

INSPECTION REPORT

ST AIDAN'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Harrogate, North Yorkshire

LEA area: North Yorkshire

Unique reference number: 121719

Headteacher: Mr Dennis Richards

Reporting inspector: Dr David Benstock

Dates of inspection: 18th – 21st November 2002

Inspection number: 252151

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 – 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Oatlands Drive
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North Yorkshire

Postcode: HG2 8JR

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Ms Claire Kelley

Date of previous inspection: 7th October 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
20243	David Benstock	Registered inspector		
19339	Susan Evasdaughter	Lay inspector		
17923	Michael Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
12499	Marie Durkin	Team inspector	Drama	
4483	Jean-Pierre Kirkland	Team inspector	Psychology	
15396	Ronald Bulman	Team inspector		
2630	A Haigh	Registered inspector for sixth form		What sort of sixth form is it? How well is the sixth form led and managed?
13448	D Lloyd	Lay inspector for sixth form		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the sixth form work in partnership with parents?
3758	A Barringer	Team inspector		
3937	J Seed	Team inspector		
27984	A Whitehall	Team inspector		
2628	J Edwards	Team inspector	Physical education	How well does the sixth form care for its students?
30978	E White	Team inspector	Geography	

24033	J Ruse	Team inspector	English, electronics	
27416	T Howard	Team inspector	Mathematics	
4922	M Driver	Team inspector	Science	
31981	E Forster	Team inspector	Art and design	
2491	D Beaumont	Team inspector	Design and technology	
25551	A Hodge	Team inspector	Business education, politics	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
2928	B Baxendale	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8873	C Evers	Co-ordinator	History	Results and achievements How well are students taught?
27665	O Lees	Team inspector	Music	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St Aidan's Church of England High School is a mixed, 11-18, comprehensive school near the centre of Harrogate in North Yorkshire. There are 1757 pupils and students on roll, of which 534 are in the sixth form. The sixth formers are part of the Associated Sixth Form, which totals more than 830 students, the rest of the students coming from the neighbouring Saint John Fisher Catholic High School. The school is larger than average and the roll has risen since the previous year. Pupils are admitted from a large number of primary schools, many of which are some distance away. The school is substantially oversubscribed. The school is located in an area with a higher than average proportion of families having higher education experience and high social class background. The attainment of students on entry, based on performance in National Tests at age 11, is well above average. The percentage eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language is low. Most pupils are white and have UK origin. There are a small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average and the proportion with statements is also below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Aidan's continues to be an outstanding school. Overall, pupils attain standards that are well above average by Year 9 and very high in examinations at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. GCSE results at this stage are also very high when compared with schools with a similar social context. Pupils achieve very well, overall, from their entry in Year 7 until the end of Year 11, due to the excellent attitudes to learning shown by pupils, the overwhelming climate of support for personal development and the very good teaching in the school. The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are very good, resulting in maintenance of high standards, overall good improvement and very good value for money.

What the school does well

- GCSE results are very high compared with both the national average and schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds.
- Very good teaching overall results in very good learning and development of personal qualities, relationships and skills.
- Pupils' attitudes to work are excellent, resulting in exceptional self-motivation and determination to succeed.
- The excellent leadership and very good management of the headteacher and senior staff, together with the very good support of the governing body, ensure a clear educational direction.
- The school fosters strong links with parents and members of the local community
- The quality and range of the extra-curricular provision are exceptional, and opportunity in music, sport and drama is excellent.

What could be improved

- Quality and consistency of marking of pupils' work to ensure they are clear about what to do to raise their level of attainment.
- Quality of reporting to parents to be more informative and ensure a more extensive description of pupils' strengths and 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

The school was last inspected in October 1996. Since that time, results at GCSE have been consistently high and have risen broadly in line with the national trend. Pupils' performance in the national tests in core subjects at the end of Year 9, has improved at a rate above the national trend. Demanding targets set by the school have been exceeded each year. Good progress has been made on the issues from the last inspection.

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	2001
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	-	A*	***	

Key
 very high A*
 well above average A
 above average B
 average C
 below average D
 well below average E

*** National results for A/AS- level not yet published for 2002

Test results at the end of Year 9 in 2002, were well above the national average for all schools and very high compared with schools admitting a similar percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. The performance of boys was approximately the same as that of girls. The standards reached in English exceeded those in mathematics and science. The average point score in English was very high, and those in mathematics and science were well above the national average. Overall the average point score per pupil was well above the national average and, in comparison with schools in a similar context, average scores were very high in all three core subjects. The overall average point score was close to the average in schools with similar prior attainment on entry to the school in Year 7. The overall trend in performance over recent years has been above the national trend.

Results in the 2002 GCSE examinations were within the highest five per cent nationally. The school has set challenging targets and exceeded them. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C in GCSE was well above the national average. Performance overall was very high compared to schools in a similar social context. The average GCSE point score, taking account of all qualifications at Year 11, was very high compared with schools with pupils having a similar range of attainment at Year 9. The average point score, based on the best eight results of pupils in schools nationally, was well above average. Pupils' achievement in relation to their test results in Year 9 is very good.

Work seen in Year 9 classes, during the inspection, in English, mathematics and science, was well above average. Lessons were sampled in most subjects and overall standards were well above expectation for the age. In Year 11, the quality of work seen is even further above average in English and science, and very high in mathematics. Standards of literacy and numeracy are well above average. The standard of work seen in information and communication technology (ICT) was well above average. Pupils in Year 7 produce work that is very much better than expected for their age, and they continue to achieve very well throughout their time in the main school. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve very well, due to well-focused support.

Standards in the sixth form are well above average and students achieve very well. Both male and female students' A-level results were in the top five per cent of schools nationally in 2001. Of the subjects inspected in detail, standards are very high in art and in psychology, and well above average in most others. Students achieve very well in the vast majority of subjects and make significant progress in their

studies with high levels of 'value added' in virtually all subjects. There is a rising trend in sixth form standards.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Students and pupils are fully committed to high achievement. Attitudes are excellent in the sixth form and overall.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Politeness, care for and consideration of others, close attention to teachers and lessons and adherence to rules typify behaviour at school.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. These are excellent overall. There are high levels of participation in school activities; pupils and students are very mature and articulate.
Attendance	Excellent. Attendance is excellent overall and very good in the sixth form, with no unauthorised absence.

Students and pupils are exceptionally positive and committed to the school. Behaviour is exemplary, because students and pupils respect the expectations and values promoted by the school. All students and pupils collaborate well and are considerate of the opinions of others. They contribute a great deal to the school, both in lessons and through the extra-curricular environment. Relationships with staff are excellent. Students and pupils enjoy their time at school and are clear about the educational benefits.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching, and the learning that is promoted, is very good throughout the school. Expectations are high, and result in many pupils having high motivation and goals. During the inspection, teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons observed. In approximately two-thirds it was judged to be very good or excellent. Very good relationships established in classes contribute significantly to the very good learning. Marking of work is regular but too often gives insufficient guidance to pupils on how to improve their level or grade. Pupils are encouraged to use ICT, in all possible ways.

Literacy is promoted very well in many aspects of the curriculum, as well as English, and also in the extra-curricular activities that abound. Numeracy is developed to a high level through several subjects such as science and geography, as well as mathematics. Teaching is very good overall, including English, mathematics and science, and is exceptional in some subjects, such as music. Support for pupils with special educational needs is very good and the depth of the work often provides an excellent level of challenge for more able pupils.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Excellent. The curriculum is diverse and rich with a full range of opportunities. The sixth form curriculum is very good with a wide range of courses on offer.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Provision is made for pupils to have full access to the curriculum and progress is in line with that of other pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Religious education makes a major contribution to pupils' personal education and moral development. The opportunities for taking responsibility and service to the community, residential experience and collaboration in many school activities enhance the provision available in the curriculum.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The school cares very well for all of its pupils and students. Provision for first aid, hygiene, water and food is exemplary.

The school meets statutory requirements in its curriculum.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher and senior staff have a very clear vision of future development. Staff with management responsibilities are supportive and fulfil their roles very well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The governing body is very hard working on behalf of the school. It is supportive and active in key areas, for example in the strategic management of finance.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school analyses examination results very well. There is increasing involvement by heads of departments in using the data more rigorously. The school is developing teaching through the performance management process.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Financial resources are managed extremely well, with rigorous and very secure monitoring procedures. Departments are well resourced.

The school meets its aims very successfully, in that it provides an environment for learning that develops academic and personal qualities together with strong sense of responsibility towards others within the Christian ethos of a Church school. There are some statutory requirements which are omitted from the governors' annual report to parents. These include addresses of chair and clerk, an update on the action plan from the previous inspection, how the school is increasing access to disabled and arrangements for school security. The school applies the principles of best value very well in its use of resources.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My child likes school. • Behaviour in the school is good. • My child is making good progress in school. • I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. • The school expects my child to work hard and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My child gets the right amount of work to do at home. • I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on. • The school works closely with parents.

achieve his or her best. • The school is helping my child become mature and responsible. • The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	
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Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. On questions relating to leadership and management and teaching, there was almost total agreement by parents with the statements posed about the strength of these aspects. A few parents expressed concerns regarding the lack of lockers for pupils not in Year 7. Inspectors endorse the positive views of parents. The school provides an appropriate amount of homework, which is in keeping with that provided by other successful schools. The timing of information given to parents is good but reports could be improved to give more evaluative information to parents and detail about how their children could improve their attainment in each subject.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is an ecumenical Association of St John Fisher Catholic High School and St Aidan's Church of England High School. It is the largest school-based sixth form in the country and consists of about 830 students and has grown substantially in recent years. There are about 120 more female students than male students. The ethnic mix matches that of the main schools, being predominantly white. There are three students on the register of special educational needs. Over four-fifths of pupils from Year 11 continue into the sixth form and about a fifth of the total join from other schools. The socio-economic background is wide with the majority of students from well above average circumstances. The students have achieved very well in their former schools and their GCSE results are well above average. There are no minimum requirements for entry into the sixth form. There are GCE AS and A-level courses and also vocational ones leading to intermediate and advanced qualifications. A small minority retake GCSE courses that are offered in English and mathematics. There are enrichment courses, some of which are compulsory, and a particularly wide range of extra-curricular activities.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very effective and its cost-effectiveness is very good. Standards are well above average and students achieve very well, continuing to make very good progress from their above average levels at entry. Teaching and learning are very good and the provision is very successful in meeting the needs of the students.

Strengths

- Students achieve well above average standards overall but especially so in art and psychology.
- Results in GCE A2 and AS-level examinations are very high.
- Students' attitudes to sixth form life and work are excellent, promoting very good learning.
- Teaching is consistently very good; one in eight lessons was excellent; students respond very well to the high expectations and thorough assessment methods and make very good progress.
- Excellent leadership and very good management lead to a very strong ethos that permeates the whole sixth form. The ecumenical dimension fosters tolerance and understanding extremely well.
- The sixth form provides very good quality support and guidance for its students.

What could be improved

- The medium and long-term planning for the sixth form provision as a whole are not strong.
- There is too little monitoring and evaluation of teaching; the excellent practice is not disseminated widely enough.
- Several subjects make too little use of ICT.

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.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Standards of attainment are well above average and students achieve well, reflecting very good teaching, insightful learning and strong management. There is too little use of ICT.

Biology	Very good. Examination results and standards observed are well above average reflecting the very good teaching. There are too few opportunities to challenge students with more independent or problem-solving work.
Physics	Good. Results were well above average in 2001 but dipped in 2002. Work seen was above average in Year 12 and well above in Year 13. Teaching and learning are good. There is too little sharing of good practice across the two departments.
Design and technology – product design: three-dimensional products	Good. Standards are above average overall. Students achieve well. Teaching is good overall; much is very good. The quality of ongoing assessment and project management lacks rigour.
Business education	Very good. Results in this vocational subject are well above average and students are achieving better than expected considering their GCSE results. The department is well led and teaching is good. Boys' standards are not high enough.
Information and communication technology	Excellent. The 2002 results in this new advanced vocational course were well above average with students achieving very much better than would be expected. Teaching is consistently very good – staff have a strong understanding of course requirements.
Sports studies	Very good. Standards are above average across all aspects of the course. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. There is strong management and very good cooperation between the two departments.
Art	Excellent. Students achieve very high standards and examination results are well above average. The teaching is consistently very good, great care and attention being paid to individual needs. The subject is very well managed. There is too little use of computers.
Music	Excellent. Standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Teaching and learning are very good, reflecting excellent management.
Theatre studies	Very good. Examination results were average in 2001 and improved in 2002. Students achieve well but written work is not as good as practical work. Teaching and learning are very good. Leadership is strong and extra-curricular provision is outstanding.
Geography	Very good. Standards are well above average and students progress very well, reflecting the very good teaching. There is excellent collaboration between the two well-managed departments but teaching is not monitored systematically.
History	Very good. Very good teaching results in very good learning and above-average standards. The hardworking students achieve very well. The subject is well led but longer-term planning and collaboration are not good enough.
Politics	Very good. Standards and examination results are well above average; students achieve well because of very good teaching and strong leadership.
Psychology	Excellent. Standards are very high and students, higher attainers especially, achieve very well. Teaching, learning and management are excellent.
English	Very good. Attainment is well above average and students achieve very well. Very good teaching inspires students and leads to very effective learning. Management is good but there is too little sharing of good practice.

French	Very good. Examination results are well above average and students achieve very well. Teaching is very good and the students' personal development is excellent.
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OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The assessment and monitoring of students' academic performance are very thorough. The provision of information and advice for students is very strong, supported by very good careers and university guidance.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership is excellent and management is strong and very effective despite the complications of the arrangements. The aims are achieved very well and equality of opportunity is excellent. Medium and long-term planning is not strong enough and monitoring of teaching is not systematic and does not support dissemination of the widespread very good practice.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The curricular choices suit their talents and aspirations. Teaching is good and students are challenged. Teachers are helpful and accessible. Sixth form is enjoyable and they would recommend it to others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About a quarter say they would like more advice about their future options. One in five say they are not well enough informed of their progress. One in five feel their views on the sixth form are not sufficiently considered.

Students' positive views are well founded and justified. Their criticisms are somewhat contradicted by the inspectors' evidence arising from discussions with students and interviews with staff. Careers and university advice is of very good quality. Teachers provide much evidence for students on their progress. Students' opinions are sought regularly.

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

GCSE results are very high compared with both the national average and schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds.

1. Attainment based on the total average point score per pupil in 2002 was very high in comparison with the national average. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C in GCSE examinations was well above average. A new measure, to make comparisons between schools more equitable, is denoted the 'capped average point score' and is that gained from the eight best subject components. This was also well above average.
2. Results were very high compared with schools having a similar background context as measured by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. Compared to schools having pupils with a similar prior attainment at the end of Year 9, the total average points score in Year 11 is very high. Value added data indicates that the capped point score is well above average compared with schools with similar prior attainment, and that progress has been very good in Years 10 and 11.
3. Over the past four years the results have been maintained at a consistently high level and have improved in line with the national trend. Over the years there has been little variation in the performance of boys and girls, although in 2002 the percentage of girls gaining five or more A*-C grades was greater than that of boys.
4. In English, mathematics and science the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C in 2002 was well above the national average. In comparison with schools in a similar context, the percentage of A*-C grades was well above average in English and mathematics, and very high in science.
5. In the work seen in Year 11, standards reflected the high levels found in examinations. Well above average detail and depth of knowledge and understanding were apparent in English, mathematics and science written evidence. Literacy standards are above average and quantitative numerical work is commonplace and of a very good quality. Overall students achieve very well throughout the school.

Very good teaching overall results in very good learning and development of personal qualities, relationships and skills.

6. The overall quality of teaching is very good throughout the school. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and use this very well to extend the depth of learning. Many opportunities are found to develop literacy and numeracy within the curriculum. ICT is used significantly, access permitting, to enhance learning.
7. Planning is very clear and includes a focus not only on academic but also on personal development. Teachers expect a great deal from pupils in terms of their effort and the standards they can reach. This motivates and drives pupils to make tremendous effort and commitment to achieve success. Excellent relationships are established and staff know the pupils very well. Homework is used very well to consolidate and extend learning.

8. In most lessons the teaching style and methods adopted result in an extremely interesting experience for all pupils. Questions are used vigorously to inspire and stimulate pupils.

Pupils' attitudes to work are excellent, resulting in exceptional self-motivation and determination to succeed.

9. Pupils show an excellent commitment to learning. They make every effort to complete work and respond actively and articulately to discussions in class. The collaboration in lessons, including sharing of ideas, contributes a great deal to the brisk pace that is often found.
10. Behaviour in class and around the school is very good. No time is wasted through the need to resolve problems of behaviour. There is no bullying, or anti-social behaviour and pupils of all ages are respectful of others' views or personalities in a mature fashion. Behaviour outside, for example at lunchtime, is excellent and pupils return after breaks refreshed and ready for purposeful work.
11. Pupils extend their excellent attitudes and determination to do well, to their involvement in extra-curricular activities, charity work, residential activities and trips. The level of involvement is exceptional. Once committed, pupils are reliable and dependable in all respects. Pupils show strong self-motivation and capacity for independent learning whenever this style of teaching or opportunity is made available to them.
12. Attendance at school is very high, and reflects the support shown for school. Unauthorised absence is nil, although some lateness occurs due to the long bus journeys of some pupils.

The excellent leadership and very good management of the headteacher and senior staff, together with the very good support of the governing body, ensure a clear educational direction.

13. The headteacher has a very clear view of the direction of the school development and is ably supported by a strong senior leadership team. Responsibilities, for which colleagues are fully accountable, are very clearly delegated. The ethos of the school and the work that it does reflect exactly the stated aims and values.
14. Governors are very supportive as a group, and many spend a great deal of time in school. Particularly notable is the excellent involvement of one governor in the financial management. Budget accounts are expertly drawn up and very well monitored. All planned development is clearly costed, and specific grants are used appropriately. Statutory obligations are in place although a report on progress on the action plan from last inspection has been omitted from recent governors' annual reports.
15. The school has an established policy for performance management and, through the line management structure, it is used well, not only to set objectives but also to review and monitor teaching. The school has established very clear priorities for development within its own approach to planning.

16. Staff are well qualified and knowledgeable in their subjects. Their expertise matches the needs of the school very well. Very good administrative and clerical support is enabling teaching staff to focus on issues more efficiently.

The school fosters strong links with parents and members of the local community.

17. Parents are extremely supportive of the school. Regular newsletters keep parents well informed about what is happening. Consultation meetings follow school assessments, and are very well attended. Staff responsible for special educational needs meet pupils before arrival in Year7 and at regular reviews. Pupil planners are used very effectively in keeping parents informed about homework and other issues.
18. The parent-teacher association is effective in supporting the school and raises generous funds. Very good opportunities are given for meetings to receive information on proposals for specialist status or discuss issues such as school trips and uniform. Several parents do voluntary work, for example in the library. The response to the parents' questionnaire prior to inspection was very positive on virtually all aspects.

The quality and range of the extra-curricular provision are exceptional, and opportunity in music, sport and drama is excellent.

19. The range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school is vast. Clubs and societies are run in almost every area. In addition many opportunities are made for support activities such as revision. Two areas of activity stand out. The extent of participation by pupils of all ages and the quality of the experiences in music are excellent. Two orchestras, a jazz/swing band and choir perform regularly at a very high standard. Ambitious drama productions involve many pupils. A rehearsal for *My Fair Lady*, held during inspection, illustrated the commitment, enjoyment and cooperation by pupils, as well as their very good standard of performance.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Quality and consistency of marking of pupils' work to ensure they are clear about what to do to raise their level of attainment.

20. In general, pupils' work is seen and marked regularly. Verbal feedback is given well as part of the teaching method. Progress in the subject is indicated frequently through assessments. Good practice can be found in all areas of the school.
21. However, for some pupils, the detail in the written comment in marked work is insufficient to provide adequate feedback on progress. Practice is inconsistent between subjects. In some examples, marking has no comment or correction. In general, comments, where written, are too broad, frequently refer to presentation and tend not to give enough guidance on how to improve the standard of work.

Quality of reporting to parents to be more informative and ensure a more extensive description of pupils' strengths and areas for improvement.

22. Annual reports are issued regularly and provide general statements on progress and pupils' attitudes to work. There is, in general, a lack of detail about the specific strengths or weaknesses in the subject, in terms of levels of attainment or skill, and insufficient indication of progress, especially to higher and medium attaining pupils.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

23. To raise further the standards of work and the quality of education provided, the governors and the senior leadership team should:

Improve the quality and consistency of marking of pupils' work by

- further monitoring of teaching, set apart from the approach through performance management, with a focus on the consistency of implementation of a marking policy; (paragraph 21)
- sharing good practice of teachers more widely across the school. (paragraph 21)

Improve the quality of reporting to parents by

- ensuring a more extensive description of pupils' specific strengths and weaknesses; (paragraph 22)
- reviewing the process of identifying for pupils' targets for improvement. (paragraph 22)

Sixth form

Improve the medium and long term planning for the sixth form provision as a whole by

- Ensuring regular meetings of staff and ensuring all departments imitate the excellent practice of the most successful departments (paragraphs 62, 64, 71, 78, 84, 92, 144)

Improve the monitoring and evaluation of teaching

- Ensuring that the excellent practice is disseminated more widely (paragraphs 64, 78, 84, 91, 137, 144)

Ensure that all subjects make appropriate use of ICT by

- Providing good access to suitable hardware (paragraphs 70, 76, 82)
 1. Considering a link between the two sites (paragraphs 93, 103, 115)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	36
	Sixth form	105
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		55

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 – 11

Number	7	15	11	3	0	0	0
Percentage	19	42	31	8	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages, as each lesson represents almost three percentage points.

Sixth form

Number	14	52	28	10	0	0	0
Percentage	13	50	27	10	0	0	0

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1223	534
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	19	0

Special educational needs

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	29	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	88	7

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year		No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission		7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving		57

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.0
National comparative data	8.0

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	1.0

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	97	140	237

National Curriculum Test/Task Results 2002		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	93	87	92
	Girls	137	131	130
	Total	230	218	222
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	97 (96)	92 (91)	94(95)
	National	66(64)	67(66)	66(66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	78(78)	80 (73)	74(78)
	National	32(31)	45(43)	33(34)

Teachers' Assessments 2002		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	90	87	85
	Girls	134	134	132
	Total	224	221	217
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	95 (88)	93 (92)	91 (94)
	National	67(65)	70 (68)	67(64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	58 (57)	78(71)	66 (71)
	National	32(31)	44(42)	34(33)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2001.

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	95	144	239

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	77	93	95
	Girls	124	141	142
	Total	201	234	237
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	84 (84)	98 (99)	99 (100)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	59.6 (59.4)
	National	39.0 (39.0)
Average point score capped	School	46.7(n/a)
	National	34.6 (34.3)

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

In 2002 'Capped' is the average point score based on the best eight results for each pupil

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	120	135	255
	Average point score per candidate	25.4	26.5	25.9
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1730	23	0
0	0	0
15	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
3	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
7	0	0
0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7-Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	106
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.6

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	30
Total aggregate hours worked per week	640

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	91
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.3
Key Stage 4	20.0

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	5175741
Total expenditure	5209663
Expenditure per pupil	3159
Balance brought forward from previous year	65310
Balance carried forward to next year	31388

Sixth Form	15.5
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	10.39
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	13.67

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1757
Number of questionnaires returned	1057

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	59	36	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	58	37	2	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	56	39	1	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	36	50	11	1	2
The teaching is good.	58	38	0	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	45	11	2	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	66	30	2	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	79	19	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	42	44	8	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	73	24	0	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	61	34	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	62	31	3	0	3

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

23. The standards reached in public examinations by students at the end of Year 13 are high, being very well above average. Both male students' and female students' average points score in their GCE advanced level (A-level) examinations were in the top five per cent of schools nationally in 2001. Results in the vast majority of subjects at A-level, and advanced vocational (AVCE) level are well above average and the vast majority of students make significant progress in their sixth form studies with high levels of 'value added' in virtually all subjects, based on their already above average GCSE results. The average points score per student shows a rising trend from 22 in 1997 to almost 26 in 2001, indicating significant improvements in standards since the last inspection. The national comparative figure was 17.4 in 2001.
24. The results in the A2 examinations in 2001 were well above the national average in all subjects except design and technology, where they were above average, and in German and religious studies, where they were below average. In 2001 over half the grades awarded to students were A or B. The results for 2002 were similar overall to those of 2001 and nearly one third of all grades were A, and well over a half were A or B grades, figures well in excess of recent national comparisons. The average points score per student was, however, lower than that of 2001 but the value added measures showed that this cohort achieved very well as their GCSE profile was lower than that of the 2001 cohort.
25. The proportion gaining A or B grades was much higher in 2002 than in 2001 in German, English literature, French, psychology, sports studies and theatre studies. The proportion of students gaining an A or B grade was noticeably lower in 2002 than in 2001 in biology, English language, geography, music, physics, and religious studies.
26. The standards reached by students taking the AS examination at the end of Year 12 are high. In 2002, over half the results were an A or B grade, a slight increase on the proportion in 2001. Over two thirds reached the two highest grades in art, biology, economics, geography, mathematics, music and politics. All but two of the 177 of the students who took the AVCE courses in 2001 achieved a pass grade. A quarter of the grades achieved were A or B. In 2002 nearly one in three grades was A or B.
27. The retention rates in sixth form courses are good, generally above 70 per cent and often above 90 per cent. Male students and female students achieve equally highly. Indeed, in 2001, they both surpassed their respective national average points scores by almost nine points, in each case being 50 per cent ahead of their national figures.
28. The standard of work seen during the inspection was well above average overall and much in Year 13 was high. It was very high in art and psychology and well above average in biology, English, French, geography, ICT, mathematics and music. In physics, politics, theatre studies, design and technology, history, business and sports studies the standard was above average. Students achieve very well overall, reflecting consistently very good teaching and their own unstinting endeavours. The very small number of students with special educational needs make good progress because the teachers ensure that the work matches their needs well. The gifted and

talented students make very good progress as much of the work is very challenging and expectations are very high.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

29. Sixth formers have outstandingly positive attitudes to learning, which are reflected in their conduct, both in and outside lessons. Relationships are exceptionally good and students show a high degree of maturity. Their attendance is very good and there have been no exclusions in recent years. Students are very enthusiastic about the sixth form and enjoy all aspects of the time they spend in school. They take a lively interest in organising their own activities, and willingly put time and effort into school-based events and projects, such as sport, drama and music. Their punctuality to lessons, which was criticised at the time of the last inspection, is now good. The vast majority of students who begin a sixth form course stay to complete it.
30. Students are totally committed to achieving the best possible results by making the most of the educational opportunities available to them. Their concentration and involvement in lessons are invariably very good, often excellent. They listen attentively, taking their own notes instead of waiting for prepared handouts, and are keen to express their opinions and demonstrate what they know. They have a very mature approach to their school work and are more than willing to use any spare time profitably; for example, students were observed before registration making additional notes that might prove useful, others were continuing with an art assignment through lunchtime.
31. Students enjoy the mental demands made of them in lessons, and rise to the academic challenge of advanced level work. They arrive in class well organised and prepared, and remain very focused throughout their lessons. They apply themselves assiduously to independent study, making very good use of library and ICT resources to complete the research required for their subjects. Their understanding of the need to establish a self-disciplined approach to learning is helping them build a firm foundation for later life.
32. Relationships amongst students themselves, and between students and their teachers, are excellent. They collaborate very well on joint projects, helping one another appropriately, for example, in an art lesson where new techniques were being explored. In small discussion groups they show mature consideration and respect for the views of others. Opportunities to show initiative and take responsibility are plentiful, and students are very willing to become involved in them. They take part in a very wide range of activities that enrich their educational experiences. Many of these are of benefit to the school or wider community, as well as allowing students to demonstrate their social and organisational skills. For example, through membership of the sixth form committees, students are able to make their views known to staff and to influence events. Staff, in their turn, canvass sixth form opinion and value the mature feedback that this provides. Students in the stem schools also benefit from the willingness of sixth formers to devote time to them, for example, as voluntary peer counsellors, or in helping Year 11 students choosing courses to gain an insight into what life is really like in the sixth form. Students have a real sense of their responsibilities in life, and give time and energy to raising funds for charitable causes.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

33. More than 100 sixth form lessons were observed. The teaching was very good or excellent in almost two-thirds of all lessons. It was at least good in nine out of ten and none was unsatisfactory. The teaching is very good overall. It is excellent in psychology and very good in art, biology, English, French, geography, history, ICT, mathematics, music, politics, theatre studies and sports studies. It is good in physics, design and technology and business.
34. The overall strength in the teaching is its consistency. Teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge. They plan lessons carefully and thoroughly. Where there is a wide range of ability in classes, teachers ensure that the work is appropriately challenging for all and also accessible to all. Teachers demand, and receive, high quality work from their students. Lessons usually proceed at a brisk pace so that students make very good progress in both knowledge and understanding in lessons and over a period of time. In a psychology lesson, for example, high attaining students in Year 12 studying flashbulb memory were moved forward intellectually and academically by the challenging concepts and the pace of the lesson.
35. Teachers often use probing questions to deepen students' understanding, usually ensuring that all students are involved in the lesson. This was seen to work very effectively in a Year 12 English language lesson where students developed their understanding of lexical frameworks to a deeper understanding of stylistics. The needs of the small number of students with special educational needs and the large number who are gifted and talented are well met.
36. Students have many opportunities to learn in a variety of ways. Teachers make very effective use of whole class teaching, group and paired work and independent study. In a history lesson, the very well organised group work led students in Year 12 to make excellent progress in understanding the role of individuals in the unification of Italy. Excellent whole class teaching in a psychology lesson for students in Year 13 on ethical issues in research into human behaviour included very challenging questioning which resulted in learning of the highest quality.
37. Teachers use assessment methods very well to check what students are learning during lessons. The quality of marking is very good. The constructive comments, which teachers write on students' work, give very clear indications as to how the students can improve still further.
38. The quality of students' learning is very good. Students have an extremely high level of commitment to their work. They are usually inquisitive and not afraid to put their own views forward in a mature way. In most lessons the teacher's interest is reflected in the active involvement of the students and in many lessons the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject rubs off on to the students.
39. Relationships are excellent and make a very positive contribution to learning. In a music lesson in which students in Year 12 worked on producing their own backing tracks, the excellent rapport between an expert and dedicated teacher and the students led to learning of the highest quality. Similar results of high quality collaboration between teachers and students were seen in Year 13 in a theatre studies lesson on *Our Country's Good*.
40. Teachers ensure that students develop very effectively as independent learners. Homework is generally used very well for this purpose. In lessons also students are

expected to work independently. This was especially noteworthy in a further mathematics lesson on motion in a vertical circle in which very high attaining students were asked to choose and work on their own examples that they did with competence and confidence.

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

41. The curriculum opportunities provided in the associated sixth form are very good and result from close collaboration between the two schools. There is a wide range of 27 GCE courses on offer at AS and A2 level, which represents a significant increase since the last inspection. There is a good choice of traditional subjects, and others introduced in response to changing needs, such as media studies and a new joint English language and literature course. In addition, there are five AVCE courses and one intermediate vocational course in ICT, which was introduced last September. Re-sit courses are available in GCSE English and mathematics, and Spanish is offered at GCSE level.
42. There is no formal Key Skills programme for all students in communications, numeracy and information technology. The schools feel that these are adequately catered for up to age 16 and through the subject teaching of the sixth form curriculum and this appears to be the case. There is no evidence that students are disadvantaged by this policy. Similarly, there is no separate programme of personal, social and health education – this is dealt with within the general studies course and within subject teaching.
43. Equal opportunity provision in the sixth form is very good for those who fulfil the entry requirements for two-year courses. Students from other schools are invited to a Prospective Sixth Formers' Conference in the summer term of Year 11, and they settle well into the life of the school. All students have the opportunity in annual feedback to express their views on the curriculum and other matters, and they are listened to. Also, male students and female students are elected in equal numbers in student representative bodies from both schools, and they meet the governors once a year for discussion.
44. The needs of students who are not ready for a two-year sixth form career are not, however, well catered for, and this was a point also made in the last report. Although the staying on rate is about 80 per cent, a significant number of Year 11 students leave for vocational education elsewhere. The specific needs of a small number of students are met well with courses tailored to their individual needs. Only nine students completed a one-year course in summer 2001. The schools are beginning to address the question of how to cater for the student who might wish to stay on for one year only to take intermediate vocational courses and re-sits, or for three years and take one- and two-year courses in succession. The introduction of intermediate level ICT is the first response to this need, and discussions on this question continue, with the participation of the local Area Learning Partnership, with a view to increasing the provision in September 2003.
45. Breadth is given to the curriculum in a number of ways, and students are able to get a very well rounded education. In Year 12, students must take a well-planned general studies course for one hour a week, and about two-thirds of them choose to take an examination at AS-level at the end of the year. A minority continue to A2 in this course in Year 13. A keynote speaker is arranged for each of the three units of the course. A central emphasis is the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural

awareness, and these are well catered for generally in the sixth form. There are some very strong elements within subject areas, for example in modern foreign languages, which has considered animal rights, French education practices and drug abuse, and organises work experience in France.

46. The statutory requirements for religious education are met, with a 'Thought for the Day' delivered through tutor groups, and a weekly assembly that contains a strong spiritual element. The ecumenical arrangements foster students' understanding and tolerance. Students are expected to add individual 'extra commitment time' to their curriculum for one hour a week, and this emphasises giving, and the needs of others. For example, about a quarter of the sixth form are engaged in helping students with special educational needs in the combined schools, and others participate in the 'Smile Room' counselling scheme. Students show a great commitment to charitable and social work in the community, such as Riding for the Disabled, the Dr Barnardo's Play Scheme, visiting the elderly and disabled, Sportathon, and links with schools in Uganda and Sri Lanka. Sixth formers contribute greatly to charitable fund-raising.
47. Extra-curricular provision is outstanding. Students can participate in a particularly wide range of sporting, dramatic and musical activities, many of which take them out of school and into the community and national arena, for example, interactive drama workshops in local schools, and participation in national musical competitions. There is a debating society, Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and a range of outdoor activities such as Lake District weekends and a winter mountaineering course.
48. In general, the sixth form is highly responsive to local circumstances and is successful in meeting external requirements. Nearly 90 per cent of those leaving in 2001 were qualified and intending to go on to a higher education course, and their success emphasises the close match of the curriculum to their needs. Specialist courses outside school are arranged for medical applicants, lawyers and engineers. The students' personal development is very well supported by many of the courses and much of the teaching, not least that in French where foreign trips and work experience give students a good insight into French life.
49. Since the last inspection, with the exception of the provision of one-year courses, the curriculum of the associated sixth form has improved and grown in both coherence and depth, and there remains a real commitment to providing a full and satisfying educational experience for sixth form students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SIXTH FORM CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

50. The assessment and monitoring of students' academic performance are very good, being supported through very effective procedures. There are clear systems for recording and monitoring students' progress and students are well informed of their anticipated grades. Individual target setting is effective in challenging students and raising standards. This process involves the students, their subject teachers, senior tutors and heads of sixth form. Parents are made aware of predicted grades. Arrangements are in place for individual students to receive advice and guidance to improve their achievement grades.
51. The marking of students' work is of very good quality overall. The vast majority of students who responded to a questionnaire about the sixth form, as well as those who were interviewed, said their work was thoroughly assessed. Most felt that they

were kept well informed about their progress but about one in five of those replying to the questionnaire thought they could be better informed. Virtually all, however, find their teachers helpful and accessible.

52. The director of the associated sixth form provides a wealth of data that assists subject departments in their planning. Data is analysed thoroughly and value added measures are provided for all subjects. This information is presented clearly and used very well. Most departments use assessment information well to improve their work.

Advice, support and guidance

53. The advice, care and support for students are of high quality. All reasonable steps are taken to ensure the students' health and safety. The information available to Year 11 students coming into the sixth form is very good, with detailed advice given through interview and 'Forums' run by Year 12 students. Present students speak very highly of the help they get and the courses offered, and they confirm that the provision closely matches their needs and aspirations. This point is reinforced by the entry of students from a large number of other schools.
54. The overwhelming majority of students responding to the questionnaire felt that the courses they had chosen suited their talents and aspirations and that they had received clear information to assist them in this choice. Four out of five students found the advice helpful and constructive. Senior tutors have a good overall view of individual students and offer effective support and guidance throughout the sixth form.
55. The sixth form has strong links with universities. These links help students to make informed choices about their futures. All students receive very good careers and higher education advice through a programme of weekly workshops, visiting speakers and a parents' evening. Students have the opportunity to attend careers fairs and conferences. Work experience is available and students report that this is very helpful and much valued. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. There are close links with Oxford and Cambridge colleges and these include a yearly visit. All participate in a two-day 'Challenge of Management' conference. 'Young Enterprise' is offered to students across Year 12, in which they can gain practical business experience.
56. The students had mixed views on advice about their future options. About two-thirds replying to the questionnaire felt this was good but a quarter had some reservations. The vast majority of students feel that the induction into the sixth form was very effective.

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

57. As at the time of the last inspection, parents strongly believe that the sixth form is providing their sons and daughters with a good education and a thorough preparation for adult life. They are particularly pleased with the high expectations and the academic standards that students achieve. The fact that the sixth form is so popular is an indication of the satisfaction of both parents and students.
58. Sixth formers themselves, like their parents, have predominantly positive views about the sixth form. For many, the decision to enter the sixth form was influenced by the very broad range of subjects and extra-curricular opportunities that the associated sixth form offers, which meant that they were all able to choose appropriate courses.

A wealth of information and advice, both general and individual, helped them to make suitable decisions and prepared them well for what was to come. Students appreciate the good relationships they have with teachers, who mostly treat them like responsible young adults.

59. Students believe they are well taught and appreciate the way teachers challenge them to give of their best. They are pleased that teachers expect them to become self-reliant and to develop independent study skills. Well-organised systems of review and assessment keep them informed of their progress and help them to work towards their agreed personal targets. Students are particularly impressed with the commitment of their teachers, who give unstintingly of their time to help with any problems, whether academic or personal.
60. Students consider that advice about options beyond the sixth form is readily available, with especially useful practical help in making applications for higher education. Although students are intent on achieving good qualifications, they also appreciate that the sixth form makes a substantial contribution to their personal development, through its very wide range of extra-curricular provision and the opportunities that exist to show initiative and take responsibility. Almost without exception, students agree that they enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it wholeheartedly.

HOW WELL IS THE SIXTH FORM LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

61. The heads of the two sixth forms and the director of the associated sixth form provide excellent leadership and very good management of the sixth form. There is a very strong ethos that promotes very high standards of work and leads to well above average examination results. The ethos permeates every aspect of sixth form life, and its impact can be seen in the high attaining, mature, thoughtful and independent young people in Years 12 and 13.
62. The aims of the sixth form are very well supported by the senior management team and all senior staff, who have a very clear view of how they see the sixth form developing and improving. In this they are supported most effectively by the associated governors who have a very close involvement and an active role in the continued improvement of the sixth form. The issues for action identified at the last inspection have largely been dealt with, with two exceptions, those of collaborative development planning and some poor accommodation for theory lessons in sports studies.
63. The management of the complex organisation of the associated sixth form is very good. The problems of running a joint sixth form in two schools several minutes walk apart, each with its own staff, are overcome largely very successfully. The overall very good leadership and management of the respective heads of subject in both schools make a very positive contribution to the overall very good quality of the management.
64. There are, however, some areas in which the sixth forms can improve the management still further. There is no sixth form development plan that sets out aims and systems for monitoring and evaluation, other than that which exists within the two individual whole sixth form plans. This was identified as an area for improvement at the time of the last inspection. There are some inconsistencies in the extent to which collaboration and co-operation operate at a departmental level. The number of formal

meetings between the heads of subject in the two schools varies from one per year to one per week, with many meeting only three times a year. The teaching staffs of subjects rarely meet together. This results in an inconsistency in the amount and depth of effective planning for mutual development and improvement. There is also no systematic monitoring and evaluating of teaching in the associated sixth form, which means that the excellent practice that exists is not disseminated sufficiently well.

Resources

65. The teaching staff are very well qualified and deployed very effectively, and their expertise is used well to ensure that standards remain high. Overall the provision and quality of resources available for the sixth form are very good, but the lack of a link in the ICT network between the two sixth forms means students cannot save work in one sixth form and use it in the other. The accommodation for the sixth form is generally sufficient, but varies considerably in quality. Most is of good quality and provides a pleasant environment that stimulates learning. A small number of rooms on one site are, however, in a poor state of repair and as a result provide an uninspiring environment in which to teach and learn.
66. The principles of best value are applied rigorously and this results in provision that is very cost effective. Resources are used well and spending decisions link clearly to educational priorities. Financial planning is very good. Funds allocated to the sixth form are separate from the main budgets. They are carefully apportioned to cover defined needs and closely monitored to ensure that spending matches identified headings. Sixth form administrative staff work closely with the finance officers of both sixth forms to keep a tight rein on expenditure. Procedures for financial control are excellent. Given the very good outcomes in terms of academic achievement and personal development, and the wide range of available courses, the sixth form provides very good value for money.

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

In the inspection, 18 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001 (the latest year for which national comparisons are available).

GCE A- level

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	79	98	89	70	48	7.7	5.8
Further mathematics	11	100	-	90	-	9.5	NA
Chemistry	68	99	92	68	49	7.6	5.9
Biology	85	99	88	61	38	7.7	5.3
Physics	44	93	89	64	45	7.0	5.7
Design and technology	30	90	92	50	31	6.2	5.4
Economics	30	93	90	53	42	7.0	5.5
Sport studies	32	100	92	59	25	7.6	5.1
Art	32	100	97	72	48	8.3	6.6
Music	10	100	95	70	42	8.0	5.7
Theatre studies	15	93	93	27	32	6.0	NA
Geography	41	100	93	63	42	7.8	5.7
History	51	96	89	49	40	6.7	5.5
Religious studies	25	76	93	32	41	4.7	5.8
Politics	9	100	92	78	43	8.2	5.3
Psychology	30	97	85	53	31	6.9	5.3
English language	43	100	94	61	36	7.3	5.3
English literature	40	100	94	50	36	6.6	5.9
French	25	92	92	52	45	6.8	5.6
German	19	90	93	26	49	4.6	5.8
General studies	198	97	85	48	29	6.4	4.9

AVCE courses

Subject	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Science	9	100		67		11	

Business	35	100		57		37	
Health and social care	9	100		44		56	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Students attain well above average standards in A-level examinations.
- Very high quality of teaching provides very good learning opportunities.
- High attaining students are supported well in their applications to higher education.
- Students' independent learning skills are developed well.

Areas for improvement

- There is no formal, joint development plan to ensure a co-ordinated approach to future actions.
- There are too few opportunities for students to use computers to enrich their learning.

67. In 2001 A-level examinations, students gained well above average results. The 2002 results maintained the 'well above average' trend evident over past years. However, there was a reduction in the percentage of students attaining the highest grades. The 2002 AS results improved on the already high level of the previous year, with the percentage of students attaining the highest grades increasing and the average point score rising. Analysis of students' individual performances indicates that they had made good progress since they started their courses. In 2001, all but one of the ten students of further mathematics attained the highest grade possible. In 2002, all five candidates achieved an A or B grade on this demanding course. Of those students re-sitting GCSE mathematics, about one third improved their grade. There are no significant differences in the performance of male and female students or in the performance of students from minority ethnic backgrounds.
68. The standard of A-level work seen in students' books and in lessons is well above average; students achieve well. High attaining students' work demonstrates very good flexibility of thought, and answers to examination questions are presented with mathematical rigour. They use clear freehand diagrams to develop their mechanics and statistical solutions. Generally, algebraic skills are very high and students progress through proofs and calculations without resorting to basic techniques. Year 13 further mathematics students' standards are high; they demonstrate very good understanding of complex vertical circular motion problems and apply their understanding of Newton's laws of motion to solving them. On all courses, students use their scientific calculators appropriately to develop rapid understanding of algebraic and statistical problems. Year 12 students, studying AS-level modules, achieve well and show interest and much concentration during lessons. However, in a lesson of two hours duration, the concentration of some students waned towards the end, reducing the impact of their early effort. Ability levels observed in a GCSE re-sit lesson covered a wide range, but students worked successfully, showing average attainment as they studied the angle properties associated with parallel lines.

69. The teaching is very good and this ensures very good learning. The very high quality of teachers' subject knowledge ensures insightful delivery of new concepts to students. Very good student-teacher relationships within the classroom, and the willingness of teachers to assist students at any time, provide the students with confidence to ask questions and seek help whenever it is needed. Regular assessment of students' work, with detailed marking, ensures problems are identified early and addressed.
70. The many very high quality lessons are typified by pace, challenge and clear methodology. Teachers ensure that the work is made relevant to students by linking the current topic to real-world applications. This was clearly seen in a Year 12 lesson on frictional force and in a Year 13 lesson on circular motion. The first example related to the need for friction in tyres and the other to the possibilities observed in fairground rides. This enrichment brings the subject to life and maintains students' interest in their future learning. By Year 13, students have accepted responsibility for their own learning and work at topics until they have full understanding. The predominant style of teaching is that of demonstration of technique and practice. Whilst this is very effective in maintaining progress and developing understanding, it provides too few planned opportunities for the use of computers as tools or as extension activities.
71. The combined management of the subject is very good. Courses provided meet the needs and aspirations of students and very good monitoring of students' progress is in place. The department analyses examination data well and modifies provision accordingly. Gifted mathematicians are well catered for in a successful further mathematics course and strong links and support are in place for students aspiring to go to Oxford or Cambridge colleges. However, there is no formal, combined development plan to which the separate departments can work to achieve their shared goals. This inhibits long-term planning for the quality of teaching and course planning, as staff movement and curriculum changes affect what the schools provide.
72. Good progress has been maintained since the last inspection; A-level results stay well above the national average. The new AS course has been introduced and developed well, together with a very successful further mathematics course. Retention rates are high. Links with Oxford and Cambridge colleges have been developed and an increasing number of students progress to study mathematics at university.

Sciences

The focus of the inspection was on biology and physics. In addition, work in A-level chemistry and the AVCE science course was sampled. The standards in chemistry are well above average; teaching and learning were good, with students exhibiting very good attitudes to their studies. One chemistry lesson was observed. This was good. Students worked confidently on their practical investigations and discussion showed they have an above average understanding of recent work on rate and order of reactions. Results in the vocational science course are high. One lesson was observed and this was very good. The students enjoyed the task-based approach to learning and worked confidently on practical activities relating to sound and vibration. The work observed demonstrated the students' good grasp and understanding of the topics.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Standards in 1999 and 2000 were well above the national average; in 2001 they were very high.
- Students perform significantly better in biology than would be predicted from their prior attainment.
- Overall, teaching is very good.
- Advanced extension work is offered for the higher attainers.

Areas for improvement

- The range of learning opportunities is a little narrow and has too few opportunities for independent work, research and problem-solving activities.
- There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching.

73. Standards at A-level have been consistently well above the national average in recent years and standards in 2001 were very high. Standards in 2002 dipped but were still clearly above recent averages. The students achieve very well and have consistently performed significantly better in biology than would be predicted from their prior attainment.
74. The standards of work of current Year 13 students are well above average – much is of high quality. They make very good progress as a result of well-structured and thorough teaching. In an introductory lesson on the kidney, students made very good progress in identifying the gross structure of the kidney, using an information sheet provided by the teacher. Discussion with students showed a well above average understanding of recent work on the structure and function of nerves, including neurotransmitters and their control.
75. Students in Year 12 have only recently begun their course but are also making very good progress. Their understanding of work on the structure of DNA and its replication and translation to produce proteins is well above average. They have developed competent practical skills, using microscopes with camera attachments effectively.
76. Teaching is very good overall, and this is reflected in very good learning and the progress the students make. The key features of effective teaching are well-planned and structured lessons, conducted at a brisk pace, which involve a variety of activity to bring about learning. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject, explanations are clear, and questioning is used effectively to check upon and develop students' understanding. In some lessons, good handouts were used which required students to extract information. Homework is set regularly and is used effectively to promote students' learning. Advanced extension work provides extra challenge for higher attaining students. Students feel well supported with the help that teachers give, and know that teachers are approachable. ICT is used to support learning but the use is more on one site than the other. Whilst teaching is very good overall, opportunities are not always taken to use more problem-solving approaches and to develop students' skills in independent working and research.
77. Students make very good progress and learn well. Their attitudes are very positive, they are mature in their approach and they respond very well to the learning opportunities provided. They work well both individually and in groups and carry out practical tasks safely and accurately. Retention rates are high.

78. Work in biology is well led and managed in the two schools and this is reflected in the high standards achieved and there has been very good progress since the last inspection. There is scope, however, for greater collaboration to ensure that the most effective teaching methods are shared between all staff across the two schools. To this end it would be beneficial to develop a more detailed, common scheme of work, which incorporated a suitable breadth of learning opportunities. There is some monitoring of teaching and learning as part of performance management, but good practice is insufficiently shared.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Standards rose in 2001 and were well above average.
- Students' high levels of concentration ensure good understanding, which is consolidated through appropriate practical work.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching.
- There is no development plan for A-level physics.
- There is no common detailed scheme of work to share effective practice and ensure a consistent high quality approach.

79. Standards at A-level were well above average in 2001 and students achieved more highly than would be expected on the basis of prior attainment. In 1999 the results were also well above average but they were average in 2000 and students generally performed less well in physics than in their other subjects. The results in 2002 dipped more sharply than those in the other sciences.
80. The work of current Year 13 students is well above average and progress is good. In one lesson, as part of their revision, students made good presentations about various aspects of astrophysics, including quasars, Wien's Law, Stefan's Law and radio astronomy. In another lesson students made very good progress in understanding standing waves in strings and the relationship between the length of the string and the frequency of the wave for the fundamental note and for harmonics.
81. Students in Year 12 are less than one term into their course and are also making good progress and attaining above average standards. In one practical lesson they showed a good understanding of the principles behind a variety of mechanics experiments including the determination of the muzzle velocity of a gun and finding the terminal velocity of a ball-bearing dropped in glycerine.
82. Teaching is good overall and the quality of lessons seen ranged from very good to satisfactory. The main features of the most effective teaching included brisk questioning to involve all students, the use of analogies, clear explanation, a good variety of activity, good demonstrations, well-designed worksheets, good revision techniques which developed students' key skills, and good support for students not taking A-level mathematics. In an introductory lesson on waves the teacher effectively showed the nature of standing waves with a number of good demonstrations. Students' learning was promoted with a well-designed worksheet. The lesson was

conducted at a brisk pace. In another lesson the teacher made effective use of students' presentations to help students revise. There is too little use of ICT at St John Fisher because of a lack of some resources.

83. Learning is good: students make good progress. They have a positive attitude and respond well in lessons. Students work well with one another in groups and also individually. They carry out practical tasks accurately. Concentration is sustained very well and all make good efforts to do their best. Retention rates are good.
84. Leadership and management in physics are satisfactory as is progress since the last inspection. There is a need, however, to ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and to share effective practice. There is at present insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching, although analysis of performance by teaching group has recently been introduced. There is no common detailed scheme of work for the two schools to ensure consistency in teaching or the sharing of good practice. There is no development plan for physics and so improvements are too slow.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The inspection focused on the design and technology A-level course in product design: three-dimensional products, although lessons were observed in food technology and product design: textiles. Teaching and learning are very good in food studies and textiles and standards are well above average, supported by high quality project management and assessment methods. The leadership and management in food technology are excellent.

Design and technology – product design: three-dimensional products

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

Strengths

- Examination results are above average.
- Teaching is universally good, and some is very good.
- Use of computer-aided design and manufacturing (CAD/CAM) in three-dimensional product design is strong.

Areas for Improvement

- The quality of ongoing assessment/project management in three-dimensional product design is not strong enough.
- There is no joint sixth form development plan to address course development, resources and in-service training needs.
- The access to and the availability of computer-aided design and manufacturing facilities at St John Fisher High School are inadequate.

85. Examination results are above average and are continuing to rise. In recent years almost all students have achieved at least a pass, and a high proportion have gained A and B grades at both GCE AS and A2 levels.
86. Attainment in lessons is above average. All students make good progress in knowledge, understanding and skills during the first term of the AS course, because teachers have developed new and challenging projects, carefully linked to commercial and industrial practices. Parallels are drawn in applying techniques to industrial production. Students analysed domestic vacuum cleaners produced over the past 40

years and then, in another lesson, analysed modern appliances made from plastics. Over the two years, students' understanding of design issues and manufacturing practice is well developed and they apply this knowledge to other products and to their own projects.

87. Male and female students achieve well and make substantial gains through Years 12 and 13. All students use computers well for computer-aided design, testing, presentation and manufacturing. They have a well-developed understanding of design processes.
88. Students' learning is good: many learn very quickly. They come to lessons with very good attitudes to work and often begin productive activities before the lesson formally starts. They are clear about the next stages of learning or task to be undertaken. Their personal development is very good. Students work independently, in small groups and whole class situations. They have very good communication, information technology and numeracy skills.
89. Teaching is good overall. All teachers have a depth of experience and the knowledge and skills to enable students to learn at a good pace, from work pitched at a demanding level. Lesson planning is detailed and uses a range of appropriate strategies to engage and motivate students. Computers, with appropriate software and associated output devices, are well used to extend learning. There is a high level of individual support at all times and challenging questions are asked to explore ideas and extend the levels of understanding.
90. In the most successful lessons, project work is very well managed. Targets are set for each lesson, reviewed and reset for the next lesson. In three-dimensional product design, although teaching and learning are consistently good, standards could be improved further if some of the better practice evident in food and textiles was applied to learning on this course. During these lessons, the students did not have the same thorough approach to work. Progress on projects varied more widely, and students were less aware of the standard at which they were working. More and better lesson target setting and written assessments of project development would help students to achieve higher standards.
91. The leadership and management are good and there has been good progress since the last inspection. Retention rates are good. The work of students is effectively monitored on a regular basis and outcomes compared with the set course targets. More emphasis needs to be placed on evaluating what has been learned from monitoring, and implementing lessons learned. Links between teachers from the two schools are effective, and when necessary resources are shared or collectively purchased. Adjustment to the demands of the new AS and A2 courses have been effective and the number of students studying in this curriculum area have grown significantly in recent years. However, there is no over-arching development plan for the subject area. A jointly-produced plan would support further curriculum and course development, help identify and target resource spending and indicate areas of need for in-service training.
92. Limitations in access to computers, and the restricted nature of manufacturing output devices at St John Fisher, inhibit the quality and frequency of use of these essential tools for learning. Accommodation at this school is also limited both in extent and in the nature and range of equipment required for modern technological work.

BUSINESS

The focus was on AVCE business, but GCE A-level economics was also sampled. Standards in economics are high. Recent examination results in both GCE A-level and in AS are above the national average and on an upward trend. Teaching in the two classes seen was very good, as was the quality of students' learning, taking them to a high level of attainment.

Business

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and there is a commitment to maintaining standards that are well above average.
- Results have been well above average over the last three years.
- Students progress faster than might be expected, often from entry with quite low GCSE grades.
- The quality of assessment and advice given to students is very good.
- The department operates a very active Young Enterprise scheme for hands-on business experience across the sixth form.

Areas for improvement

- More attention should be paid to raising the attainment of male students.
- More use should be made of whole group discussions in AVCE classes to reinforce the main themes of unit assignments.

93. Results in external examinations have been well above average in the last three years. In 2000 and 2001 the pass rate was 100 per cent, and was just below that figure in 2002. In relation to their previous GCSE results, students made better than expected progress and achieved well, in some cases significantly so. Girls' results have been consistently better than boys'.
94. Across both years of the sixth form, the standards of work are above average, many students having started the course with modest GCSE results. There is the variability that might be expected with a wide range of prior attainment. A planning sheet, well supported by teacher's comments, prefaces every piece of coursework, and this evidence of good organisation contributes to good learning. The structure of the work is clear and well thought out, with extensive use of ICT.
95. Students have a good grasp of the criteria for success in each unit and act on this. They bring a wide variety of sources into their research and formulate hypotheses. In class, their attainment is at least average and often above this. In a Year 13 class on cash flow forecasts, for example, most students showed confidence in their use of financial tools and could, with more or less sophistication, construct a spreadsheet and explain it. Where they were less sure they were able, nevertheless, to ask for advice and act on it. The accessibility and helpfulness of teachers are an important factor in the department's commitment to high standards and the good progress of students, especially those with low GCSE grades. Sometimes students are not testing their understanding in higher level evaluative skills, as in a Year 12 class on the growth of firms, where they were confident in their understanding of facts and applications, but did not make progress in critical comment.

96. Teaching is consistently good. The main features are: the very good knowledge teachers have of theory, techniques and applied business examples; good class planning with variety; careful assessment of students' progress and attention to the needs of individual students; reinforcement and the constructive use of encouragement; and high expectations. In a Year 13 class on business at work, a case study of a well-known bed manufacturer was used, where the teacher acted as adviser to individual students, giving very good quality advice, continuously assessing progress and understanding through question and answer, and assisting them to discover answers for themselves. All were required to produce a time plan for completion of the unit. Similarly, a constructive and relaxed working environment was promoted at the start of a Year 12 class. A good, direct re-cap of the main elements of market research analysis was given, followed by individual help to students by the teacher and an ICT assistant. As a result, learning was good. On occasions, a class, once split for individual work, can lack coherence, and teachers make insufficient use of whole-class work to reinforce the main themes and produce greater cohesion.
97. Students generally learn well and make good progress. In all classes, teaching fosters co-operative working patterns, particularly in research, and this gives support to all and promotes learning. For example, each market research group was able to find information on different aspects of this business tool, bring the data together, and collaborate on synthesising it. Students make faster progress than might be expected, given their GCSE grades, and this is in part due to their own efforts and strong sense of motivation, and in part to the opportunities given them by their teachers. They are keen to do well, and are enthusiastic about the subject.
98. Since the last inspection sound progress has been made and the department has continued to provide a valuable and growing part of the sixth form curriculum, maintaining a high commitment to business education for all students. The subject has high retention rates. Its staff are well qualified and there is frequent attendance at in-service training courses. The department is well led and managed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The focus was on the AVCE course in ICT.

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well, attaining very good standards in their work.
- Teaching is consistently very good, ensuring that students develop their skills very effectively.
- Teachers assess students' work very well. They make very good use of this information to tell students of the progress they are making and how to improve yet further.
- The subject is very well led so that all teachers work effectively.

Area for improvement

- There is no method by which students on one site can access work stored on the computer system at the other site.

99. This is a new course for this sixth form. The first students to complete the course did so in 2002. All students gained a pass grade and a half obtained A or B grades. Students gained much higher grades than might have been expected based upon their GCSE results. Male and female students achieved equally well.

100. Standards of work of current students are well above average and levels of achievement are high. During the inspection, students in both years were preparing for tests that would count towards their final grade. In this work students showed that they had a very good understanding of the material they had been learning. Students in Year 13 searched the Internet effectively to compare ways in which travel agencies present information. Very positive attitudes towards work ensured that students were not sidetracked in any way. Students in Year 12 extracted the key information from written material and then presented it as a chart. They understood fully why they had to do this on a single side of paper. Students producing a range of stationery for a clothing company showed they have a good sense of the audience for whom their work is intended. They understand a design brief. Students planned, tested and evaluated their work very systematically. They understand both the purpose and limitations of tests.
101. The main reason for these standards is the consistently very good teaching. Teachers have an excellent knowledge, not just of what the course covers, but also of the best way to teach it. They take every opportunity to develop students' abilities to learn by themselves. Teachers have produced a very high quality series of course guides to help students learn. Students make very good use of these booklets, particularly to check very regularly that they have included everything required in each piece of work. Teachers are very good at assessing students' work. They regularly tell students about the progress they are making and the next step for them to take.
102. Students learn very well in lessons. They have mature and responsible attitudes towards their work. They respond well to the invitation to take charge of their own learning. However, they will seek advice from the teacher when they need to. Students keep good records of how their work is developing. They set themselves deadlines and work well to these. Only a handful of students do not complete the course. Although students have all their ICT lessons on the same site, some of them do find themselves on the other site during 'free for study' periods. At such times, they cannot get to their work stored on computer because there is no link between the sites. This means that they cannot always use their study time to the best advantage without spending time moving between the two schools.
103. The subject is very well led and managed. Effective measures have been put in place to ensure that the course is taught consistently on both sites. A very good feature of the course is the introductory unit. In the first three weeks students are introduced to the features of the course. Most importantly, this is done in the way in which they will work. This is very helpful, especially to those who have not followed a similar course before they entered the sixth form. Very few students do not continue with the course after this introduction. After the first group of students completed the course in 2002, the examination board was very complimentary about the steps the school had taken to introduce the course. ICT is proving to be very popular in the sixth form and there are very good plans on how the provision can develop to meet this growth.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Sports studies

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Results on the A-level course and current standards are well above average.
- Learning is very good and students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Very good relationships between teachers and their students promote very good learning.

Area for improvement

- The accommodation for teaching some theory lessons is of poor quality.

104. Results in the A-level examinations in 2001 were well above average. Over half the students gained an A or B grade. In 2002 this proportion rose to 70 per cent. Results have been consistently high for four years. They have improved since the previous inspection. There is no significant difference in the attainment of male and female students.
105. During the inspection students produced written and theory work of well above average standards in most lessons, representing very good achievement when their prior attainment is considered. Their skills in gymnastics were, however, below average although the sample of work observed was small. In a psychology of sport lesson, students in Year 13 understood that the attitudes of performers tend to reflect behaviour and that stereotyping is based on opinions and not knowledge. They know that aggression in sport can be positive, for example in boxing, and that decision making should consider the personality of the individual in coaching. Another group of Year 13 students discussed in depth the pressures of sponsorship on sportsmen with references to advertising in Formula One motor sport. When tracing the history of sports studies through the last century, students in Year 12 appreciated the developments from the military drill style of the 1950s through to the present day in gymnastics.
106. Students take pride in their work and use word processing skills well in their personal studies resulting in very good presentation skills. They demonstrate evidence of research skills in individual fitness programmes and interpret data through graphs and calculations. Students use a wide range of vocabulary relevant to their courses and speak enthusiastically about all aspects of their work. Their attitudes are very positive; they are confident to be involved in discussions, work collaboratively in groups and form very good relationships with their teachers.
107. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good. Teachers have a very good grasp of the topics taught and students speak highly of the quality of the teaching. Teachers have high expectations and they share learning objectives with students in their planning, which is thorough. Very good use is made of ICT such as *PowerPoint* for presentations. Appropriate use is made of the wide expertise of teachers. All teachers are committed to raising standards and to providing a positive learning experience for students.
108. Students have an excellent grasp of how they are progressing. They work independently when necessary and show a high level of interest in the course. They take responsibility for note taking without prompts from teachers and take homework seriously. A high level of effort and concentration typifies the very good learning.
109. Leadership and management are of good quality and teachers work well together. There has been good progress since the last inspection. Retention rates are good. The accommodation for theoretical lessons varies and is barely satisfactory overall

because students are taught in a variety of rooms and access to ICT equipment is consequently impaired.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The inspection focused on art, music and theatre studies. Within these, lessons in art history and music technology were also observed and these are reported on under the main subject's heading.

Art

Overall the quality of provision is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Exceptionally good individual tuition results in very high standards.
- The monitoring of students' achievements is exceptionally good.
- The craft skills demonstrated in all aspects of work are of a high standard.
- The quality of students' personal responses when looking at art is very mature.

Areas for improvement

- Students visit art galleries too infrequently and there are too few links with working artists.
- The creative use of computers needs is undeveloped and students following the art history course do not have studio access to the Internet.

110. Students are able to follow either an art course or a recently introduced art history course. Standards of work seen are very high, and art students' achievements overall, in relation to their standards when they began in the sixth form, are outstanding. These standards are achieved because the teaching is consistently very good and at times excellent. Students' attitudes also enable the quality of their learning to be excellent.
111. In the 2001 examination at A-level students achieved results that were well above the national average. The results in 2002 were very similar and again amongst the best in the sixth form. In 2002, the first AS examination year of the art history course, most students achieved grades A to C.
112. The standards of work seen are well above those seen in most sixth forms. Students draw and paint with very good craft skills. Painting of the human form often exceeds expectations. They use their sketchbooks to record accurately from observation and to explore different solutions. They develop imaginative three-dimensional work in a range of different media. From looking at a wide range of different artists' work they learn how to use different techniques and to incorporate these influences into their own original work. They look at art of other cultures to enrich their work and use art to express personal spiritual values.
113. Students learn good composition skills from taking part in role-play activities and analysing and discussing how the positioning of the figure can be most effectively used. In paired assessment tasks, students identify strengths and areas for improvement and apply this process to their own work. This results in improved critical judgement and leads to the rapid progress. Because teachers have very high expectations, it is normal for students not to settle for their first answer to a task but to explore alternatives. This results in a variety of art demonstrated with much individual

flair. Students on one site are provided with useful workspace to continue their practical work in private study time. Students on the other site do not have this opportunity to continue to rehearse their practical skills.

114. The standard of work seen in art history is also well above the average as students are exposed to work of the highest quality. Students look at a range of slides of different artists' work and analyse what they see. They make connections between the work of different artists and different art movements and relate this to historical events. They write confidently about what they see and feel, following very clear guidance. As a result of the teachers' regular emphases on the use of words, particularly with phrases in Italian, they use a correct art vocabulary to express accurately what they think. Their work is notable for the thoughtful way personal opinion and judgement are informed and expressed. Unfortunately studios for art history are not provided with Internet access to aid research, as would be expected.
115. Teaching and learning are excellent overall and in no lessons were they less than very good. All lessons in both activities are notable for all teachers making very clear the lesson objectives. Students are very well informed of what is expected of them and provided with useful information sheets to clarify lesson and examination requirements. The monitoring of students' achievement in lessons and homework tasks is exceptionally thorough. Teachers share their assessments and judgements and, from the exceptionally good individual tutorials, each student understands what must be done in order to improve.
116. Both male and female students show a very mature response to their work and achieve equally high standards. All lessons are purposeful and very productive as teachers and students work hard to make maximum use of every moment of time. There is a regular planned trip to national art galleries but students do not visit galleries or sculpture parks as frequently as would be expected. There are opportunities to work with artists to develop life drawing and photographic skills, but opportunities to work with artists-in-residence are infrequent. All students know how to use computers to find out about artists' work and show good word-processing skills in presenting their writing. With the introduction of digital cameras they are beginning to use sophisticated software to develop creatively their work, but this area is not yet fully exploited. Retention rates are high.
117. Leadership and management of what is a complex situation. There has been very good progress since the previous report with all issues being successfully addressed. The study of history of art has been successfully developed as a specialist course. Examination results at the higher grades in art have risen and now exceed the national average. On both sites students are exposed to a wide range of widely displayed exemplary artwork that sets high standards for which to strive.

Music

The quality of provision for music is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Standards are well above average.
- Students achieve very well because of the very good teaching and because of their own excellent attitudes.
- Leadership is excellent and staff from both schools work closely together.
- The outstanding range of extra-curricular work, competitions, workshops and concerts considerably enhances the experiences of the students and raises standards.

Area for improvement

- The accommodation at St Aidan's is unsatisfactory, although improvements are planned.

118. Results in the 2001 examinations were well above the national average for music at both AS and A-level. All students achieved a pass grade at AS-level and eight of the 12 students achieved grade A or B. In the 2001 A-level examination, seven of the 10 students achieved grades A and B and all students achieved at least a pass grade. One student achieved a place in the top five nationally. In AS music technology in 2001 all students achieved a grade between A and D. These results were far higher than expected. In 2002 these high standards were maintained in all cases and in music technology students achieved much better than expected. Again, a student in A-level music achieved a place in the top five nationally. Boys and girls achieve equally well. The majority of students progress from the AS course to A2 level and many of the students go on to study music at university or college. The examination results have improved substantially since the last inspection. The introduction of music technology considerably enhances the provision in the sixth form.
119. Standards seen during the inspection were well above average and students make very good progress through the courses. Standards of composition and performance are very high. Students have a very good grasp of music theory that they can translate very effectively into practical performance and composition. Some students are very able improvisers. All have very well developed listening skills and use technology confidently for composition. In music technology, arrangements and backing tracks using computers are effective and students manipulate the parameters to achieve a satisfying musical result.
120. Teaching and learning overall are very good. Both are often excellent. Teachers are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their subject. As a result students are acquiring very good knowledge and understanding and excellent practical skills. Lessons are excellently planned with regard to what has led to the current position and how it will be built on. As a result students are very clear what they have to achieve. Teachers use highly appropriate and innovative methods and approaches to teaching and learning. Question and answer sessions in most lessons establish students' very good knowledge. Individual work is then reinforced by paired or class discussion. Homework is designed to build on their knowledge and skills. Rehearsal groups are chosen to enhance learning for all. Students learn very well because theory and practice are always linked. Teachers motivate students well when assessing them, by using high quality examples from previous students' work to show what can be achieved.
121. Students work hard and productively in lessons because the pace set by teachers is demanding. Tasks are very challenging and as a result students make considerable effort on many levels. Students' work is very thoroughly assessed both in lessons and more formally for a complete piece of work. Students use the examination criteria in lessons so that they know exactly what is required of them and how to improve their

work. They also have half-termly reviews during which strengths and weaknesses are discussed and targets set.

122. Students are very interested in their work and are highly motivated. Retention rates are very good. They are responsible and mature and are very positive about the music courses in the school. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent and a very strong feature of the departments. These excellent attitudes considerably enhance their learning.
123. Music making outside the curriculum is also a very strong feature of the sixth form. Students have their own chamber choir and the high standards and total commitment in rehearsal have enabled them to win prestigious competitions nationally. Students also belong to a wide range of high quality bands, orchestras, choirs and groups all available in the schools and they take part in productions such as the current *My Fair Lady*. These opportunities add a further dimension to the quality of students' experience in the sixth form and contribute much to the excellent overall provision.
124. The management is excellent and the two very competent heads of departments work closely together. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good. The accommodation is excellent on one site and is being enhanced on the other as a result of the increased numbers choosing to study music in the sixth form. Resources, particularly those for technology, are excellent at both schools.

Theatre studies

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average and are improving because of the very good teaching and learning.
- Very good leadership enhances students' progress.
- Excellent extra-curricular provision develops students' social and subject skills.
- Teachers work very closely with each other, and with students, resulting in the requirements of the course being shared and well understood.
- Excellent relationships promote learning well.

Area for improvement

- Students' perceptions of their written work are less positive than those for performance and consequently standards are slightly lower.

125. The number of students taking the subject has increased and the retention rate is high. The first group of students was examined in the subject in 2001. Results matched national ones and have continued to improve with the proportion of students achieving A or B grades rising from 27 per cent to 44 per cent. Students' current standards of attainment are above average and they are achieving very well, taking their GCSE backgrounds into account.
126. Students have an excellent understanding of theories about acting, particularly those of Stanislavsky. They use these theories to guide their own acting, to help them evaluate the work of others and to be self-critical. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students successfully explored how an actor's proximity to others was an important factor in expressing particular moods. In a Year 13 class students showed a high level of insight as to how the contradictions in characters might be communicated. In all the practical work seen students displayed excellent communication skills. The

quality of their speech, their awareness of how to use the acting space to advantage and the quality of their non-verbal communication, such as facial expression, meant they held the attention of the audience very well. When evaluating the performances of others, students display insight and tact. Written work is of a high standard, although not quite as assured as students' performance skills. The department has strategies in place, including developing literacy skills, to improve students' writing further.

127. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and there are examples of excellent teaching and learning. The teachers who share the sixth form classes work very closely with each other, and with students, so that all the work is co-ordinated and students feel the course is coherent and enables them to progress. Students have a very good understanding of their own learning. Teachers possess excellent subject knowledge, as was seen in the way in which theories on acting were explained and in the discussion of particular texts. They also have an excellent understanding of the practicalities of producing and directing plays. The consequence is that students engage with what they read and act out at a high intellectual level, enjoying rigorous discussion with others.
128. The planning of lessons is a particular strength. Teachers take into account how well students have understood what was taught in earlier lessons so as to remedy any deficiencies of understanding. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson that revised aspects of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Lessons include variety, give ample opportunities for students to be actively involved in the work and are conducted at a brisk pace. All the time available is used to full advantage. The department is active in encouraging students to broaden their interest in the subject beyond the classroom by, for example, organising visits to theatres, community involvement, supporting younger students in lessons and presenting professional quality productions. These not only develop subject skills but also heighten citizenship. All students relish the subject and the excellent relationships reflect the enthusiasm and joy of both staff and students. Students do not use their initiative to explore the subject as fully in their written work and consequently their standards are slightly lower.
129. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Resources are deployed efficiently and effectively. Students are provided with very good support and guidance on a range of relevant matters, ranging from the opportunities available to become involved with local groups to university courses. The arrangements for assessing students' progress, and using this to determine what and how they will be taught, are very good. The quality of the accommodation has improved significantly since the last inspection and the subject has a high profile and steadily improving standards.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography, history, politics and psychology. Religious education was inspected by the Section 23 inspector whose report is published separately.

Geography

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

Strengths

- There is excellent collaboration in the management of sixth form geography.
- Examination results and current standards are well above average.
- Students make very good progress because the teaching is very good.
- Students are very interested and have excellent attitudes towards their work.
- Very good individual support is given to students.

Areas for improvement

- There is no formal system to monitor the work of the department.
- The marking and grading systems are potentially confusing to students.

130. In the 2001 A-level examination results were well above average; the proportion of students achieving the top two grades was very high. These high standards were maintained in the results for 2002, and at AS-level all students achieved at least a pass grade and over two-thirds achieved the highest two grades. Students begin their AS and A-level courses with levels of attainment that are above average. They make good progress throughout the sixth form and their achievement in relation to their prior attainment is very good.
131. The standard of work in Year 13 is well above average. Students have a very good breadth and depth of knowledge, seen in essays evaluating the impact of top-down and bottom-up aid schemes in less economically developed countries. In lessons preparing for the synoptic paper, students demonstrated that they could draw information and use skills from different parts of the syllabus. They used their knowledge of both physical and human factors to evaluate development opportunities on the island of Raratonga. Students are competent in their analysis and interpretation of data, for example, when seeking to find an objective measure of levels of deprivation in civic wards in Leeds. Students' contributions to classroom debates are perceptive, demonstrating a very good understanding of the effects of demographic change on societies and of the need to balance the protection of natural environments with the requirement for economic growth.
132. Standards in Year 12 are also well above average. As in Year 13, written work is of a very high standard and students build up a comprehensive portfolio of work. Students' personal investigations based on Leeds show a very good understanding of models of city development and the challenge of urban environments. They analyse data well and come to valid, clearly expressed conclusions. Their understanding of coastal deposition and erosion is enhanced by the fieldwork visit to the Holderness coast. Fieldwork reports show clearly that students understand the difficulties facing coastal communities and can evaluate the effectiveness of sea defence strategies.
133. Very good teaching ensures that all students make very good progress with their learning. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and they ensure that students are well prepared for the examination. Practice examination questions are used to very good effect and preparation for the synoptic paper mimics that of the actual examination. Lessons are very well planned to include a variety of activities. The mixture of class teaching, group work and student feedback opportunities ensures that all students, including those with special educational needs, are well supported. Resource packs, used when students are working in groups, are comprehensive and often contain articles from recent newspapers and geographical periodicals. They encourage students' independent learning and provide wide-ranging examples. The teachers' very good oversight of group work maintains the pace of the lesson and allows for additional input where necessary. The support given to individual students,

particularly when they are completing personal studies and longer assignments, is excellent and is a major strength of the department. Students make good use of the extra help that they know is available at lunchtimes and after school. As a consequence, students develop very good essay writing skills and students' personal investigations reach a very high standard.

134. Students are given regular opportunities to complete practice examination questions. The thorough marking of these indicates clearly what the student should do to improve and is instrumental in maintaining students' good progress. There is, however, some inconsistency in the way that marks are given, using both percentages and grades in similar exercises. This is an area for development so that, after every assessment, students understand clearly the standard they have reached in relation to their predicted examination grade.
135. Students enjoy the subject. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. Students have a real confidence in their teachers and find them easy to approach. They feel supported and encouraged by teachers who demonstrate a good knowledge of their subject and the demands of the examination. They appreciate the individual support that is available to them and feel that they make good progress because teaching is good and lessons are interesting. Most students progress from AS-level to complete the A-level course and retention rates are good.
136. Leadership and management of sixth form geography are very good, as is progress since the last inspection. There is excellent collaboration between the two heads of department. Both departments now use the same examination board and syllabus and resources are purchased together and shared as necessary. The team of teachers work very well together and have prepared new joint schemes of work. All teachers are committed to raising standards and meet regularly to discuss how this is to be achieved. Selective training opportunities ensure that knowledge of examination requirements is up to date. However, a system of formal monitoring of the department's work, including direct observations of lessons, has yet to be put in place, and this is an area for development to facilitate the sharing of good practice. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

History

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

Strengths

- Attainment in AS and A2 examinations is well above average.
- Teaching is very good and results in students making very good progress.
- Students' attitudes towards their work are excellent.
- Very good relationships motivate students to aim for the highest standards.

Areas for improvement

- The joint management of the two departments does not sufficiently ensure effective collaboration or the spreading of the very best practice in teaching.
- The medium and long-term planning for future development of the two departments is not strong enough.

137. The GCE A2-level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average. This continued the high attainment of 1999 and 2000. In 2002 there was a slight dip in the proportion gaining grades A or B but it was still above the 2001 national average. All students who took the examination in 2002 gained a pass grade. These results

largely reflect the prior attainment of the students in their GCSE two years previously. All students who took the AS examination in 2002 gained a pass grade, and half gained grade A or B. This was a slight improvement on the 2001 results. Students achieve very well and make very good progress overall from their GCSE work as a result of very good teaching and their own hard work.

138. The standard of work is overall higher than that in most sixth forms, being above average. Students in Years 12 and 13 produce essays that are well structured and analytical. They have very good knowledge and understanding of the periods of history they are studying. Students explained clearly, and in some depth, the problems facing Russia in the early 20th century that hindered industrialisation. A group of students studying the Cold War in the 1950s had very good understanding of long and short-term causes in their work on Castro's rise to power. The highest attainers made very valid comments on the likelihood and nature of bias in some of the sources of their evidence. The oral contributions of the highest attainers are articulate and well developed.
139. The Year 13 essay work is well structured and analytical, shows considerable depth of understanding and presents a valid viewpoint, backed up by well-researched evidence. Students studying the General Strike of 1926 compared very successfully two contrasting explanations of why the strike failed. They identified very clearly the bias in the extracts, and the highest attainers explained how the language and tone used could show bias. They successfully explained how the same events could be interpreted in different ways. The highest attainers in a group studying Napoleon I identified very competently whether or not he could be seen as an heir to the French Revolution. The lower attainers found the task of linking Napoleon's reforms to the principles of the revolution a difficult one.
140. Teaching is very good overall, and often excellent. This is a major contributory factor to the students' very good progress in both Years 12 and 13 and to the well above average attainment in examinations. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they communicate very effectively. Teachers start lessons by checking that students have understood previous work before moving on to new work, and use short plenary sessions to draw conclusions both during and at the end of lessons. They thus are well informed about their students' understanding and progress. The work set is appropriately challenging, and gives very good opportunities for the highest attainers to work at the highest standards. Teachers prepare students very well for examinations and give very clear guidance on how to write high quality examination answers. The detailed comments on marked work provide students with clear guidance and targets to improve their answers in the future.
141. Teaching methods ensure that students have a variety of ways in which to learn; learning and progress are very good. Students have good opportunities to work independently and not to rely too heavily on their teachers. Group work is well organised and ensures all students participate in the work. The best lessons have a suitable mix of whole-class work, paired or group activities and independent work. In a lesson on the changing nature of warfare, for instance, a series of paired activities kept all students involved, including some who had not been involved in whole-class discussion. The activities were interspersed with short whole-class sessions in which the teacher checked students' progress. Teachers rightly emphasise students' oral contributions to lessons and give them frequent opportunities to develop their answers at length.

142. Students' attitudes to their work are very good. They work hard and come to lessons prepared for work, thus enabling the teachers to move on to new work effectively. They have very strong commitment to their studies, and clearly want to learn and improve. A very small number occasionally do not participate actively in lessons, and allow others to answer questions and contribute to discussions.
143. The very good leadership and management of the departments ensure that high standards are maintained. There has been good progress since the last inspection. The ethos of hard work and high attainment supports the schools' aims strongly. History is a very popular subject, and virtually all students who start the course remain on it through the two years. Both heads of department provide very good leadership and management for their respective sixth forms. They do not, however, meet sufficiently frequently to ensure that the two departments are always working together as well as they should be. There is, for example, little opportunity for departments to share the excellent practice in teaching that exists in both schools across both schools. The teaching staff from the two schools do not meet together to discuss issues of teaching and learning. This need to improve the collaboration was identified at the previous inspection.

Politics

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- There is a strong sense of shared values in the department and a commitment to high standards.
- Teaching is very good and promotes very good learning.
- The department uses a wide range of up-to-date and challenging materials.
- Students work very well together and co-operate fully.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities are sometimes missed to ensure that all students participate fully in classroom activities.
- The style of teaching occasionally lacks variety.

144. The GCE A-level results in 2002 were well above recent averages, and this was part of a rising trend of above average results in previous years. A similar pattern exists in the last two years' AS results. All students taking the examinations passed, and in relation to their previous results at GCSE they did better than expected. Male and female students did equally well.
145. The standards of work of current Year 12 students are above average. The majority of students in both years are progressing faster than might be expected for this stage of the course. In Year 12, their notebooks are clear and well presented, and higher attaining students are already, at an early stage of their studies, using quite advanced and sophisticated concepts together with good factual knowledge and a good writing style. This is a reflection of very good teaching. In class, they are able to reflect and argue convincingly, and all students contribute to discussion and respond to questions. For example, in a class on referenda, students volunteered their views, showing interest and an awareness of political issues, and similarly in a class on electoral turnout there was a lively and well-informed response.

146. In Year 13 the quality of work is, in general, above average and much is well above. Students have grasped the importance of critical comment in their participation in class and in their writing. Their responses are accurate and show a sound grasp of facts, and in addition they can build on this to weigh the pros and cons of an argument. In a class on the peace process in Northern Ireland, for example, students worked well in groups to disentangle the complexities of participation and vested interests, and their responses were detailed, thoughtful and evaluative.
147. Teaching is very good overall and promotes very good learning. The main features are very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, a wide range of materials, good planning, a challenging style and wide use of encouragement and praise. In addition, there is a constant emphasis to the students of the need to develop higher level skills and ways of thinking. For example, in a Year 12 class on referenda a very clear and direct teaching style, alternating explanation with reading and group work, produced good learning and inspired confidence. A Year 13 class on Northern Ireland was conducted in an adult, collaborative atmosphere to which the students responded well – the teacher's knowledge was excellent, and very precise and detailed help was given. In general, feedback from teachers in class and in assignments is very good. Occasionally, however, opportunities are missed to involve all students, as, for example, in a Year 13 class on law and order, where some students were allowed to be passive, and where moderate pace and emphasis on absorbing information lacked challenge for an advanced group – but this is the exception.
148. Students learn very well. They are attentive and are mostly very willing to respond to the promptings of their teachers. Industriousness is a feature of their approach, together with co-operative work habits that ensure that the class moves forward together. They rise to the challenge of the very good teaching, as in a Year 13 class on the significance of falling voter turnout, where they moved confidently through a sequence of individual response, small group work and the drawing of mind maps. They were self-motivated to stretch themselves intellectually and see complex connections in the Northern Ireland discussions. They are well organised and become adept at working on their own as they progress through the two years. In particular, their research skills develop well. In general, they record information and ideas well, but particularly in Year 12 they are not always good at making notes in open discussion, something not always picked up by their teachers.
149. Since the last inspection very good progress has been made. Provision in politics has improved, particularly in teaching, the standard of which has risen from satisfactory to very good, and attainment is now consistently above average. The department is well led and managed and has a well-qualified staff who frequently attend courses to update their knowledge. There is a pleasing sense of unity across the teaching, particularly in challenging students to higher levels of attainment.

Psychology

The quality of provision in psychology is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Excellent leadership and management of the department focus on raising standards and improving overall provision.
- A rich, stimulating curriculum engages students' interests and enthusiasms to a high degree.

Areas for improvement

There are no areas of any significance for further improvement.

150. The 2001 A-level results were very high with over half the students attaining A or B grades. The proportion of students obtaining pass grades was well above the national average. The results improved significantly in 2002 with the proportion gaining A or B grades rising to two thirds, and all gaining grades A to E. Over the past three years, results have continued to improve. Students who took the AS examinations in 2002 achieved very well and reached high standards. Over three-quarters of the students reached A, B or C grades on the first two test papers; students' performance on the third test paper was not so good, but over two-fifths obtained an A, B or C grade.
151. Students have already obtained well above average grades at GCSE overall and they continue to make very good progress, achieving very well and reaching high standards. Higher attaining students and those with talent in the subject do particularly well and make excellent progress. In 2002, based on results overall at GCSE, eight students were predicted to reach an A grade; however, 17 reached this top grade in the examinations, showing excellent achievement over the two years. The standard of work seen during the inspection was very significantly above what is expected.
152. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Students are provided with an excellent range of opportunities to advance their understanding, knowledge and skills. Teaching is of extremely high quality and staff take great care to advance learning through a thorough understanding of complex technical language. As a result, students debate and discuss issues such as 'flashbulb memory' or 'post-traumatic stress disorder' comfortably, with understanding and with authority. Students learn the skills of cause and effect by relating psychological research to real-life situations. They realise very quickly the ethical implications of testing on an unaware audience. Through the use of case studies and video clips, students readily appreciate the differences in responses of men and women to sexual advances, learning to relate this to ethical and gender considerations when assessing the validity of the research.
153. Teachers provide frequent opportunities for students to assess each other by performing simple yet relevant experiments on each other, even to the point of rewarding them with sweets. As a result, the theories and experiments of great psychologists such as Piaget or Vygotsky are brought alive. Higher attaining students are effectively challenged further by being given opportunities to read more widely or to research from a broader field. This gives them a deeper insight into the risks and consequences of experiments and research.
154. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They use this very effectively when challenging students' thinking in the frequent question and answer sessions in lessons. The teaching methods are especially successful. A very extensive range is used frequently, keeping students on their toes and stimulating their interest and imagination. The frequent use of case studies, video clips, opportunities to interview each other or to present their findings, all encourage better learning while promoting key skills of listening, reading, speaking and measuring.

155. The department is a centre of excellence. Staff work as a team and meet regularly. All discussion centres on improving students' learning, and on helping them reach better grades. The head of department observes all her colleagues teach regularly and provides effective feedback on how to improve. Work is very carefully marked with very helpful annotations on how to improve. An excellent range of resources ensures students are constantly challenged and moved on in their learning. The adaptation of the curriculum has also made a significant contribution to enhancing students' learning. By ensuring that learning is active and draws upon a very wide range of information, current and historical, students' enquiring minds are further stimulated. The teacher and students drew the conclusion in one lesson having looked at some recent research, that learning is greatly enhanced if participants enjoy what they are doing. That is the hallmark of this department and accounts to a large degree to its great success.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

The focus of the inspection was on all English courses and involved observing lessons and scrutinising work in GCE AS and A2 classes in English language, English literature and the dual course in both. The GCSE re-sit course was also sampled. Comments on all these are included below.

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive.
- Levels of attainment are well above average – students achieve very well.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.
- The effective use of assessment facilitates good progress.

Areas for improvement

- There is too little sharing of good practice through lesson observations.
- The absence of a detailed sixth form development plan hinders progress.

156. The 2001 examination results, with a large entry, were well above the national average in English literature and were very high in English language. The percentage of high grades, A and B, was also well above average in both. All students who took the course gained grades A to D in English literature and all gained A to E in English language. Male students performed as well as female students. The 2002 results indicate a trend of maintaining standards well above what is expected nationally in both English language and English literature. In GCSE retakes, most of the students gained a grade C.
157. Standards of attainment seen during the inspection were well above average. In Year 12, students of all abilities have already made good progress from their GCSE level of work. In Year 13, when previous attainment is considered, achievement is very good. Coursework in both year groups is above average and some excellent responses to Chaucer and the analysis of language were seen. In a Year 13 lesson, students showed very high levels of understanding in their work on Marlowe's *Edward II*. In all cases male students are performing as well as, and in some cases better than,

female students. Those who are retaking examinations are building on previous learning and most are on track to improve their grades.

158. The quality of teaching is very good overall, and in a small number of lessons it was excellent. As a result, students learn very well. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and they make full use of assessment and targets to plan their lessons carefully. In the very best lessons teachers use questioning very effectively to test students' understanding. Teachers' expectations are high and students respond well to the challenges. Learning was best when students were given the responsibility to form their own judgments. They have a good understanding of how well they are doing and how they can make further progress. In a minority of lessons the students are not sufficiently involved because the teacher's exposition dominates the whole lesson.
159. Students' attitudes are very positive. They show interest in lessons, are ready to contribute to class discussions and co-operate well with each other. Relationships with teachers are very good. Students show initiative and have developed strong learning skills. They work well independently and take pride in their achievements.
160. The subject is well led and managed. There is a clear direction for the sixth form work and this promotes high standards of teaching and learning. The lack of a detailed development plan for the department limits teachers' understanding of the department's priorities and their role in them. Target setting is well established and is based on a thorough understanding of students' abilities. It helps students to build on what they already know and can do. Teachers do not have sufficient opportunities to watch each other teach and share the very good practice and ideas. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

Modern foreign languages

The focus was on French, but German was also sampled. In German, average A-level point scores and the higher grade (A and B) pass rate were below the national average in 2001, but the overall pass rate was about average. A strategic change of staff is producing good improvements. Teaching and learning were very good in the one Year 13 lesson observed. Numerous inter-related activities culminated in a good debate in German on the subject of cloning. The lesson gave the students substantial practice in expressing themselves fluently in German on a moral issue in which they were really interested.

French

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

Strengths

- The A-level examination pass rates and points scores are well above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- The chosen study themes, visits and work experiences abroad make an excellent contribution to the students' personal development.

Area for improvement

- Some teachers would benefit from closer guidance from senior and middle management through helpful criticism of their work in class.

161. Examination results are well above average; only one candidate failed the A-level examination in the past four years. The GCE A-level results in 2001 continued the well

above average pattern since the previous inspection; the 2002 results were similar. In 2001, the average point scores and higher grade, A and B, pass rates were well above average. The well above average standards are the outcome of very hard work and commitment on the part of able students and of very good, imaginative teaching that leads to learning of a similar quality. Male and female students do equally well.

162. Current standards of work are also well above average and, in Year 13, achievement is very much better than what could reasonably be expected considering the students' GCSE and AS results. Some students' written work is outstandingly fluid and very well researched; it makes compelling reading. Others' writing is interesting and uses a good range of construction and vocabulary, but is interspersed with grammatical errors and misspelling, although it is within the range of course grades.
163. Lesson observations confirm the students' very good achievement over the duration of the courses, with very good reading and excellent listening and comprehension skills. In classes and homework, which makes a very good contribution to learning, the students have thorough practice that improves their literacy and ICT skills, in which they are very proficient. For example, in one very good lesson the students collaborated very well in groups to prepare talks on education systems in five French-speaking countries around the world, having found the material they worked on through useful websites.
164. The achievement of students in Year 12 is good overall, although they are only a little way into their course. Some written and oral work is well above average, but that of others lack some confidence. Whilst they have a good understanding of the topics studied, their writing has not shown much improvement in accuracy since they started the course. Interviews with students confirm the very good relationships and attitudes that are crucial parts of the very good achievement made by the end of the two-year course in a positive learning atmosphere.
165. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. This translates into classes where there is no slacking. Students are frequently put on their mettle to find their own solutions through, for example, focused group work. In these lessons, the resources used are often particularly effective in helping very good learning to occur. For instance, in a very good Year 12 lesson, an action-packed snippet of a French film formed the basis for testing the students' observation skills in reporting the actions of aggressors and victim into a computer program that checked their accuracy with them. Learning, as a result, was very good, as the students were highly motivated and keen to do well.
166. Whilst no teaching is unsatisfactory, some does lack the sparkle of the best. Certain activities go on for too long, so the pace slows and questioning and discussions lack depth, although in one lesson on bulimia some responses showed good insight, for instance, stating, in perfect French, it to be both an alimentary and psychological condition.
167. An excellent characteristic is the impact of the course on the students' personal development. The work requires study, from a French point of view, of themes that are of immediate interest to the students, showing they are not alone in their concerns. At the same time, very well supported work experience programmes in, among others, French veterinary, chemist and café work places, residence in French families and study of literature that is couched in rural French culture, give the students clear perspectives of other ways of doing things.

168. Leadership and management are good. Each school makes an equal contribution to the curriculum that lends itself so well to raising standards. Assessment and marking are very good; they help the students to know how they are doing and equally how to improve. The main weakness is in the relative isolation of the numerous teachers who contribute to the courses. Middle and senior managers do not arrange mutual observations to promote positive professional criticism of each other's work to bring the quality of teaching and learning up to that of the best.