A–E grade. A good proportion of Year 12 students continue their studies into Year 13. For the majority of students, their Year 13 results represent considerable 'added value' compared with their prior attainment. The number of sixth-form biology students is rising slowly and includes students from other 11-16 schools.

48. Students' attitudes are very good. They are well motivated, interested in the subject and have their career paths firmly in mind. They co-operate well and share ideas and information freely. Small group work contributes to their social development and historical references add a cultural aspect, but multicultural aspects of science are not explored. Students show initiative in considering the moral and ethical aspects of their topics on genetic engineering, totally in accordance with the expectations generated by the ethos of St

Wilfrid's. By Year 13, students are mature individuals who take responsibility for their own work and record of progress, including any work missed through absence. They value both biology courses and particularly appreciate the everyday applications of the subject. Although there is a heavy work-load in both years, this is accepted very readily. Regular assessment keeps them informed of how well they are doing.

49. Teaching and learning are good. Staff have very good subject expertise and high expectations, and their enthusiasm and commitment motivate students. Lessons are challenging, especially in the amount of detail expected and the complexity of the vocabulary. Relationships are very good. Students are helped to develop their use of ICT techniques and resources, and these enliven lessons. Staff have a thorough knowledge of their students and of individual needs, and the resulting learning ethos, although challenging, is also encouraging and supportive, and is leading to rising standards. Slower-working students are confident that they will not be left behind and that support is always available. However, there is not enough detailed evaluative comment in the marking, nor enough opportunities for independent research and wider reading. The use of work-sheets sometimes results in superficial knowledge of the subject matter. Key skills such as numeracy are tackled as the need arises.

50. Leadership of the subject and management of the department are good. Newly qualified and part-time teachers are strong players in the biology team. There is a shared sense of purpose and a commitment to the best possible results for each student. Assessment and record keeping are very good and contribute to good planning and close monitoring of students' progress. There is no study area for students in the department.

51. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Teaching and learning have improved and examination results are rising. The critical comments in the last report have been tackled, except for the science laboratories where the weakness persists, although these are shortly to be upgraded.

Physics

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

Strengths

- The team of committed, enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers and the very good relationships between students and staff
- Students motivated by well-planned, challenging lessons
- Small-group teaching facilitating very good learning, with good use of ICT techniques and resources.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient opportunities for students' extended written work and independent research using a variety of sources
- Not enough constructive detailed comment in marking
- Unsatisfactory quality and quantity of laboratories and lack of a study area for students.

52. Standards are above average in Year 13, while average in Year 12. There is no apparent difference between the standards of male and female students, or between students from different backgrounds. Students with special needs progress equally well as other students. Students' written work is presented well and shows good graphical skills. The detail in students' correction and annotation of course work-sheets is impressive. Gifted students in particular, develop the content in great detail, often using Internet sources for additional information. Students' numeracy skills are developed individually to meet course

requirements; their oral communication is good and they use scientific vocabulary correctly. They have good ICT skills. For example, a presentation on the physics of the human heart featured not only a simulated beating heart, but also automatically plotted graphs showing what was happening to blood pressure and the electrical impulses in the organ, all derived from Internet sources. No experimental work was seen during the week, but students' files of practical work show this to be of an appropriate standard. Irregular attendance by some students prejudices their attainment during the course, however. Achievement is satisfactory. The 2001 A-level results were below average. In 2002, the results show an improvement in the proportion of students gaining A and B grades. The 2002 results are the first since the modular course was introduced, which promises further improvement. The number of students taking physics in the sixth form varies, but the new course is encouraging rising numbers. The majority of students questioned intend reading science at university, with a science-based career in mind.

53. Students' attitudes are very good, they co-operate well and their motivation is high. Male students outnumber females, but every student has equal access to staff and to resources. Working together in pairs or small groups, close interaction with staff, 'honest reporting' of results and respect for individuals and for resources, all contribute to their moral and social development. Individual teacher's use of historical aspects provides a cultural dimension to the course, but this is not extended to considerations of physics in different cultures, particularly in the applications of science in developing countries. Students view the courses very positively. They were aware in advance of the work-load they would encounter and the need to plan their activities. Frequent assessment keeps them aware of their attainment and progress and they enjoy the informal atmosphere of the well-ordered lessons.

54. Learning and teaching are very good. Teachers' subject knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm all motivate students well. Lessons are well paced, contain plenty of challenges and all students are involved. Lessons out of the laboratories are of the same high standard as those taught in the laboratories, due to imaginative use of available resources and to staff versatility. Small teaching groups and the very good relationships between students and staff mean that lessons are tutorial in nature, support is given unobtrusively and higher attaining students are extended. State-of-the-art ICT techniques enliven lessons and give students opportunities to extend their ICT skills to enhance their work. However, a disadvantage of the work-sheets used instead of students' own note-taking is that students occasionally complete the sheet during the lesson without having digested the content. Students lack opportunities for extended writing and for individual research and collation of materials from a variety of sources. Marking is regular, but does not incorporate detailed constructive criticism alongside the verbal feedback students receive.

55. Very good leadership and management show in improving results, the effective new course and students' evident enjoyment. However, the department does not have enough laboratories so that some lessons have to be taught in classrooms. Many laboratories are in need of urgent refurbishment which is already scheduled. There is no study area for students in the department. Reference material in the library is inadequate and appropriately under review.

56. Since the last inspection, improvement is good. Learning and teaching have improved, examination results are rising and other issues reported then have all been tackled.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of the inspection was A-level product design. An A-level food technology lesson was sampled in which teaching was good and challenging activities encouraged students to work independently and creatively. Standards are above average. Students have a good knowledge of nutrition, which they use to plan food for people on special diets, such as gluten-free diets. Male students are achieving equally as well as female students and are fully integrated in group-work. Students have a good understanding of the function of ingredients, although those also following science courses have a better understanding of food science because they understand the concepts better. The course meets the needs of students in terms of their interests and career aims.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Good learning and teaching
- Teachers' frequent checking of individual progress and effective guidance helping students to achieve well
- Good relationships between teachers and students.

Areas for improvement

- Homework not always completed, with some adverse effect on standards
- Unsatisfactory attendance by a small proportion of students adversely affecting standards and progress
- Accommodation not reflecting up-to-date aspirations in the subject.

57. Standards of work by Year 13 are average. Students communicate ideas effectively using computers, hand-drawn sketches and formal drawings. They understand examination requirements and complete all sections of their coursework logically, but their practical skills are of a higher order than their understanding of the materials they use. They understand the design process and use it effectively to plan and evaluate their work. Higher attaining students produce imaginative designs, for example for a modular storage system, and their written work is detailed and well organised. Lower attaining students have well organised folders and complete the tasks set, but their designs lack originality and their written work is often superficial. In the 2002 A-level examinations, the first year students have been entered for the examination, they gained D grades. No national comparisons are yet available for 2002. Students' achievement by Year 13 is good in relation to their prior attainment. Most students meet or exceed their targets because they are keen and interested. Students adapt well to the higher levels of work expected in Year 13, learning to recognise good design features and incorporate them into their own work. A high proportion of students continued the subject from Year 12 and are building effectively on their previous learning.

58. Students reach average standards in Year 12. Most show a sound understanding of good design features, for example when they re-design buildings to reflect up-to-date needs. In all materials areas, a significant proportion of students show weaknesses in their understanding of underlying concepts and in their knowledge of the properties of materials. Both higher and lower attaining students achieve well in Year 12 in relation to their prior attainment because teachers encourage them to build on their known strengths in the subject. Most complete their written work in greater depth and detail, but a few are not achieving as well as they could because of poor attendance and the lack of effort they put into their homework.

59. Students' attitudes to learning and personal development are good. Students enjoy the opportunities to work creatively and develop their ideas independently, in spite of the dull and uninspiring workshops they are obliged to work in. They have formed good relationships with teachers and other students. They respect the work and opinions of others and offer supportive evaluations informally. Students have a high regard for teachers and comment positively on the course.

60. Learning and teaching are good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge which most communicate enthusiastically. They know the course examination requirements well and provide very good support and guidance for students' management of their projects, helping them to clarify their ideas without over-direction. This results in work being completed by the deadline, so that the time remaining before the examination is used to good effect for consolidating skills and knowledge. Students work hard in lessons and make good progress because they are encouraged to set their own weekly targets. However, they do not have enough opportunities to present their work formally to others to help them develop skills in presentation and evaluation.

61. Leadership and management are good. The department is well organised and staff work together effectively as a team, each contributing expertise and ideas for the development of the subject. There is a shared commitment to improving standards and a clear direction for the development of the subject.

62. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Product design has been introduced and textiles are now included in the range of materials. Health and safety issues identified in the previous report are no longer of concern.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was A-level ICT. No lessons in other ICT courses were observed.

ICT

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

Strengths

- Good teaching by a team of specialists leading to good learning
- Very good relationships between teachers and students raising students' aspirations
- Effective monitoring of progress together with good use of assessments helping to raise the attainment of individual students
- Very good guidance on managing projects helping students to meet deadlines.

Areas for improvement

- Lesson planning and approaches not always taking sufficient account of the needs of different students.

63. Standards of work by Year 13 are average. Achievement is good in relation to students' prior attainment. Most of the 19 students continued the course from Year 12. Students have a good understanding of course requirements because these are strongly emphasised by teachers to help them focus their studies. The work of higher attaining students shows well-researched projects written in depth and detail. It shows good understanding of 'user-documentation' which enables wider use of, for example, on-line booking systems for a small business. Students maintain good contact with the 'end-users' of their projects which results in appropriate evaluations of their work during its development. Lower attaining students understand and complete coursework requirements, but their work

is more descriptive than analytical and lacks depth. There were no students with special needs in the classes observed. All students show satisfactory understanding of the main elements of research. They make good headway in communicating information efficiently, using appropriate technical language. The progress of a small proportion is restricted by insufficient attention to homework tasks in preparation for lessons. Results at A-level in 2001 were above average. In 2002, the results were below the levels expected; one set of papers has been re-marked and the marks adjusted upwards. No comparisons with national results in 2002 are yet possible.

64. Standards in Year 12 are below average overall although most students are achieving or exceeding their personal target grades for the subject. Most are currently too dependent on their teachers to develop and express ideas for themselves or complete research tasks and written work in sufficient depth and detail. In discussion, female students are generally more prepared than male students to debate issues in pairs or small groups. When there is discussion of criteria for evaluating projects however, higher attaining male and female students are equally successful in considering the needs of 'end-users'.

65. Students' attitudes and personal development are good. By Year 13, students are more confident and willing to think and work independently. They are keen to learn. They show interest in lessons because the content is relevant and they are encouraged to play an active part in planning their own work. Relationships between students and with staff are very good and students respect the views of others. A small number of students in Year 12 however, are reluctant to contribute to discussion. Higher attainers show considerable tenacity in pursuing their course-work projects in depth and detail. Students express the view that they are well supported by their teachers and have appropriate resources. They have a high regard for teachers' subject expertise and their ability to guide coursework effectively.

66. Learning and teaching are good. Teachers communicate their very good subject knowledge clearly and efficiently. Their good knowledge of examination requirements is apparent and respected by students. Good liaison between sixth-form teachers is facilitating good progression in learning. Teachers mark work frequently to check individual progress and give good guidance for improvement. Students learn well by following advice. While teachers generally use effective teaching methods, they do not always take sufficient account in their planning of the range of attainment in classes.

67. Leadership and management are good. With very good support from the school, the new head of department has settled in quickly and has made a good start in evaluating current provision and planning for the future. There is a clear vision for developing the subject and sensitivity to issues relating to the management of change. Good relationships and mutual respect between staff support their work to improve standards

68. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Resources are substantially improved and computers are now used by all staff to manage their work. Teaching and learning are now good and plans are underway to introduce more vocational courses. All Year 12 students now follow enrichment courses to support their work in other subjects.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was A-level physical education. No lessons in other subjects or courses were observed.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Good management and leadership committed to improving standards
- Students achieve well because of good teaching
- Good relationships helping students to learn well.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use of methods that involve students sufficiently in their own learning and encourage them to be independent.

69. Standards of work in Year 13 are average overall. They are above average for female students and average to below average for male students. Achievement is good and generally a reflection of students' wide range of attainment at GCSE. Students have a sound knowledge of anatomy and physiology and can use this when describing the body in action. Higher attaining students draw together knowledge from several areas. For example, an essay on analysing a front crawl action in swimming included work on the principles of training and the effect of training on muscle structure. Students have a satisfactory understanding of current issues in sport. However, written work and notes show over-dependence upon textbooks and the work covered in class. There is little evidence of wider reading and research. This is particularly true of lower attaining students, among whom there is some resulting underachievement. Students' skills of literacy and numeracy are satisfactory overall and benefit from very clear marking and guidance from teachers. Students know why they gain a particular grade and how to improve it. Higher attaining students produce well-structured essays showing good development in their ideas and opinions. However, insufficient use is made of ICT for research. Students are sometimes hesitant in class discussions and when making presentations to others. In Year 12, both female and male students are making good progress in lessons and achieving well over time. They make a lively contribution to class discussions as an aid to learning.

70. In 2001, the first year the course was offered at the college, all AS-level students gained a grade and over half achieved a higher grade. Results in 2002 at AS-level were slightly lower. In 2002, for the first set of A-level results, data provided by the college show that students achieved what might be expected from their AS-level and GCSE grades.

71. Students' attitudes are good; they have positive views about the course. Recruitment to this new course in Year 12 is good, with numbers continuing to rise. Most Year 12 students continue into Year 13, and many continue with sports studies on leaving the college. Relationships with teachers are a strength and a positive element in helping students to learn. Students feel they are well taught and that teachers give them good support and encouragement. They particularly value the process of checking their progress against their target grades. They have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and where they need to improve. However, students' work and their response in lessons show that they are too reliant on teachers and that teaching methods do not sufficiently encourage their self-motivation.

72. Learning and teaching are good and students make good gains in knowledge. Teachers have good knowledge of the syllabus and examination requirements and their planning is thorough. Students are well prepared for written examinations and benefit from very good individual support and encouragement. Some very good practice was seen where teachers had carefully marked students' work and used the assessments in the next lesson to ensure secure knowledge and understanding of the topic. Homework is set regularly to consolidate and extend learning, but some students do not complete the tasks sufficiently well. This shows particularly when the homework is planned to provide the basis for work and discussion in subsequent lessons. Teachers' questioning, while confirming knowledge, does not always go on to probe understanding more deeply and challenge opinions. Students are not sufficiently independent in their learning.

73. Good leadership and management are bringing about improvement. There is good commitment to the values of the college and to equality of opportunity. Effective action for further improvement has followed from very good analysis of the new course and students' results. Learning in some lessons, however, is limited by unsatisfactory accommodation that is too small for the numbers involved so that more active teaching methods cannot be employed.

74. Physical education was not reported in detail at the previous inspection. Since then the new A-level course has been successfully introduced and is popular with students.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The focus of the inspection was the AVCE health and social care course. Students can take a number of vocational courses including health and social care at intermediate level. The number of students on these courses is low.

Health and social care

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

Strengths

- Satisfactory achievement from students' modest standards when they join the course
- Students' work experience supported by close links with the local community.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient emphasis on developing communication skills, including skills of analysis and evaluation
- Students on work placement not monitored through visits by staff.

75. By Year 13, standards are below average. Small numbers of students with modest GCSE grades choose the subject because of interest and the opportunity to submit a portfolio of work as part of the examination. Students' achievement over the course is satisfactory overall, and for some it is good. Their folders and portfolios contain interesting material and the course-work reflects the examination board requirements. Students respond well to the careful individual instruction they receive from their teachers and they make good use of computers to improve their presentations and essays. In one joint Year 12 and Year 13 lesson, the students in Year 12 wrote about their work experiences, while Year 13 students analysed and designed articles for client groups. In another lesson, students demonstrated their first aid skills using resuscitation equipment. The pace of the lesson was determined by the practical activity but there were limited opportunities for discussion. Most Year 12 students continue the subject into Year 13 and most achieve a grade in the AVCE examination. The numbers entering in 2001 were too small for valid

comparisons to be made with national results. In 2002, the results showed standards to be much the same, but no national comparisons are yet available. Up to 2001, results for the Intermediate Vocational Qualifications have been around the national average.

76. Students in the combined years work together co-operatively and the transition to Year 12 is successfully achieved. Students tackle portfolio work with enterprise but their skills in critical analysis and research work are not always sufficiently developed. Course work shows careful preparation. The close attention of teachers ensures that lower attainers are able to contribute at an appropriate level. On the Intermediate course, students are using relevant skills and concepts confidently and their achievement is good

77. Students have positive attitudes to their studies and respond carefully to questions. The course, including the preparation for work experience and work placements, contributes effectively to the students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Students make sound use of ICT and a small number follow up websites to obtain required information. Attendance is a weakness on this advanced course, although students say that they enjoy it, especially the work placements.

78. Learning and teaching are satisfactory overall, and some is good. There are clear lesson plans. Teachers encourage students' individual work on specific projects and provide the necessary resources. A suitable range of activities is used for which learning targets are identified in the work schemes. Students' progress is monitored carefully and this contributes to setting targets for their assessments. Teachers make effective use of Year 12 students' experience in care settings by encouraging students to understand the needs of the staff in different client groups. Work experience is supported by the college's close links with the local community, although students do not receive monitoring visits from staff on their work placements. The experiences of Year 13 are not always fully utilised to benefit those in Year 12. Teachers' comments on students' folders are helpful and many suggest appropriate ways to make improvements.

79. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Some staff are not specialists but much has been achieved with careful management and support to ensure that provision is satisfactory. Accommodation and resources, although satisfactory, are not always suitable for the planned activities.

80. The subject has been introduced since the last inspection, part of the college's broadening of the range of courses available, a good development.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on A-level art and design and music. A Year 13 performing arts lesson of exceptional quality was also sampled. Students' standards were well above average. Excellent teaching and learning, and students' extremely positive approach to their work, resulted in very high achievement.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Very good departmental leadership and management
- Very knowledgeable and committed staff
- Very good contribution to students' spiritual and moral development.

Areas for improvement

- The poor quality of accommodation
- Students' limited access to studios
- Inadequate resources, particularly for the presentation of work.

81. Standards by Year 13 are above average. Students have strengths in mixed media work, where they combine collage, paint and textural materials in vigorous colourful designs. Their work includes very high quality illustrative drawings and paintings, incorporating surreal and fantastic imagery, which show considerable imagination and technical skill. However, students' skill in drawing from direct observation is below average and their knowledge of artists and their work is generally weak. Female students attain higher standards than male students, as they did at GCSE. Results at A-level have varied considerably, but there is an upward trend over recent years that is continuing in the standards seen during the inspection.

82. Achievement over Years 12 and 13 is good. Higher attaining students achieve well in broadening the range of materials they use and developing more complex compositions, often using text and symbolism to convey deeper meanings. Lower attainers make effective use of ICT to compensate for their weaker drawing skills and to explore alternative ways of presenting their images more quickly. Gifted and talented students achieve well, taking increasing control of the style and character of their work. Standards in key skills are average. Aspects of literacy and numeracy are taught as required with considerable help for students' 'artist study' essays. Good use is made of ICT as a creative tool. Rising standards in ICT are limited by the small number of accessible computers which slows the teaching of skills.

83. Students' attitudes and personal development are good. Mutually supportive relationships are encouraged by the teachers' example, particularly in Year 13, where students show a greater maturity and sense of community than the Year 12 groups. By considering such international events as the Holocaust and 'September 11' from the perspective of individuals involved, Year 13 students gain a very good personal insight into the spiritual and moral aspects of these. Students appreciate the complementary teaching styles and expertise of staff and readily accept and act upon the advice they receive. Gifted and talented students show increasing independence and initiative and are pro-active in putting their work forward for wider use within the school. The number of pupils taking GCSE art and design is about half that expected for this size of school and take-up at A-level has been low. Over the last two years however, a good proportion of these pupils have gone on to take the subject in Year 12 and around two-thirds of these continue into Year 13. Over half of the Year 13 students are considering careers in the field of art and design.

84. Learning and teaching are good. Students' knowledge and skills are extended by the very good technical expertise and enthusiastic encouragement of staff. Teaching contributes very well to students' personal development through introducing challenging themes and new media, related to a good range of artists and styles. Teachers' emphasis on individual mentoring ensures that appropriate targets are set for each student. The quality of oral guidance given during projects and the recording of assessments at the end are very good.

However, insufficient use is made of the resulting data to monitor students' achievement over time. There is a lack of uniformity in the approach towards students' management of their folders and assessment records.

85. Leadership and management are very good, setting clear priorities centred around meeting the needs of individual students. The department is very well staffed, organised and documented. Experienced teachers provide a very good balance of skills and approaches to match the students' different approach to their work. However, accommodation is unsatisfactory. While there is adequate space for students to work during sixth-form lessons, the heavy use of rooms by large classes in lower years limits their access during study periods. Limited storage restricts the size and scope of three-dimensional work. Resources for art and design are barely adequate. The poor quality papers used for storing and mounting pictures do not do justice to the quality of the students' work.

86. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Most issues have been tackled, apart from the quality of the accommodation which is scheduled shortly for refurbishment.

Music

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

Strengths

- Consistently good teaching
- The very good relationships and attitudes of the students
- Strong contribution to the personal development of the students
- Very good use of ICT and resources.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient accommodation for this growing department
- Not enough attention to music of different cultural traditions.

87. In Years 12 and 13, standards are above average and students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. Performance standards are high: students play and sing sensitively, with a good sense of style. Their investigations into two performances of the same music by different artists are detailed and perceptive. High standards are achieved in the analysis of set works and students show good knowledge of technical vocabulary. Standards in composition are more varied. The setting of words to music is generally good; students show a good feel for word rhythms and compose effective melodies. However their writing of two-part counterpoint suffers from an approach which is too harmonic. There are no students with special needs, or for whom English is not their mother tongue, and there are no significant differences in the performance of male and female students. The numbers entered for A-level are too small for valid comparisons with national results and identification of trends. Most of the students entered in 2001 and 2002 gained a grade, with a good proportion gaining A-B grades.

88. Relationships in the department are very good. Students are courteous and work well together, for example in instrumental ensembles and other extra-curricular activities. They have a very good attitude to the subject, which means that they work hard in lessons and support the department's activities well. In class discussion they are not afraid to put their own points of view, occasionally challenging the teacher's interpretation. Their views of the subject are very positive: they enjoy the course and the general musical life of the school and appreciate the help given by the staff. The department makes a very strong contribution to students' personal development: extra-curricular activities contribute well to their social and cultural development; they study a wide range of music from the Western European classical

tradition in addition to twentieth century music, although opportunities for the appreciation of music of differing cultural traditions are limited. The students make a strong contribution to the liturgical life of the school, taking the lead in organising music for the regular masses and other services.

89. Learning and teaching are consistently good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it well in their explanations and illustrations. Lessons are well planned and challenging, and expectations are high. For example a Year 12 class were involved in a detailed analysis of a Mendelssohn overture which required them to work out harmonic structures and identify features of orchestration. Resources are very well used, such as the camera used to project a musical score onto the whiteboard as important features in the music were pointed out. ICT is used well, both for presentations by staff and to help students when composing. The management of students is very good, which results in well-paced lessons leading to productive working. This goes hand in hand with a good emphasis on independent learning; for example students undertake individual composition projects and performance investigations. Marking is conscientious but is not always sufficiently clear about the standard achieved, although there is a good level of verbal feedback to students.

90. Leadership and management are good. The development plan has appropriate priorities, showing good vision. A wide range of instrumental teaching and extra-curricular activities is coordinated well. The quality of resources is very good, including a very good range of equipment for ICT and music technology, a wide range of audio and printed materials, and a good selection of library books and scores. The accommodation is unsatisfactory, however. Although well situated and a pleasant environment, it has insufficient space for all the musical activities offered in the department. The range of activities results from very large GCSE groups in Years 10 and 11 and over 200 students taking instrumental lessons. Combined with poor sound insulation between rooms, this has a negative effect on learning, particularly in the areas of listening and composition.

91. There is good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen and the number of students opting for music courses has increased.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography, history and sociology. A lesson in A-level theology was also observed. This showed average standards and good achievement by students. Very good teaching utilised students' presentations and group discussion to deepen understanding of the teachings of scholars on the subject of conscience.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Very good working relationships between students and teachers
- Good teaching leading to good achievement
- Good leadership and management committed to high standards.

Areas for improvement

- Criteria for assessment not always explained clearly enough for lower attaining students.

92. The standard of work seen in Years 12 and 13 is above average. This represents good achievement by the students. For both AS- and A-level courses, all students build up comprehensive portfolios of work on all topics. They demonstrate good factual recall, for example of the nature of the physical and human hazards affecting the lives of people living in Los Angeles, and have a good understanding of geographical concepts. The majority display a sound ability to apply their knowledge to complete extended writing tasks and to answer practice examination questions. However, there are differences in students' ability to manipulate information in order to answer questions effectively, in spite of the department's good teaching of what is required. Lower attaining students find it difficult to select what information to include and to explain causes and effects clearly, for example when accounting for glaciated landforms.

93. In 2001, the number entered for A-level was very small. All three students gained a grade, but none reached the highest two grades. The AS-level results of that year were high and students maintained these high standards through to the A-level examinations in 2002. All eight students gained a grade and over half gained the highest two grades, a good improvement. The numbers are too small for comparisons to be made with the national results, when these are confirmed.

94. Students enjoy the subject and find it interesting. They have confidence in their teachers' knowledge of the subject and of the demands of the examination. Students consider that they are taught well and they value the good relationship which exists between themselves and their teachers. They know that extra help is on hand whenever it is needed. Students' very positive attitudes to the subject are evident in their strong commitment to independent research and in their very good response in lesson activities. The number of Year 11 pupils staying on into the sixth form has grown in the current year, as has the take-up for GCSE geography. Nearly all Year 12 students continue their studies into Year 13.

95. Learning and teaching are good. Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject and the demands of the examination to ensure that there is an appropriate balance of tasks. In some, students are expected to research their own information and in others, teachers' contributions are very effectively supported by school-generated information sheets. Where the latter pattern is adopted, there is a good balance between students' self-directed learning and class-teaching, the topics are fully covered, and sound learning takes place. Lessons usually progress at a good pace, although this is not always so in revision lessons. Opportunities for students to learn how to answer examination questions are plentiful. The marking of these and of homework tasks is good. Teachers' comments are well-directed to inform students what they have done well and what could be improved. Marks given reflect the examination levels and grades so that students have a good understanding of their standard. Higher attaining students make good use of the grading criteria which accompany assessment assignments, but the criteria are not always explained in sufficient detail for lower attaining students. Students with special needs make progress which is equal to that of the majority of students because teachers ensure that their needs are met. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well developed by the subject when, for example, students examine Malthus' population theory or consider case studies of people applying for refugee status in the context of United Nations and Human Rights guidelines.

96. Leadership and management are good. The collaboration between members of staff is very good and documentation gives very clear guidance on all aspects of the department's work. Formal monitoring systems are not yet in place but the weekly informal meeting is used to ensure that courses are progressing appropriately and to review resources and planned activities.

97. Improvement since the last inspection is good, including provision for an increased amount of fieldwork. The development of very good assessment strategies is a significant improvement. A continuing commitment to high standards is demonstrated by the department.

History

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

Strengths

- Good teaching, employing a range of learning activities appropriate to advanced studies
- Very good assessment and feedback to students on their written work
- Effective new management of the subject, putting in place action needed to raise standards.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough opportunities for independent note-making and for Year 13 students to advance their own ideas in lessons
- Inadequate sixth-form reference library.

98. Standards in Year 13 are below average but students are maintaining a satisfactory level of achievement over their A-level courses. Staff changes delayed the start of A2 courses and students found the first historical investigation unit on the unification of Germany difficult, scoring below average grades. Their essays lack sufficiently detailed analysis of questions and enough reference to the views of historians to gain higher grades. Students are making better progress in their study of civil rights in the USA, showing good understanding of significant events over the 100 year period. The skills of independent enquiry are developed well through individual research topics but are not utilised enough in lessons. The 2001 results were below average. Results showed some improvement in 2002, although no national comparisons are yet available.

99. Standards in Year 12 are average and students' achievement is good. Students are knowledgeable about the American Civil War and have kept a detailed note record of their work, utilising information from handouts and texts to summarise effectively the main stages of the war. In a very good lesson, group planning of an essay on reasons for the South's defeat boosted individuals' confidence in their ability to analyse the question and prepare a reasoned argument to respond to it. Careful monitoring of progress and tutorial guidance are improving their performance.

100. In recent years, history has regularly recruited over twenty students to Year 12 and most of them have continued through to Year 13. However, the uncertain situation over staffing affected numbers in the current year. Students' attitudes and response to the new teaching team are good. They appreciate the improvements in the organisation and structure of courses, although Year 13 students would welcome more opportunities to use their initiative and put forward their own ideas. They are working well with their teachers and pool their ideas constructively in group activities. Students are particularly happy with the detailed feedback they receive on their written work and the guidance they have been given in Year 13 on their individual investigations. The American history units are particularly popular and the study of the civil rights movement has contributed to students' own moral and social development, in keeping with the religious ethos of the college.

101. Learning and teaching are good. Teachers' meticulous planning enables students to build up a good knowledge base for their studies, although, sometimes, too much of the note-taking is done for them, presenting them with judgements that leave little scope for their own

thinking. Learning is most effective in those lessons where students are expected to use information and source materials selectively to demonstrate their understanding. Teachers vary the learning activities effectively, engaging students in making presentations and taking part in class debates. Direct teaching of examination technique in the context of specimen questions and model answers is done well. Year 12 students are benefiting from the good training they have received from the start of their AS course. All students benefit from the perceptive and detailed written comments on their work, which diagnose clearly how they can improve. Self-review of their progress against these diagnostic points is not yet incorporated into the termly reviews of their attainment.

102. Leadership and management are good. The new direction of advanced studies has brought a more organised structure to the courses and a renewed emphasis on developing teaching and learning to raise standards. The groundwork laid in Year 12 is having a notable effect on students' progress already. Effective teamwork is generating a wealth of ideas for teaching and a bank of materials for learning. The supply of sixth-form reference books is inadequate, however, for promoting wider reading of scholarship and facilitating individual research.

103. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory in terms of A-level standards, while the new departmental team has already shown its potential for bringing about higher performance, given time.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching with rigorous preparation for examinations
- Students achieving very well as a result of very good teaching methods
- Students' critical analysis and confident use of concepts and theories to clarify and explain social structures.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient attention to statistical analysis.

104. The standard of work is well above average. Year 13 students achieve very well in relation to the predictions based on their GCSE results. Their files are a comprehensive record of the detailed approach to the topics studied. Careful selection of material for use in answering extended essay questions is standard procedure. Students make considerable headway in their understanding of concepts. In the lessons seen, they made good progress because effective teaching encouraged them to think about the content and the possibilities for presentation. Year 12 students are provided with clear learning targets and develop an extensive knowledge base. Students speak confidently about answering questions by summarising their own knowledge as well as that of other students. The 2002 A-level results maintained the successful trend of past years. All students gained a grade and the majority achieved grades A, B or C. No national comparisons are available for 2002, but in 2001, comparisons show that A-level results were average.

105. Students support and listen to each other well and attendance is good. They react well to different teaching approaches and have considerable respect for their teachers. Most continue their studies into Year 13. The number of students taking the subject has grown and some extend their study of the subject in higher education.

106. Learning and teaching are very good. Students respond to the teaching with enthusiasm. Each lesson contains a clear objective, good strategic planning and a brisk pace which ensures coverage of content. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; they use current material and give lucid explanations of theories. All students respond to the teachers' questions and their responses are used to monitor individual progress. For example, Year 12 students considering gender and education, watched sections of a video about current research on gender differences. The research stimulated useful discussion on the implications for curriculum planning. Written work is planned to provide opportunities for all students across the attainment range to demonstrate their understanding. All work is marked well, with encouraging comments and helpful advice. This is particularly strong in the associated mark-sheets required for the submission of course-work. Students' files demonstrate a sound grasp of English and all are well presented. All files have sufficient information for revision and examination purposes.

107. Sociology contributes significantly to the development of study skills. Extended essays develop skills of critical analysis. Examples of past papers, model answers and students acting as examiners, all provide good learning opportunities. Citizenship and social and cultural understanding are a thread in the work and students are introduced to the ethics of social research. However, insufficient attention is given to the use of statistical analysis.

108. The subject is very well led and managed. Attention is given to monitoring each student's performance through an analysis of achievement, attendance and progress stored on the laptops. Schemes of work reflect the requirements for the subject and detailed lesson plans provide extensive and appropriate guidance for students. Lesson aims and learning targets are displayed at the start of each session. Resources and accommodation are sufficient, and the addition of the new member of staff provides opportunities for further development.

109. The subject has been introduced since the last inspection, a good development.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on A-level English language, English literature, and French and German. Spanish is also studied in the sixth form. At both AS- and A-level in 2002, all students gained a grade in Spanish, and at A-level, half the students gained A or B grades. No lessons were observed in other subjects or courses.

English

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

Strengths

- Consistently good learning and teaching
- Regular, detailed marking and guidance for students
- Shared determination to improve achievement
- Very good contribution to students' personal development
- Students' very positive views on the value of English.

Areas for improvement

- Results not high enough at AS- and A-level
- Insufficient strategies for involving all students actively in their learning.

110. Standards by Year 13 are average in both subjects. In English language, higher attaining students make accurate applications of linguistic theory. They write well-structured surveys of the effect of gender and social class on language, and show well above average understanding in their analyses of contrasting texts. Other students show sound awareness of cultural variations and make appropriate references to research. Poor presentation and expression reduce the quality of some students' work, and some writing lacks relevance and detail. Standards in English language in Year 12 are below average, reflecting students' lower prior attainment. In English literature in Year 13, the most talented students show detailed knowledge of set books and give clear explanations of dramatic effects in 'Othello' and Hardy's narrative technique. Other students' responses are modest, but they too show sound knowledge of the text and support their judgements with relevant quotations. On the basis of their attainment on entry to the course, students' achievement in both subjects is satisfactory. Results in A-level English literature in 2001 were average. In 2002 they were slightly lower; no national comparisons are yet available. The English language course was not offered in these years. Over time, results in both subjects have varied between an above or below average standard.

111. Students' attitudes are good. Most willingly offer perceptive ideas in brainstorming and class discussions. They quickly become involved in paired or group tasks, with female and male students working well together in Year 13. In mature discussions, they show respect for each other's ideas, indicating that English is contributing very well to their personal development. Good study habits such as note-taking have been acquired by most students. Relationships between students and with teachers are cordial and open. A few male students in Year 12 do not concentrate throughout lessons, however, and some female students do not join in class discussions. Nevertheless, students' views of English are very positive. The subject area is consistently popular, although a lower proportion of students stay on for the second year of the language course, possibly because it was not what they expected. Students appreciate the support that they receive and feel that they are treated as adults. They find lecture days and conferences very useful.

112. Learning and teaching are consistently good in both subjects. Students are steered effectively into appropriate lines of enquiry because teachers have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are planned well to build upon students' previous knowledge and understanding because clear targets, time limits and carefully prepared resources keep them challenged and interested. Their answers are often refined after skilful questioning by the teachers. They become increasingly confident because teachers know them well as individuals and give them full and clear advice on how to improve, both through marking and in discussion. Some students, however, are not sufficiently drawn into discussions or given enough responsibility for their own learning through research and presentations to the class.

113. English is well led and managed. Staff share a strong commitment to improving standards, and are restructuring the programme to prepare students more effectively for examinations. Teaching and learning have been improved through monitoring and discussion of good practice. Improved resources in lessons and the non-fiction section of the library are recent developments. The subject ensures equality of opportunity by offering two subjects and by moderating the generous entry policy with careful advice about the courses. Through the study of a rich diet of literature and a wide range of language texts, the department makes a very valuable contribution to students' personal development.

114. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have been maintained and teaching has substantially improved. Students are no longer seen to be isolated in lessons, although some are not always actively involved.

Modern foreign languages

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

Strengths

- Good and often very good learning and teaching
- Very good assessment processes used very well to monitor students' attainment
- Students' very good attitudes to languages
- The range of languages on offer
- Excellent resources.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough attention to strategies for bridging the gap between GCSE and AS-level work
- Insufficient teaching accommodation in the language centre.

115. Both French and German in the sixth form were inspected. The two languages are part of the work of a very cohesive modern languages department. For this reason, although attainment and achievement are reported separately for each subject, other aspects of the subjects are considered together.

French

116. In French, standards in Year 13 are average. Students communicate ideas very well, both orally and in writing, but there is some inaccuracy. This is largely because of a weakness in their understanding of grammar at the beginning of the course. Students' understanding of written and spoken French is generally good. There is no obvious difference in the current year, or in the results of the previous Year 13, between the attainment of female and male students. Results at A-level in 2001 were below average. They were considerably better in 2002. No national comparisons are yet available for 2002. Students generally continue from AS-level to A-level. In Year 13, given students' starting points, achievement is good and indicates hard work and a determination to succeed. Standards in Year 12 are higher overall. Again numbers are small, and this group is all female. These students have had more time to benefit from the improvements in teaching and resources since the school became a Language College. They generally write and speak much more accurately, and they are more willing and able to express complex ideas in French.

German

117. In German, standards in Year 13 are average. Numbers entered for A-level are generally lower than in French, and too small to make valid comparisons with national figures. Results improved from 2001 to 2002. There is no evident difference in the performance of female and male students in examinations. In Year 13, students' skills in German are similar to those in French, with grammatical accuracy hampering communication and access to higher grades. This is due, in part at least, to staffing problems in the department in the past. Students' achievement is satisfactory. Although they show interest in the work in lessons and are very willing to discuss topics in German, they have not made sufficient effort to overcome basic errors. As in French, standards are higher in Year 12 for the reasons given above.

French and German

118. Overall, students have very good attitudes to languages. They willingly join in oral work, both in pairs and in whole-class activities. In Year 12, students show a great deal of interest and motivation to perfect and add to their knowledge of the language they are studying. They describe teaching as very good, and although they recognise the much greater demands of AS- and A-level, they are glad they chose to study languages. Good teaching certainly contributes to their positive attitudes, as do the interesting topics they study

and the good support they receive through the structure of lessons to begin to express their opinions successfully. The wide range of topics studied makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

119. Learning and teaching are good overall and often very good. Teachers have a very good command of the language they teach, and both students and teachers use it consistently in lessons. This gives students a good model to copy for their own pronunciation, some of which is very good. There are very good relationships between students and with staff. At times, higher attaining students unobtrusively help and encourage weaker members of the group. Assessment is a strength of the teaching and the management of the department. Students' work is very carefully marked with good advice on how they can improve. Thus students know how well they are doing and what they need to concentrate on in future. However, students respond better to this advice in French than they do in German. Teachers pay good attention to skills, for example teaching students how to tackle reading passages containing unknown words and how to listen effectively to understand the gist of what they hear. The school has excellent resources for teaching languages, a consequence of becoming a Language College. The use of ICT, especially for listening exercises, helps students to develop as independent learners. They use the Internet, books and other facilities in the library as well as in the department, to research topics for their course work. As yet, however, they do not use computers to produce written work. Thus, a very good aid to drafting and redrafting is neglected.

120. Leadership and management are very good. The work of the department is very well monitored and evaluated. All of the concerns raised in a recent review organised by senior managers have been tackled. There are frequent opportunities for sharing good practice in teaching. In addition, all teachers in the department have been involved in writing very thorough, useful teaching schemes. These strategies have had a very positive effect on teaching and learning. The laptops all teachers have are very well used to track the progress of all students. They are used to set targets based on a wide range of information on students' potential and attainment. Information about their progress is shared with sixth-form parents on three occasions in each year. This is much more frequent than in many schools, and is effective in ensuring that any problems are identified and dealt with quickly. The accommodation in the language centre is of good quality, but there are insufficient rooms to house all the timetabled languages lessons. The need for teachers to change rooms and travel from other areas in the school wastes valuable teaching and learning time. This adds to the problems caused by the narrowness of the corridor. It is to the credit of both staff and students that this situation is dealt with very well.

121. The previous inspection report contained few references to the sixth form. However, it is clear that standards have risen overall and that teaching is better. Some teaching was reported as unsatisfactory then, and now all is at least good, with much that is very good. Achievement in languages and pupils' attitudes to them have also improved as a result. This represents very good improvement overall.