

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **WHITECROSS HIGH SCHOOL**

Hereford

LEA area: Herefordshire

Unique reference number: 116935

Headteacher: Mrs Denise Strutt

Reporting inspector: Dr Kenneth C. Thomas  
3390

Dates of inspection: 09 - 12 December 2002

Inspection number: 252270

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 16
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Baggalley Street Hereford
Postcode:	HR4 0EA
Telephone number:	01432 359151
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Tony Marrett
Date of previous inspection:	08/11/1999

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3390	Kenneth Thomas	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>How high are standards?</p> <p>a) The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well are students taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
14214	Gillian Smith	Lay inspector		<p>How high are standards?</p> <p>b) Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
19399	Linda Aspland	Team inspector	Art	
10905	Alan Brewerton	Team inspector	Science	
14704	Jeffrey Cooling	Team inspector	Geography	
19414	Janet Flisher	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
4372	Ralph Fordham	Team inspector	Religious education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
17201	Vikki Harrhy	Team inspector	Physical education	
11548	David Lee	Team inspector	Mathematics	
19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History	
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Music Citizenship	
3793	John Ratcliffe	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	

14573	Hugh Wareing	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
31831	Keith Watson	Team inspector	Design and technology	
11720	Philip Winch	Team inspector	Educational inclusion Special educational needs	How well does the school care for its students?

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Whitecross High School is a mixed 11-16 comprehensive school with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls. The number of students (866) has risen by about 13 per cent since the last inspection and the school is now about the same size as most other secondary schools. With the exception of Year 11, which is slightly smaller than other year groups, there is a broadly equal distribution of students across Years 7 to 11. The school provides for students across the full attainment range. Attainment on entry has risen over the past four years and is now average, overall. The proportion of students on the school's register of special educational needs, at 25 per cent is above average, as is the proportion of students with statements (4.8 per cent). A unit for students with moderate learning difficulties is based at the school and provides specialist support for 35 students. The range of students' other needs include, specific learning difficulties (dyslexia), emotional and behavioural difficulties, visual impairment and autism. Less than one per cent of students have other than white United Kingdom backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals, at about 12 per cent, is within the average range. Forty-five students have been admitted to the school since September 2001 at times other than with their normal cohort arrival. A significant proportion of these students have attendance problems or special educational needs. There are two traveller students on the school roll and two with English as an additional language. There are firm plans to re-house the school in purpose built accommodation on a green field site in September 2005.

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

This is an improving school, which provides an overall satisfactory education for its students. The excellent leadership of the headteacher, effectively supported by other senior managers and governors, has brought much improvement. Because teaching is good overall, most students make good progress and standards are rising. National Curriculum tests results are improving at a similar rate as results nationally, while GCSE results are rising at a faster rate. Attitudes and behaviour are good. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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

- Standards are rising because of excellent leadership, very effective school management and very good support from governors
- Teaching is good. Teachers are highly committed; they plan lessons well so students learn effectively
- Good use is made of assessment information to identify strengths and weaknesses and to set students targets
- Pastoral arrangements are strong. Procedures for promoting good behaviour are excellent and students have positive attitudes to school
- Provision for students with special educational needs is good; students participate fully in all aspects of the school and achieve well
- Provision for students' social development is excellent. It is enhanced by a very good citizenship education programme and a very good range of extra-curricular activities
- The arrangements for the professional development of staff are very good and underpinning school improvement

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

- The amount of curriculum time allocated to some subjects and the structure of the two week timetable
- The achievement of girls in Years 7 to 9 in English, mathematics and science
- The range of courses offered to students in Years 10 and 11
- The match of teachers to the needs of the curriculum
- The use of the library to support teaching and learning
- The accommodation for science, art and music

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

When the school was last inspected in 1999 it was judged to have serious weaknesses. The school has improved considerably and now provides a quality of education that has many good features. Several of the issues for action identified in the last report related to leadership and management and the use of assessment information. These have improved to the extent that they are now strengths of the school. Vigorous action taken by senior managers and the governors has successfully brought about improvements in teaching and learning. Good planning with staff development closely linked to school improvement priorities underpin the rising standards. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved, as has provision for science. With the exception of the provision of a daily act of corporate worship, all statutory requirements are met. The school is now in a strong position to raise standards further.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	D	D	C	C

<b>Key</b>	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

From entry to the school in Year 7, girls and boys of all social groups and academic potential make good progress and achieve well. The school is successfully implementing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy and results in the National Curriculum tests, taken at the end of Year 9, are rising. In 2002, the overall test results in English, mathematics and science rose to be average in comparison with all schools. Although the results were below average in comparison with similar schools, based on students' entitlement to free school meals, they represent good achievement when standards of attainment on entry are taken into account. There were differences in the core subjects. Results in English were affected by instability in staffing and below those obtained in mathematics and science. Results in science and mathematics were average in comparison with all and similar schools. There are differences in the standards attained by boys and girls, with boys performing better than girls overall at the end of Year 9. This is not consistent with the national picture.

Achievement is good through Years 10 and 11 and this is reflected in the results of GCSE examinations, which have risen at a faster rate than results nationally. The proportion of students achieving five or more A\*-C grades has risen from well below average in 2000 to average in 2002, both in comparison with all schools and similar schools. The proportion of students obtaining five or more A\* to G grades and the GCSE average points score have also risen. The proportion of students obtaining grades in the A\*-C range rose in all subjects other than science and ICT, where the 2002 results were similar to those obtained in 2001 and in geography and physical education where they were below. Nevertheless, overall achievement in the 2002 GCSE examinations was well above expectations based on students' levels of attainment at the end of Year 9. There was a marked difference in the performance of boys and girls with more girls obtaining five or more A\*-C grades. In most subjects differences in performance are explained by differences in attainment at the end of Year 9. Students with special educational needs, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and the few students with English as an additional language make good progress and achieve well: the great majority are successful in the GCSE examination. The targets set for 2003 are demanding but achievable and if reached will continue the rising trend.

Inspection evidence shows the standards of work of students presently in Years 7 to 11 to be consistent with the results obtained in external tests and examinations.



## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good, overall, having significant impact on students' progress.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good, both around the school and in the vast majority of lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Students understand the impact of their actions on others and respond well to the very many opportunities to show initiative and take personal responsibility. Relationships are very good.
Attendance	Attendance is consistently good in Years 7 to 11, with little unauthorised absence.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school, and better than at the time of the last inspection. Teaching and learning are particularly effective in mathematics and in the resource base for students with special educational needs, where examples of excellence in teaching were seen. Examples of excellent teaching were also seen in citizenship, geography and physical education. The teaching of science, English and most other subjects is good throughout. Teaching and learning in drama and ICT are good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Teaching takes account of the needs of all students. The effectiveness of the teaching of the few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and the small number with English as an additional language, together with those students who have been excluded from other schools, is seen in the rise in standards across the GCSE grade range at the end of Year 11. Good teaching ensures that all students learn successfully and achieve well. Literacy and numeracy are well taught with appropriate emphasis in all subjects. Teachers manage their classes very well with the help of the respect that arises from very good relationships. However, weaknesses in planning and low expectations were among the shortcomings of the very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching observed in English, science, physical education, ICT and art.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory breadth and balance up to GCSE enable students to achieve well, but a limited range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Effective support enables students to achieve well. Support for students in the resource-based provision is very good.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good support is provided for the few students at an early stage of learning English as an additional language

Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Provision for social development is outstanding and very good for moral development. Provision for spiritual development is good and satisfactory for cultural development. Staff provide good role models. Opportunities for reflection are provided in most assemblies, but the school does not meet the requirement to provide a daily act of corporate worship.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pastoral arrangements are strong and increasing use is being made of information on students' progress to monitor and support their improvement.

The school is keen to increase the extent to which parents are involved in their children's education and is providing parents with a growing range of opportunities to do this. There is general parental agreement that the school is improving rapidly. This is reflected in the growing popularity of the school and the steadily increasing number of students who apply for places. The very wide range of curriculum enrichment and other extra-curricular activities widen students' educational experiences and increase their achievement opportunities. The school is aware of the need to extend the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 to provide alternative programmes for students not well suited to GCSE courses. Not enough curriculum time is allocated for full syllabus coverage in science, history, geography, religious education, physical education and art. The uneven distribution of lessons over the two-week timetable period has an adverse effect on teaching and learning in some subjects. Apart from collective worship the curriculum meets statutory requirements.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent leadership by the headteacher ensures clear educational direction. Good teamwork among very capable senior managers is leading the drive for improvement. Strong leadership in many areas of the school has a significant impact on the progress of students, including the resourced based provision for students with special educational needs.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good, except for the provision of collective worship. Governors have an increasing capacity to monitor and evaluate the quality of education provided by the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Planning, monitoring and evaluation, both of results and of priorities for improvement, are all much improved and are now very good.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The school seeks to get the best value when buying services and there is an increasing awareness of the need to ensure best value in making educational decisions.

The match of teachers to the demands of the school's curriculum is unsatisfactory. The school has an appropriate number of teachers but there are too many staff in some subjects and too few in science, music and history. Learning resources are adequate but not all subjects use computers as much as they should and the library is inadequate and underused. The unsatisfactory nature of the accommodation has been recognised and new school premises are to be built for the start of the 2005 school year. Nevertheless, there are serious accommodation deficiencies in science, art and music that require urgent attention.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expectations are high and their children make good progress</li><li>• The school is well led and managed</li><li>• The school is helping their children become more mature and responsible</li><li>• The approachability of the school</li><li>• The range of extra-curricular activities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information on the progress their children are making</li><li>• Homework</li><li>• The closeness with which school works with parents</li></ul>

Inspectors agree with parents' favourable views. Inspectors do not support parents' concerns; the amount of homework is similar to other schools and parents are kept well informed about what their child is studying and how they are getting on. The school is keen to work constructively with parents and does this successfully in many ways, as in promoting regular attendance.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. The attainment of students on entry in Year 7 has risen over recent years and, while covering a wide range, is now average overall. However, there were differences between students' attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science on entry in 2002. While attainment in science and mathematics was average overall, attainment in English was below average. There were also differences in attainment between boys and girls. While the attainment of girls in English was below average that of boys was well below. In mathematics, the attainment of boys was average while that of girls was below. The attainment of both boys and girls in science was average.
2. The school is making determined efforts to raise standards. The introduction of curriculum area reviews has led to more accountability for performance and an increased awareness of the impact of teaching on students' achievement. This has been linked to the introduction of target setting and closer monitoring of students' progress, and the effect is seen in rising standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. The overall results of National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9, in English, mathematics and science, have risen from below average in 1999 to be average in comparison with all schools and in comparison with schools in similar circumstances. Taking the standards of attainment of these students when they entered the school in Year 7 into account, the results represent good achievement by the end of Year 9. There were differences in attainment between the three core subjects. In 2002 students achieved better results in mathematics than in science or English. The below average results in English are largely attributable to instability in staffing over recent years. The staff is now more stable and new leadership in the subject is having a significant impact on teaching and learning. When standards of attainment in English on entry to the school are taken into account, the 2002 results represent good achievement on the part of students. However, the results in science, although average, represented a certain amount of underachievement at the end of Year 9. Here instability in staffing has had a similar impact on standards and the difficulties this has caused have been compounded by significant weaknesses in provision in the subject that were identified at the time of the last inspection. The recently appointed subject leader is tackling these weaknesses vigorously and the impact has been seen in a sharp rise in the science results in 2002 compared to 2001.
3. There are differences in the standards attained by boys and girls at the end of Year 9, with boys performing better than girls overall. This is not consistent with the national picture, which shows that girls tend to obtain better results than boys. Although the proportion of girls attaining the expected Level 5 in English was above boys in 2002, in comparison with national figures, the proportion of boys at this level was average while the proportion of girls was below. In mathematics and science, the proportions of boys attaining Level 5 were above both the national average and the proportion of girls attaining this level. In 2002, the proportions of boys and girls attaining Level 5 nationally in these subjects were about the same.
4. The 2002 teacher assessments in other subjects show attainment at the end of Year 9 to be above average in art, design and technology, and music, average in history and below average in geography, ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education. The assessments show that girls achieve higher standards than boys in all subjects other than modern foreign languages where the assessments are about the same. These differences largely reflect differences observed nationally. Students are making good progress in their knowledge and understanding of what constitutes responsible citizenship.
5. Inspection evidence is generally consistent with teacher assessments other than in physical education, where the evidence indicates that teacher assessments were inaccurate, and in geography where the impact of strategies to raise standards has brought standards closer to expectations rather than below. Rising standards are also seen in most other subjects. Standards in religious education are in line with the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus, and

although work seen in music and design and technology indicates that standards in the work seen are closer to expectations for the age group rather than above, when standards on entry are taken into account students' achievement is above expectations.

6. The positive effects of the action taken to raise standards is also seen in the 2002 GCSE results, both for five subjects at the higher grades (A\* to C) and overall. The proportion of students obtaining five or more A\* to C grades has risen from well below average in 2000 to average in comparison with all and similar schools in 2002. Over the same period the proportion of students obtaining five or more A\* to G grades and the GCSE average points score, which reflects achievement across the whole GCSE grade range, has risen from below average to average in comparison with all and similar schools. In 2002, the proportion of students obtaining grades in the A\* to C range rose in all subjects other than science and ICT, where the 2002 results were similar to those obtained in 2001 and in geography and physical education where they were below. Nevertheless, overall progress is good through Years 10 and 11 and achievement in the GCSE examination is well above expectations based on students' levels of attainment at the end of Year 9. The targets set for 2003 are demanding but achievable and if reached will continue the rising trend.
7. The percentage of girls gaining A\*-C grades in the 2002 GCSE English language examination was close to the national average, while the percentage of boys attaining these grades was just below. Results in English literature rose sharply in 2002 and the proportions of both boys and girls attaining the higher grades were well above the national average. The percentage of students gaining A\* to C grades in mathematics was below the national average with little difference in the performance of boys and girls. However, the results show a rise in comparison with 2001, particularly those of girls. Results in science, although below average, show a slight rise since the last inspection. Slightly more boys than girls attain grades in the A\* to C range, although slightly more girls attain grades in the A\* and B range. The percentages of students achieving A\* to C grades were above average in art, drama, German, physical education, design and technology (food technology, textiles, child development and resistant materials) and below average in business studies, French, geography, ICT, Spanish and music.
8. There was a marked difference in the performance of boys and girls with 51 per cent of girls obtaining five or more A\*-C grades compared with 43 per cent of boys. In most subjects differences in performance are explained by differences in attainment at the end of Year 9 and, taken overall, the achievement of both boys and girls is good. However, contrary to the national tendency, the proportion of boys achieving A\* to C grades was higher than girls in science and music, while boys' and girls' results in history were about the same. Inspection evidence indicates that there is a certain amount of underachievement by girls in science and history and that this is related to less engagement in lessons in comparison with boys. The underachievement of girls is an issue identified for action in the school improvement plan and advice is being taken on strategies to tackle this problem. Inspection evidence indicates that girls are more passive than boys in some lessons and that where teachers do not ensure that girls have equal opportunities to explore their ideas through class discussion they adopt passive roles that impede their progress.
9. Overall, students with special educational needs achieve well. Many enter the school with low literacy skills, but learn to read more fluently and write with fewer expression errors. Spelling quickly improves and students learn to speak with greater confidence. Because provision in mathematics is very good, students make rapid gains in their numeracy work. By the end of Year 11, nearly all students with learning difficulties take external examinations. In 2002, the proportion of students in the whole school achieving one or more A\*-G grades in the GCSE examination was above the national average, which represents very good achievement since the start of Year 10. Those with the greatest learning difficulties take the Certificate of Achievement and all do well.
10. Students following the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) course are achieving well. They are making satisfactory progress and are learning new skills through experience in the work place.
11. The school makes satisfactory provision for gifted and talented students and extension activities are provided in many subjects. Latin is offered as an out-of-hours additional subject and the very

wide range of extra-curricular subjects provides students with very good opportunities to develop and display their gifts and talents, particularly in the visual and performing arts.

12. Standards of literacy, while still below average overall, are rising. Students who enter the school with very low levels of literacy are given intensive support to improve their reading skills. All students are encouraged to read for pleasure through the Centurion Reading Challenge and many speak enthusiastically about books. Students' reading skills are tested regularly and those who need help are given it. Regular practice across a range of subjects leads to students becoming competent readers by the end of Year 11. They are able to understand texts and to identify different layers of meaning. In history and geography, for example, students are required to read a wide range of source material and to make accurate notes and use summarising techniques. Writing skills are improving because of the emphasis on the analysis of a range of texts. This enables students to recognise the features of different styles of writing and to employ them in their own work. The focus on correcting spelling in most subjects is helping students to improve further. However, there is a lack of consistency between subjects in the attention paid to the correction of grammatical errors. Speaking and listening skills improve as students move through the school. Students listen to the views of others and boys become increasingly able to express their viewpoints with confidence. However, in many lessons, particularly in English, mathematics and science, girls are noticeably reticent to ask questions and to engage in class discussion. This is slowing their progress.
13. There are two students on the school roll who are in the process of learning English as an additional language. The school has taken specialist advice on provision for these students who receive effective in-class support and very good specialist tuition in the resource base. As a result they are learning English at a good rate. The progress of these students is carefully monitored and they are achieving well.
14. Overall, students' numeracy skills are above expectations. The oral and mental starters used in mathematics lessons are very effective in increasing students' confidence and understanding with numerical work. Students generally have a good level of competence with number calculations and work in fractions, decimals and percentages with relative confidence. These skills are enhanced further by work from other subjects, for example in design technology students measure accurately and weigh quantities using the appropriate units. In science students make full use of a range of diagrams and graphs to depict data collected from experiments and to calculate averages. Students confidently use calculators for more difficult calculations. However, the school has yet to implement a formal cross-curriculum numeracy strategy, so these skills are developed in a systematic way in all subjects.
15. Standards of attainment in ICT are below expectations at the end of Year 9 but closer to expectations at the end of Year 11. Standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9 are affected by low expectations of students' capabilities on entry to the school in Year 7, where many learning activities are restricted to word processing. In Years 10 and 11, students use computers with confidence and are able to apply their computing skills well to support their learning in other curriculum subjects.
16. Good teaching together with greater accountability for performance and a sharp focus on examination requirements are underpinning the rise in standards. Curriculum area reviews and analyses of assessment information are providing the leadership group with a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In order to ensure that standards continue to rise there is now a need to ensure that the reviews are followed by subject specific action plans, detailing the assessment and monitoring systems that will enable students who may be experiencing difficulties to be identified and additional support provided.

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

17. Students' attitudes to school and behaviour have improved since the last inspection and are now good. The overwhelming majority of students, including those with special educational needs, enjoy coming to school and arrive in a positive frame of mind. Students are keen to do their best; they speak highly of the staff and are very loyal towards their school. They are especially proud of the many ways in which they feel it has improved since the previous inspection. The incidence

of fixed-term exclusions has fallen and is now below the national average. Relationships between students and with adults are very good and are based upon mutual trust and respect. Students' attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now well above and the number of unauthorised absences well below, the national average. Students usually arrive in good time for their lessons and this helps them to make the most of their time at school.

18. Teachers lead by example. They share a wholehearted commitment to their students and really want them to do well; this positive 'can do' attitude is clearly rubbing off. Although some of the older girls are slow to contribute during lessons and are reluctant to seek help when they need it, most of the students are willing 'to have a go'. Students are increasingly keen to seize opportunities as and when they arise and this enterprising attitude is helping them to make good progress in their work. For example, an increasing number are staying behind after school in order to study Latin, history and dance. Furthermore, at the beginning of the term in which the inspection took place, the school introduced a wide range of extra-curricular enrichment activities. Taking place on a mid-week afternoon, students in Years 8 to 11 can choose from around 50 different activities. Although they are not compulsory, four out of five students have decided to take part and this number is growing. Students say they are thoroughly enjoying these new experiences and they are keen to try more.
19. The headteacher and other newly appointed members of the leadership group gave the raising of standards of behaviour the highest priority on taking up their posts. The willingness to challenge inappropriate behaviour had become less evident in the school. The new members of the leadership group changed this by adopting a highly visible presence on the school corridors and in the school playgrounds. They demonstrated that they were not prepared to tolerate inappropriate behaviour. Other staff responded positively to the leadership shown in this area with the result that there was greater consistency in the approach to behaviour problems. At the same time there has been a comprehensive review of the school's system of rewards and sanctions with a much greater emphasis on the positive reinforcement of good behaviour. Every opportunity is taken to recognise and reward good behaviour, while dealing very firmly with those who let themselves, and the school, down. This is proving to be exceptionally effective. Although the number of exclusions rose immediately after the implementation of the strategy, the number of permanent exclusions in the last school year was about the same as those found in schools of similar size, while the number of fixed-period exclusions was below. Exclusions are given only for good reasons and procedures are correctly followed. Students and parents say that incidents of physical bullying are rare and that when they do occur they are dealt with effectively. Behaviour during lessons is usually good. In a few lessons, however, some students are unsettled and noisy, often exasperating their more committed classmates. This usually happens when the teacher has set work that is too easy, or because they are unsure of what they are supposed to be doing, or why. Between lessons, and when in large groups such as assemblies, boys and girls can be relied upon to behave sensibly. Students say that they like being praised for doing well and feel that teachers are firm, but fair. They are proud of the way behaviour has improved over the last three years and the way in which bullying is tackled.
20. Students' personal development is good. They understand the impact of their actions on others and respond well to the very many opportunities to show initiative and take personal responsibility. Relationships are strong throughout the school community and these, together with excellent opportunities for social development, underpin the good progress in personal development that students are making. The vast majority of students work constructively in lessons and when engaged in sports activities and the broad range of extra-curricular activities. Students raise money for charity and there is a well-established School Council that provides students with a 'voice' in the running of the school. The leadership group take notice of the views of students and the council has influenced several important areas of school life. Students helped to establish the successful 'Let's Improve Personal Situations' (LIPS) peer mentoring scheme and, in 2001, students helped to organise an ambitious Sexual Health and Relationship Education (SHARE) exhibition that attracted around 2,500 students from other schools. Through the School Council, students' views are now being taken into account as the plans for the new school buildings are being finalised.
21. Students say that the school is a friendly place. Boys and girls from all backgrounds work well together in groups, sharing materials and ideas. Students with special educational needs mix well

and join in all activities. Most students are helpful and courteous, and enjoy talking to visitors about their work. They respect each other's beliefs and express their opinions without fear of ridicule. They take responsibility and they help in the classroom and around the school when asked to do so, for example, Year 8 students and Year 11 prefects help incoming Year 7 students to settle in and to find their way around. Students conform to the school's expectation that racist or sexist behaviour and language will not be tolerated and the result is a lively but very harmonious community.



## HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. Teaching and learning are good overall and better than at the last inspection. In lessons seen across Years 7 to 11, teaching was satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of lessons, good or better in 79 per cent, very good in 25 per cent and excellent in four per cent of lessons. Teaching was unsatisfactory in three per cent of lessons. The overall quality of teaching was good in almost all subjects throughout the school. Teaching and learning in drama and ICT were good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Teaching and learning were particularly effective in mathematics and in the resource base for students with special educational needs, where examples of excellence in teaching were seen. Examples of excellent teaching were also seen in citizenship, geography and physical education. Teaching takes account of the needs of all students, including those who have been excluded from other schools. The effectiveness of the teaching of these students is seen in the rise in standards across the GCSE grade range at the end of Year 11. The teaching of the few students in the process of learning English as an additional language is good. Inspectors found homework was set throughout the school and generally effectively used.
23. One of the main factors helping to raise the quality of teaching and learning in the core subjects of English, mathematics, and science is the impact of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. Although the strategy is in different stages of implementation in each of the subjects, the positive impact of the strategy is seen in the best lessons in the consistency with which teachers challenge students to think. These lessons generally begin with rapid questioning to review previous learning, which captures students' interest and stimulates thoughtful responses. In mathematics, the impact of the National Strategy can be seen in lessons throughout Years 7 to 11. Teachers provide clear explanations of learning objectives at the start of lessons and, in order to consolidate learning, review the progress made at the end. This practice helps students both to structure their learning and to place new learning within their developing knowledge and understanding of the subject as a whole. In one excellent Year 9 lesson on geometric transformation with a lower attaining class, for example, the carefully sequenced learning activities, excellent use of resources and high expectations, led to students being totally absorbed in the lesson activities throughout the 50-minute period. They made very good gains in understanding vector rotation and translations as a result. Similar gains in learning were made in an excellent Year 11 lesson on the use of graphs to interpret information. Careful planning, high expectations and high levels of student involvement are consistent features in the very good teaching observed in almost all mathematics lessons.
24. The effective use of teachers' good subject knowledge to plan their lessons, provide clear explanations and give appropriate guidance to students is seen in all subjects. In English, for example, teachers are clear about what they expect students to learn and there is a good focus on raising levels of literacy. This is helping to raise standards of literacy throughout the school. This was seen in a very good Year 10 lesson on 'Romeo and Juliet' where the effective application of the teacher's expertise and high level of challenge led to students widening their vocabulary and making very good progress in their understanding of the play in a modern context. Similarly in science, the principal features of teaching are the effective use of good subject knowledge, high expectations of students and well-focused planning. This was seen in a very good Year 9 lesson, where students made very good gains in understanding the relationship between falling objects, mass and acceleration and the work of Newton and Aristotle because of the very effective application of the teacher's subject knowledge. However, weaknesses in lesson planning leading to unclear learning objectives and too much teacher talk, contributed to teaching and learning being unsatisfactory in one science and one English lesson. Although the skilful use of questioning to check and extend students' understanding is a strong feature of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science, it is noticeable that in many lessons boys tend to dominate question and answer sessions. Teachers need to ensure that boys and girls make equal contributions to lessons.
25. The teaching of basic skills is good overall. Standards of numeracy are above average and underpinned by the very good foundation laid in mathematics where teachers include activities to improve recall and students' mental agility in lessons. Students also apply and develop their numerical skills well in many subjects; for example, through measuring and judging proportion in art and design and technology, and in interpreting data in geography and science. English

teachers lay a good foundation for the development of students' literacy skills. They and other subject teachers are very well supported by the literacy co-ordinator. Training courses have been provided for all staff on spelling and writing, and the literacy co-ordinator provides advice on such topics as teaching effective note taking and writing organisation. The attention paid to the development of students' numeracy and literacy skills was given recognition in July 2002 by the award of the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark. The assessor highlighted 'innovative approaches', 'appropriate resources and good teaching' and staff who 'are enthusiastic about moving forward with the various initiatives that are making a difference'. These initiatives can be seen in, for instance, the word walls and emphasis on subject language in physical education, the improved note taking skills in mathematics, the opportunities for students to plan and draft their work in English and history and the stress on correcting spelling errors in most subjects.

26. The development of students' basic skills is supported very effectively through the very good and at times excellent lessons taught by specialist staff in the resourced provision for students with special educational needs. Teachers have considerable expertise in helping students with learning difficulties to improve standards. Their teaching of basic literacy skills and relationships with students are excellent. In mainstream lessons, teaching assistants have a significant impact on students' good learning. They work very well with subject teachers to prepare material that matches students' needs and are sensitive to students' learning difficulties. This has a very positive effect on students' learning and in particular on the learning of the few students who are learning English as an additional language.
27. The headteacher has made clear the need to raise expectations and this is evident in most lessons. Where teachers have high expectations and these are communicated clearly to students then this leads to good progress and achievement in lessons. For example, in a Year 10 Spanish lesson, students made good progress because of the enthusiasm and sense of enjoyment engendered by the challenging pace of the lesson. Similarly in a very good Year 11 ICT lesson, students made very good progress in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the design of different web sites because of the teacher's high expectations and challenging nature of the activity. However, there is a need to raise expectations of students' ICT capabilities and the level of challenge in the learning activities they are presented with in Year 7. In a very good Year 10 history lesson, students made rapid progress in understanding the impact of the Treaty of Versailles because of the high level of challenge and very good opportunities for independent decision-making. The best teaching in physical education is characterised by high expectations and lessons that proceed at a good pace. In a Year 7 gymnastics lesson, for example, students made clear gains in linking sequences of movement with controlled balances because of the challenging nature of the teaching. High expectations are a feature of the best teaching in design and technology and are particularly important in supporting girls who are taking traditionally boys' subjects. Low expectations were among the shortcomings of the unsatisfactory teaching observed in one lesson in ICT and one in art.
28. Teachers use a good range of strategies and resources to enable students to learn and develop skills. This was most clearly seen in an excellent Year 8 geography lesson on the causes and effects of population migration in relation to Mexico and the USA. The excellent use of resources and the clear structure of the lesson stimulated students' curiosity and analytical thinking so that they grasped the key ideas and demonstrated their understanding through good oral and written work. Paired and small group work is used well in many subjects. In personal, social and health education (PSHE) for example, students are provided with numerous opportunities to engage in small group discussions. These activities help to develop students' self-confidence as they express ideas and challenge each other's thinking. Effective small group work is a feature of citizenship lessons. Small group work is used effectively in drama lessons in Years 10 and 11, for example, in role-play and to develop a characterisation. However, it was less effective in the two lessons observed in Years 7 to 9 because of the tendency of some students, mainly boys, to engage in exaggerated and loud attention seeking behaviour. Small-group work is used effectively to undertake investigations in science and to discuss ideas in music. Group work is also used effectively in physical education to develop students' skill levels. Classroom management and organisation are good and based on the positive relationships between students and their teachers. Teachers work hard to ensure that there is a suitable climate for learning in lessons. However, in some of the unsatisfactory lessons, a lack of control and general inattentiveness slowed progress. This was often related to a poor match of learning activities to

the attainment levels of students and unclear explanations so that students did not fully understand what they were expected to do.

29. Most support for the learning of gifted and talented students is through the provision of planned extension work. The sharp rise in the GCSE examination results in 2002 indicates that the quality of teaching and learning of these students is good.
30. The school has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection report. There is now much less unsatisfactory teaching and more that is good or better. The strengths identified in the previous report have been largely sustained, while improvements have been made in the areas of weakness.

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

31. The school provides a broad and well-balanced curriculum that meets the interests, aptitudes and particular needs of students. Many of the action points identified in the last inspection report have now been tackled. There is now greater coherence in the science curriculum and all students in Years 10 and 11 are provided with an appropriate ICT programme. This has been achieved by the introduction in September 2001 of a GNVQ course that is being followed by all students presently in Year 11. The course was changed in September 2002 to a Vocational GCSE course on the grounds that the course is more appropriate for the needs of students. The school remains unable to provide a daily act of collective worship. The school is making good progress in the planning of schemes of work and as these are being improved appropriate reference is being made to National Curriculum or examination requirements. These make very clear what is expected of students in different years, according to their capabilities and help teachers in their lesson planning. This is seen, for example, in the contribution that effective planning makes to students' achievement in mathematics. The improvement in schemes of work, academic monitoring and revisions in the assessment policy are contributing to rising standards in, for example, English, science, ICT, modern foreign languages, and religious education. All National Curriculum subjects and religious education are taught and curriculum provision for Years 7 to 11 meets statutory requirements.
32. The school is placing particular emphasis on ways of helping students to progress well across Years 7 to 9 and is implementing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy effectively at this stage. This is having a significant effect on rising standards. English teachers have enthusiastically adopted the National Literacy Strategy and are well supported in their drive to raise standards of literacy by the literacy co-ordinator and by other subjects. The mathematics department has made very good progress in implementing the National Numeracy Strategy. The strategy has been fully implemented in Years 7 and 8 and is having considerable impact in other years. Catch-up programmes are offered in Year 7 where about 30 students are engaged in weekly lunchtime sessions. Year 8 students identified as in danger of underachieving are to be offered additional support in the Spring term 2003 and 'Springboard 8' is to be integrated into schemes of work. Year 9 'booster' work is also likely to be targeted at underachieving students in the Spring term 2003. Consistent with the national timetable the strategy for science has been introduced from the start of the present school year. As a result, developments in science are less well advanced than those in English and mathematics. Nevertheless, good progress is being made. The Key Stage 3 co-ordinator and the curriculum area manager (CAM) for science have received training and this has been cascaded to other members of the department. Teachers now have a good understanding of the strategy and are committed to implementing it. The three-part lesson, which students clearly enjoy, is a feature of most teaching and learning. However, the amount of curriculum time allocated to science in Years 7 to 9 is well below average and spread over a two-week timetable. This leads to teachers trying to cram as much as possible into the main part of lessons in order to deliver the science curriculum in full. This often reduces the time available for plenary sessions, which tend to be short.
33. The school has developed very good links with primary schools to ensure curriculum continuity at the time of transfer and to support students' progress through Years 7 to 9. Teachers from

English, mathematics, science and several other departments have visited the primary schools from which students are drawn to observe teaching and learning and teachers from the primary schools have observed lessons at Whitecross. These visits facilitate the sharing of good practice and contribute to the improvement seen in teaching and learning. Religious education is separately taught and meets the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Arrangements for ICT are satisfactory. Skills are taught through discrete ICT lessons and in other curriculum subjects.

34. Curricular provision in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. The option system provides students with a range of mainly GCSE courses with, in addition to core subjects, choices being made from among subjects grouped into the categories of humanities, creative studies, modern languages and technology. All students study double award science up to GCSE and ICT as a vocational GCSE course. The vocational GCSE course has widened students' experiences and opportunities. The school is committed to inclusion and to providing for the needs of all students. To this end flexibility has been provided through the introduction of the vocationally oriented ASDAN award scheme and a number of students are working towards the gold award. Seven boys and eight girls are placed on the VETO project and work with local employers for one or two days per week. They follow a limited range of courses, including NVQs during the remainder of the week. However, the predominance of academic courses and comparative lack of vocational courses means that the curriculum is not well matched to the needs of all students in Years 10 and 11. Alternative provision for disaffected girls or for girls in danger of becoming disaffected is inadequate.
35. The school's policy is to meet students' additional needs, wherever possible, in the classroom and students with special educational needs have good access to the full curriculum. Where the school has identified a need for individual or small group teaching for some students, so that they can have counselling or focused teaching to improve their basic skills, this is provided in the resourced provision and carefully monitored to minimise the disruption to the curriculum. Many teachers plan with regard to students' targets in their Individual Education Plans and work very well with teaching assistants in lessons to help students improve. The 14-16 Skillpower Course is popular with students, who enjoy the variety of topics and appreciate the chance to study at a local college for part of the week. Achievement on this course is good. The school has not formally identified gifted and talented students, although all teachers are aware of students' attainment levels and on the whole, their needs are satisfactorily met through teachers' planning. Additional achievement opportunities are provided through the GCSE Latin and dance courses offered as out of school hours activities and through the wide range of extra-curricular activities.
36. Provision for PSHE is very good. Requirements are met for health and sex education and raising awareness about drugs. Topics are dealt with at appropriate stages and include study skills and coping with difficult situations, including the behaviour of others and bullying. Very good use is made of visitors to the school. Responsibility towards others is fostered through a very good citizenship programme that is taught as part of PSHE. Careers education is very good. In part, this is provided through PSHE lessons, starting with developing awareness of responsibility (such as making considered choices) among younger students and going on to offer specific help at appropriate stages, before choosing subjects for GCSE and deciding which subjects or routes to follow on leaving school. Good features include special events arranged by the school, including option evenings, experience of further or higher education in Year 10 and a week's work experience in Year 11. Students are helped to make choices through talks with staff from the Careers/Connexions Service and benefit from the school's links with other schools and further and higher education. The careers library includes appropriate information.
37. In order to create greater flexibility for the demands of the curriculum and to provide time for a wide range of enrichment activities on Wednesday afternoons, the school introduced a two-week timetable in September 2002. The timetable is structured to provide a total teaching time of 24 hours and 30 minutes, which is below the government recommended teaching time of 25 hours, through six teaching periods on four days of the week and four teaching periods on Wednesdays. Because of this the school day finishes at 1.30pm on Wednesdays and students are able to take part in a very wide programme of enrichment activities. All Year 7 students are required to attend the homework club under the supervision of the deputy headteacher. The school homework policy is that six homework activities are set for Year 7 students each week, three of which are to be

completed under supervision and with support available in the homework club. This provision is helping students to gain a greater understanding of the school's expectations with regard to homework and to develop the skills of independent study. Students in Years 8 to 11 are able to choose from around 50 activities that include beauty therapy, journalism, photography, archaeology, car mechanics, carpentry, angling, first aid, hairdressing, pottery, golf and a range of other sporting activities. A mixture of volunteer and paid part-time coaches staff these activities, which take place in a variety of locations both on and off the school site. Students are able to participate in up to six different activities over the course of the school year. Teachers' commitment to these activities is to visit students working off-site. In addition, teachers offer a very good range of extra-curricular activities that include the concert band, school choir, drama and dance clubs through which students are able to play instruments, sing, act and dance in outside venues such as the Courtyard Theatre or Holy Trinity Church. Teams and individuals play in all major games for both boys and girls, and are entered in local, regional and national competitions. A wide range of internal competitions is held together with non-competitive activities such as gymnastics club, which are well attended. Students and parents speak highly of the range of extra-curricular activities the school provides. There are opportunities to travel abroad and the school has twice hosted groups from a link school in Alsace, and is planning a full exchange visit for the near future.

38. The aim of all of these activities is to support the raising of standards by extending the development of skills and understanding beyond the normal curriculum entitlement for students. Before re-structuring the curriculum and the school timetable to introduce the enrichment programme members of the leadership group and governors visited and evaluated a similar programme in another school, and took advice from the local education authority. All concerned recognise the need to evaluate the programme and there are plans to do this at the end of the school year. Nevertheless, it is evident that the programme provides a number of benefits both to students and teachers. Students are provided with a much wider range of achievement opportunities and these enhance their personal development, while teachers are provided with more productive time for planning meetings, monitoring students' progress and sharing good practice. The constructive use of this time is making a significant contribution to the improvement being seen in the school. However, there are several disadvantages. One of the effects of the new timetable has been to reduce the amount of curriculum time available for the teaching of science, history, geography, religious education, physical education and art. The time now allowed for these subjects is inadequate to fulfil syllabus requirements and is having an adverse impact on teaching and learning. The difficulties are compounded by a lack of continuity caused by an uneven distribution of lessons in some subjects over the two-week period. When this occurs the gap between lessons is too long and teachers have to spend too much time re-capping the previous lesson before going on to tackle new learning. This slows progress in lessons. Also, although most parents at the pre-inspection meeting were very supportive of the opportunities that the enrichment programme allows, a few expressed concerns about the loss of teaching time and the school's monitoring arrangements when students are off-site. Inspectors share these concerns.
39. Overall, the school makes good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Provision for social development is excellent. Provision for moral development is very good. Provision for spiritual development is good, and provision for cultural development is satisfactory. The focus of the school is on good and respectful relationships and the creation of an environment based upon clear values and principles. These influence every aspect of school life and students' personal development. There is clear recognition by the school that the SMSC development of students has a vital impact on their progress, attitudes and achievement. There are many references to these aspects of students' personal development in the school's documentation, especially with regard to behaviour, equal opportunities and bullying. The PSHE programme, together with the recently integrated citizenship programme is an integral part of the school's provision for students' SMSC development. It exceptionally well co-ordinated and provides a planned approach to SMSC development across the curriculum. The religious education syllabus provides very good opportunities in these areas, and there are valuable examples of opportunities for reflection and discussion of spiritual and moral issues.
40. Provision for students' spiritual development is good overall. Assemblies take place once each week, for each year group. Assemblies rarely constitute worship although one assembly on the

theme of human rights provided a good opportunity for students to reflect on how we treat others. Tutor time provides some opportunities by using themes for the week, but these are applied in an inconsistent manner and provide little opportunity for spiritual development. The statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met. However, students' attitudes do show a clear respect for the beliefs, feelings and values of others, and this contributes well to their spiritual development. There is some evidence of planning in departments for spiritual development, but this is inconsistent and lacks structure. The PSHE programme contributes well in this area through the consistent application of teaching approaches that encourage students to develop positive attitudes by reflecting on their own experiences and forming views about issues of justice, relationships and personal beliefs. Several subjects make good contributions to students' spiritual development. For example, the religious education curriculum makes a very good contribution. Students are encouraged to consider and respond to questions about the meaning and purpose of life. Students are aware of and have respect for the values and beliefs of others. In English, the study of literary texts invites empathy with characters facing spiritual dilemmas and the understanding of their feelings and impulses. In history, a visit to the World War One battlefields for Remembrance Day and attendance at the Holocaust memorial conference enabled students to give expression to their innermost thoughts and feelings.

41. Provision for moral development is very good. Opportunities are targeted largely through the PSHE and citizenship programmes. The school has clear expectations of students knowing right from wrong and students respond very well when they are corrected. The headteacher and staff are excellent role models for students. Assemblies make a significant contribution to this area. For example, topics such as human rights, caring for others and respecting each other all enable students to develop good moral attitudes. Several subjects contribute well in providing opportunities for moral development. In religious education, students are able to respond to aspects of morality using their knowledge of religious and ethical issues. They explore feelings, develop attitudes and values and form judgements very well. This enables them to develop moral principles and values. In physical education, students demonstrate their attention to fair play and playing to rules. In geography, students look at the notions of right and wrong as they explore their attitudes towards the use of the world's resources.
42. Provision for social development is excellent. The school provides a wealth of opportunities for students to take responsibility and develop social understanding. The PSHE programme provides many opportunities in this area and makes a valuable contribution to developing attitudes and fostering independent thinking. Trained peer listeners work with younger students to provide a listening ear for students with problems. In addition, lunchtime clubs and sporting activities all help to develop skills of social interaction. The schools council provides very good opportunities for students to develop their communication skills and make important contributions to the life of the school. Students are actively involved with parents in working groups, and they are also involved in the selection process for teaching staff appointments. Several students are also involved with the planning for the new school. Most subjects contribute towards social development. These, together with the extensive enrichment programme provide outstanding opportunities for students' social development. Students work extremely well together and many opportunities are provided for them to express their views in paired work, group work and general discussion. They respect each other's contributions. Students create a safe environment, free from intimidation and their concern for others is evident in class and around the school.
43. Provision for students' cultural development is satisfactory. There are several opportunities for students to be involved in activities that extend their cultural development. The school's curriculum, however, does not currently provide planned opportunities for students to develop an awareness of the rich variety of different cultures and traditions that exist in this country. There are aspects of religious education that make a significant contribution. The PSHE programme provides some opportunities. For example, topics such as racism, gender and sexuality and immigration enable students to develop attitudes and values. There are aspects of religious education that make a significant contribution, especially in terms of the study of different religions and the cultures that support them. The study of different cultures in geography enables students to explore a variety of different cultures in other regions of the world. Fieldtrips in geography and history, visits to France, theatre trips and involvement in local activities enable students to develop a good awareness of European cultural heritage. The introduction of a link

with Zimbabwe and the setting up of pen pals is a valuable way of helping students to appreciate different cultures and traditions.

44. Since the time of the previous inspection, there has been a significant improvement in the opportunities for spiritual development although the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all students is still not met. The opportunities for moral and social development continue to be great strengths. However, planned opportunities to raise students' awareness of the rich variety of cultures and traditions that exist in multi-cultural Britain are limited.

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

45. The previous inspection found that this school looked after its students very well and this continues to be the case. This high standard of care helps students to concentrate on their work and encourages them to make the most of the opportunities that arise. Form tutors and heads of year remain with their year group as they move through the school. This continuity places them in a good position to monitor students' personal development and they do so well. There are very good links with contributory primary schools and incoming Year 7 students receive a supportive welcome. Most of the routine health and safety procedures are in place although a small number of concerns were brought to the attention of governors during the inspection. Child protection procedures are good and members of staff are fully aware of their responsibilities.
46. Members of staff are united by a sense of common purpose. They are strongly committed to the welfare of their students and they work hard to ensure that their personal and academic needs are met. For example, students who are experiencing particular difficulties may be referred to the social inclusion co-ordinator. Less formally, they can drop into one of the lunchtime LIPS sessions that are run by Year 10 volunteers. Incoming Year 7 students are well supported by Year 8 students and by Year 11 prefects and the headteacher also meets with every Year 7 class to make sure that they are settling in well.
47. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' personal development are good. Relationships between students and members of staff are very good and teachers are sensitive to students' 'ups and downs'. Tutors closely monitor students' behaviour, attendance and punctuality. As well as encouraging a basic work ethic, this monitoring also helps tutors to spot any personal problems and deal with them at an early stage.
48. Over the last two years, the school has comprehensively overhauled the way in which it manages students' behaviour. Although there are some exceptions, teachers are now much more consistent in their expectations of behaviour. This helps students to know exactly what is, and what is not, acceptable. The emphasis is now very much more on the positive and the implementation of the revised procedures is proving to be not only exceptionally effective, but is also very popular with the students. The school has struck a delicate balance between recognising all the praise-worthy things that students do, while taking a firm line against those who misbehave or disturb others. For example, the school has identified five basic behaviours that contribute to low-level disruption during lessons and adversely affect learning. These include talking out of turn, being ill equipped for lessons and not doing homework. Random spot checks are undertaken each half term. In this way, all the well-behaved, organised students can be identified and rewarded, while those who are not are reprimanded. During discussion, students applaud the school's positive stance and feel the procedures are firm but fair. Procedures for dealing with bullying or other anti-social behaviour are also very effective and students who are at risk of exclusion are very well supported.
49. The school regards regular attendance as a high priority and regularly reminds students and their parents of its importance. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance have improved and are now very good. All absences are carefully followed up and any student causing concern is reported to the relevant head of year and sometimes the education welfare officer. This liaison is very effective and is reflected in a level of unauthorised absence that is around one-sixth of the national average.

50. Teachers and teaching assistants in the learning support area give very good personal, as well as academic, support to students with special educational needs. They are easily accessible to students outside lesson times. For example, every lunchtime the classrooms are open, where students can talk or play games. This helps students to improve their social skills and gives them a chance to share their concerns with a trusted adult.
51. Assessment procedures for students with learning difficulties are very good. Students' achievements are clearly recorded so that it is easy to track progress and to identify weaknesses. The targets in Individual Education Plans are written after consultation with students and parents, and are regularly updated as a result of tests – for example, in spelling and reading.
52. Assessment was an area criticised by inspectors in the previous report. Since then, improvement has been very good. Procedures for monitoring and assessing students' progress are now good overall. The school analyses data systematically so that it is possible to set targets for individual students, curriculum areas and the whole school. Very good attention is paid to the results of the national tests taken at the end of Years 6 and 9 to predict how students should perform in their GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. The school analyses GCSE results thoroughly, by gender and by prior attainment, providing very good information to teachers about the students they teach. The assistant head monitors assessment and has excellent systems for disseminating such information, and for setting clear targets to help raise attainment. As a result, performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9 has improved more quickly than is the case nationally, and GCSE results have risen sharply in the last three years. In curriculum areas, assessment procedures and the use of data to inform planning are generally good. They are very good in mathematics and much improved in science, where underachievement is quickly detected and plans to deal with it are made. However, in geography, physical education and ICT, procedures are only satisfactory. While procedures are good in religious education, data is not analysed systematically enough and students are not sufficiently aware of their targets. This limits achievement. In most curriculum areas, students know their target grades and this accelerates progress in lessons. The subdivision of levels – for example Level 5.5 – gives students a much more precise picture of where they should be at the end of the year, and is a good motivator. Procedures for monitoring and supporting academic progress are good. The school identifies Year 11 students performing at the grades C/D boundary and provides mentoring to raise students' attainment. In 2002, students in this category did particularly well, indicating the effectiveness of the mentoring. Curriculum areas record students' achievements carefully, so that it is easy to track an individual's progress and identify strengths and weaknesses. Thorough monitoring is helping to drive up standards, particularly in mathematics and science. Teachers use information gathered through the marking of students' work to report in detail to parents on how their children are getting on. This is leading to improvements in learning.

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

53. The school is working hard to raise the standard of students' work and is keen to increase the extent to which parents are involved in their children's education. With this aim in mind, the school is providing parents with a growing range of opportunities whereby they can become more actively involved, should they wish. These include the opportunity to participate in various working parties or to help run fund raising and social events for the parents' and friends' association. Most of the parents who expressed a view are warming to these overtures. There is general agreement that this school is improving rapidly and parents are particularly pleased with the way in which the school is led and managed. This is reflected in the growing popularity of the school and the steadily increasing number of students who apply for places.
54. As part of the inspection process, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire. Although around only three out of ten of the forms were returned, analysis of parents' responses show that they are pleased with most aspects of the school's work. Although only a small number attended the pre-inspection meeting, they agreed with the views expressed through the questionnaire. There are, however, three areas that cause concern. These are: the amount of homework that is set, the quality of information provided about their child's progress and the extent to which the school works with parents. Inspectors do not support parents' concerns; the amount of



homework is similar to other schools and parents are kept well informed about what their child is studying and how they are getting on. Despite the best efforts of the school, up to half of the parents do not attend their child's annual consultation evening and a significant minority still book family holidays during the school term. This inevitably means that their children miss out on the work undertaken by the rest of the class and this interferes with their progress.

55. Links between parents and staff who work mainly with students with learning difficulties are strong. Parents can contact the special educational needs co-ordinator with any concerns and discuss their offspring's achievements at parents' evenings. The quality of school reports for these students is very good. Teachers not only highlight achievements but also make it clear what students need to do to improve.
56. Parents' involvement in the day-to-day life of the school is limited but the parent teacher and friends association organises various social and fund-raising events throughout the school year. These are well supported and the funds raised have recently been used to fund resources such as sports equipment and a digital camera.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

57. The school was in a difficult position when the current headteacher took up post in January 2001. At the time of the last inspection in November 1999, the school was judged to have serious weaknesses. Most of these weaknesses related to leadership and management and were having an adverse impact on standards. The roles of staff with management responsibilities were not clearly defined, nor were priorities and targets for action. There were too many inconsistencies in implementing school policies and leadership by heads of department was uneven. As a result, efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning were meeting with little success and there was a high level of unsatisfactory teaching. There was little monitoring and support for teaching and curriculum development. The school had made unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection in 1995 and staff morale was low. This situation has now been reversed and standards are rising. This is directly related to the excellent leadership provided by the headteacher. She has brought to the school a clear sense of purpose, higher expectations and well-conceived strategies for its improvement. These have been successfully communicated to all who are associated with the school with the result that staff morale has been raised. This has underpinned the progress made over the last two years. The headteacher has high expectations of the staff and continually challenges them to evaluate their performance in order to improve teaching and learning and raise standards. Virtually all of the issues for action identified in the previous inspection report have been tackled successfully and some, such as leadership and management, are now strengths of the school.
58. Shortly after the headteacher took up post, senior management was further strengthened by the appointment of a new deputy and assistant headteacher. The leadership group, made up of the head, deputy and three assistant headteachers, together with the bursar, is very effective and provides the head with excellent support. The group works effectively as a team and shares the headteacher's drive to improve the school. Each has clear line management responsibilities through which CAMs and heads of year are held accountable to senior management. The school now has a strong positive ethos and provides a well-ordered learning environment in which there is recognition of the need for improvement and the raising of standards in all areas. Central to the realisation of this commitment are the processes of school improvement planning and self-evaluation, which have improved considerably since the last inspection and are having a clear impact on the raising of standards. This is evident in standards of attainment, attitudes and behaviour, personal development and relationships, all of which are getting better. School improvement planning reflects the school aims and all curriculum and pastoral improvement plans identify relevant priorities and cover both medium and long-term goals. Plans are costed effectively and have clearly defined targets, tasks, success criteria, staff responsibilities and timescales. All school plans serve as working documents and are directly linked to action to improve the quality of education the school provides. The school takes its responsibilities for social inclusion seriously and has in place policies to promote racial harmony and racial equality. The very firm commitment and systematic practice of making provision highly inclusive for every student,

irrespective of background or ethnicity, as of right are priorities of leadership and underpin the preparation of students for life in a culturally diverse society. The school is very well placed to continue its improvement.

59. Since the last inspection, middle management has been strengthened by the appointment of several new CAMs and the establishment of clear roles and responsibilities, together with lines of accountability. Leadership and management in mathematics and citizenship are outstanding and very strong in English, physical education and religious education. Leadership and management in art, design and technology, history and music are good and making a positive contribution to standards in these subjects. Leadership in science is very good and significantly improved since the last inspection. Very good progress has been made since the CAM took up post and the subject is now well managed. Leadership in modern foreign languages is satisfactory and improving. The only area where subject leadership and management are unsatisfactory is in geography. Work in the area is co-ordinated by the CAM for humanities whose subject specialism is history. Although the CAM provides good support for the two geography teachers there is a need for more focused subject specific curriculum planning in order to raise standards.
60. All posts are covered by clear job descriptions and leadership training has been provided to increase the effectiveness of CAMs by ensuring that they have a clear understanding of procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning, the use of assessment information for target setting, monitoring students' progress and measuring value-added. All teachers have been trained in carrying out lesson observations and these now form an integral part of the school's procedures for improving teaching and learning. They are becoming embedded in the school's self-evaluation procedures and are carried out by CAMs, members of the leadership group and other teachers. Through these observations the leadership group, and others with leadership responsibilities, are clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses; observations are having a direct impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
61. The leadership and management of special education are very good. The co-ordinator has forged a strong team of teachers and teaching assistants who are fully committed to helping students improve. Regular meetings enable staff to discuss students' progress. The co-ordinator monitors the work of her team very well so that she knows how students are responding to the support they receive. Deployment of teaching assistants to classes is thoroughly organised and this has a positive impact on how well students learn. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Achievement is better and is now good throughout the school. The teaching of students with learning difficulties is more consistently good, and the links between subject staff and teaching assistants have improved. Given the commitment of teachers to helping students learn well and the positive attitudes of students, the capacity for further improvement in special educational needs provision is good.
62. The assistant head with responsibility for assessment has established a comprehensive assessment database and provides detailed analyses of students' performance information to curriculum and pastoral team leaders and subject teachers. Procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of examination data, for example, are good. The leadership group analyse examination results and seek explanations for any discrepancies in performance between subjects and over time, and identify target areas for improvement. Although there is a need for greater consistency with which assessment information is used in departments, this is another area in which improvement is being made.
63. The governing body effectively fulfils its key responsibilities and gives very good support to the school. There is an appropriate committee structure with clear terms of reference and a regular pattern of meetings. Each curriculum area has a link governor and governors have participated in joint training with the staff. The headteacher and members of the leadership group provide detailed reports on all aspects of the school's work so that governors are well informed. The governing body has played an active part in major developments such as the review of the school day and the establishment of the extensive programme of curriculum enrichment. Governors have worked closely with the Local Education Authority and the community in the successful bid for finance to secure the building of new premises for the school by 2005. As a result of the openness and positive relationships there is a shared commitment to improvement and governors have a very clear view of how they want the school to develop. This is evident in the clarity of their

understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the way in which this is reflected in the school improvement plan. Arrangements for performance management are in place and there is a strong sense of purpose and direction so that the school's aim of 'excellence for all; excellence from all' is supported by effective action.

64. As the programme of improvement continues governors have the increasing capacity to monitor and evaluate the quality of education provided by the school and the standards achieved by the students. Inspectors found that only in respect of collective worship is the governing body not meeting its statutory responsibility.
65. The quality of financial management and planning is very good and significantly improved over the past two years. A school audit, carried out shortly after the headteacher took up post, identified a significant number of weaknesses in financial management. These weaknesses were tackled immediately with the result that significant improvement was noted in the follow-up audit, carried out in April 2002, which judged financial procedures to be satisfactory. Governors are now actively involved with the headteacher and the leadership group in financial planning and monitoring and are given very good support by the school bursar. All school plans are carefully costed and directly linked to educational outcomes. The school has good procedures to ensure that the principles of best value for money are applied in the use of its resources, and all additional funding received by the school is used for the intended purposes. The LEA has approved a licensed budget deficit to fund the upgrading of the school's ICT facilities. Under the terms of the financial plan the deficit will be removed by the start of the 2003/2004 financial year.
66. The match of teachers to the demands of the school's curriculum is unsatisfactory. The school has an appropriate number of teachers but, because of reduced numbers opting for modern foreign languages at GCSE level, there are too many staff in this curriculum area. Staffing is unsatisfactory in science, music and history. In science there are not enough staff and in music, the current teaching timetable does not allow the subject leader enough time for administrative matters and improvement planning. There are similar difficulties for the subject leader in history, who has additional responsibilities as a CAM. Although there are two specialist history teachers, one has management responsibilities and a significant teaching commitment outside the subject. This leads to an undue amount of non-specialist teaching in Year 7.
67. Arrangements for the professional development of staff are very good and a strength of the school. This was recognised by the school's recent achievement of the 'Investors in People' award. Close attention is paid to the identification of individual teacher development needs and how these can be matched to school development priorities. Arrangements for the support and professional development of both newly qualified teachers and students undertaking initial teacher training are very good and valued by participants, as are the induction arrangements for all new members of staff. The number and quality of technical support staff is good and the team of teaching assistants provide very good support for students with special needs. The secretarial and clerical staff provide an efficient and welcoming school office. They contribute very effectively to the administration and organisation of the school.
68. The resources for learning are adequate for the school's curriculum and the range of students' needs. There are good procedures for allocating funds to curriculum areas and decisions on spending are clearly linked to improvement plans. In most subjects the level of provision for books, equipment, reprographics and ICT facilities has improved since the last inspection and reflects the decision by the school to invest in resources for learning. In special educational needs, resources are well used and well matched to students' learning needs. In music, there are not enough computers to fully cover the schemes of work and the timetable does not allow easy access to the new computer suites. The school library does not make a satisfactory contribution to teaching and learning. While students make some use of the library during lessons and at other times, use of the library is not embedded in teaching and learning. Some of the issues raised in the last inspection report have yet to be tackled. Library stock was identified as a deficiency at that time and the lack of an effective system for stock management has resulted in a further depletion of book stock. The role of the librarian with regard to the use of the library as a resource base for learning is unclear and the library is underused for most of the day. The library does not at present provide value for the money invested in it.

69. The deficiencies in the school's accommodation are such that the school is to be relocated in new accommodation built through the Private Finance Initiative for the start of the 2005 school year. Staff work hard to minimise the adverse impact of the accommodation on teaching and learning and the walls of classrooms and corridors are covered with vibrant examples of students' work and displays of students' achievements. These have done much to raise students' self esteem and to promote awareness of their successes. Nevertheless, there are some serious deficiencies that require urgent attention. One of the rooms used for art lessons is poor and restricts progress in lessons. The room has no water supply and is too small for students and the teacher to move around freely. Accommodation for science is unsatisfactory. There are not enough laboratories and a significant number of lessons are taught in ordinary classrooms. This limits what can be taught and affects standards. Some of the old laboratories are in a poor state of repair and this also affects how science is taught and progress in lessons. Accommodation for music is also unsatisfactory. There is only one main teaching room, which has inadequate storage, and there are insufficient practice rooms. Activities in the practice rooms disturb those in the main classroom due to inadequate soundproofing. Students have to rehearse in the main music room on keyboards without any headphones, making the individual refining of work difficult. The site management team maintain the school premises to a good state of cleanliness and this makes a positive contribution to the ethos of the school.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

70. The school had an unusually large number of weaknesses at the time of the headteacher's appointment in January 2001. These weaknesses have been prioritised and are being tackled systematically. As a result the school is aware of the following issues although not all may feature in the present school improvement plan. In order to raise standards and the quality of education provided, the governors, senior managers and staff of Whitecross High School, with the help of the Local Education Authority, should:
- (1) ensure that enough curriculum time is allocated to science, history, geography, religious education, physical education and art for full coverage of the syllabuses and that the school timetable allows continuity and progression in teaching and learning all subjects (paragraphs 2, 32, 38, 101, 103, 108, 145, 151 and 159)
  - (2) ensure that as part of the continuing drive to raise standards, particular attention is given to the need to strengthen the motivation and skills of girls in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 by making certain that they participate fully in all lessons (paragraphs 1, 3, 8, 12, 24, 34, 78-79, 81, 85, 87, 91, 95, 97, 127, 130, 139 and 145)
  - (3) improve the match of the courses in Years 10 and 11 to the needs and attainment levels of students by providing more vocational courses (paragraphs 6 and 34)
  - (4) improve the match of teachers to the needs of the curriculum so as to strengthen teaching and learning (paragraphs 66, 102-103, 112, 132, 137 and 151-152)
  - (5) make better use of the library by ensuring that there are enough books and journals to support independent study, there is an effective system of stock management, the role of the librarian with regard to development of the library as a resource centre is clear and the use of the library is embedded in teaching and learning in all subjects (paragraphs 68, 82 and 137)
  - (6) strive vigorously and, with governors, work collaboratively with the Local Education Authority to improve the accommodation for science, art and music (paragraphs 69, 102, 106, 108 and 152)

In addition to the preceding areas for improvement the following less significant weaknesses need attention:

Expectations of students in Year 7 in ICT (paragraphs 15, 27, 133 and 136); monitoring enrichment activities (paragraph 38); consistency in the use of assessment (paragraphs 52, 62, 83, 138 and 167); subject leadership in geography (paragraphs 59 and 126); marking in science and design and technology (paragraphs 100 and 120); the use of ICT in art, history, music and design and technology (paragraphs 108, 120, 129, 147 and 152); resources in music and modern foreign languages (paragraphs 140, 142 and 147); collective worship (paragraphs 44 and 64)

## **RESOURCED PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

71. The resourced provision is a unit, funded by the Local Education Authority, for up to 35 students with moderate learning difficulties. It is led and managed by the co-ordinator for special educational needs. Students attached to the unit, along with others who have learning difficulties, are taught English there. Older students can opt for the 14 to 16 Skillpower course, in which they learn skills to prepare them for when they leave school. The unit, in line with the new Key Stage Three Strategy, offers support for younger students whose literacy skills are below average. The Progress Units, on which these students work, focus on helping them catch-up as soon as possible.

72. Achievement is good. Students improve their reading and spelling and acquire a wider vocabulary. They learn to link sentences accurately and structure a piece of writing. By the end of Year 9, they communicate clearly and take a pride in their work. They speak more confidently and give simple explanations of their opinions. By the end of Year 11, their improvement is such that they take GCSE or Certificate of Achievement examinations and do well, in relation to their capabilities. They sustain a piece of writing and, although vocabulary is limited and ideas are not always developed, they show they can write in a range of forms – for example, formal letters, creative writing, analysis of leaflets, and descriptive pieces. They show a basic understanding of the themes in *Of Mice and Men*, and enter into the character of George, when composing an imaginary letter to Aunt Clara. As a result of studying *Romeo and Juliet*, they put together a newspaper report on the street brawls between the rival families. Students draft work conscientiously and this is helping to eliminate errors in basic English.
73. Attitudes and behaviour are very good. Students enjoy the lessons and concentrate well, although sometimes towards the end of lessons concentration wavers. They show determination to improve and listen carefully to their teachers. Behaviour is excellent. No examples of less than very good behaviour were seen during the inspection. Students show good independent learning skills, as when engaging in silent reading at the start of lessons. They are considerate and kind to one another in class. For example, in a Year 11 communications lesson, students listened respectfully while others gave talks to be assessed for their course. They showed interest in the topic chosen and asked helpful questions about what had been said. As a result, learning was very good and students felt they had done their best.
74. Teaching and learning are very good. They are never less than good, and occasionally excellent. There are several outstanding features. Teachers place strong emphasis on basic skills in all lessons. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on myths and legends, the teacher helped students to improve their writing by extending their vocabulary and using more adjectives. By encouraging students to consult a thesaurus, she gave them the opportunity to discover new words for themselves, and to compose a more effective description of a knight. Teachers manage students with great skill. They are firm but kind, and set very high standards of behaviour and effort. As a result, relationships are excellent and students show strong motivation to improve. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of how students learn best, and plan a variety of activities to sustain their interest. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on media, the teacher tested students on spelling relating to directing a film, and consolidated work on the fire at Miss Havisham's in 'Great Expectations'. He gave a crystal clear demonstration on how to structure a piece of writing by linking paragraphs carefully, and gave students the chance to draft ideas on how they would direct the scene. Students worked at a rapid pace because they were given laptop computers to record their ideas. Teachers mark work very well and add comments that show students what they need to do to improve.
75. Leadership and management of the resourced provision are very good. The co-ordinator for special educational needs, who manages the area, is a teacher of considerable expertise, whose close links with the English department have a positive effect on students' learning. Schemes of work are modified to meet the needs of lower attaining students. The Progress Units help younger students with below average attainment in literacy to communicate more effectively, and are well planned. While resources are good overall, there are insufficient computers and this restricts the way students learn. The teacher who co-ordinates literacy across the school and who manages the Skillpower option gives outstanding support to the co-ordinator. All three teachers involved in the work of this provision use assessment very well to plan new work, and are totally committed to helping students improve. They encourage students to try hard and celebrate their efforts by displaying their work, along with key words and book posters, in the classrooms.
76. Progress since the last inspection is good. In lessons, students' learning is very good, rather than good. Students in the progress groups continue to achieve well. Given teachers' considerable expertise and students' very good attitudes to their work, the capacity for further improvement is good.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	163
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	68

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	6	41	81	30	5	0	0
Percentage	4	25	50	18	3	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching.

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	866
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	98

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	28
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	113

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	32
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.7
National comparative data	7.8

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	77	103	180

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	48	62	59
	Girls	68	66	64
	Total	116	128	123
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (53)	71 (66)	68 (56)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (13)	49 (43)	23 (20)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	55	58	56
	Girls	72	75	66
	Total	127	133	122
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (60)	74 (63)	68 (58)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (21)	46 (43)	21 (21)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

Yet to add national percentage. Rgl will add later

### 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	81	70	151

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	36	73	80
	Girls	35	67	68
	Total	71	140	148
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	47 (34)	93 (88)	99 (94)
	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	School	38.4



per pupil	National	39.8
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

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

### ***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
858	42	3
0	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
2	2	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	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 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	44.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.5

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	23
Total aggregate hours worked per week	384

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	2,263,920
Total expenditure	2,326,689
Expenditure per pupil	2,790

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	25.8
Key Stage 4	23.5

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

Balance brought forward from previous year	25,656
Balance carried forward to next year	-37.113

***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	14.4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	25.8

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.2
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	866
Number of questionnaires returned	265

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	52	9	3	2
My child is making good progress in school.	32	59	2	1	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	23	59	6	2	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	14	58	16	6	3
The teaching is good.	26	63	3	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	15	47	26	4	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	42	50	5	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	43	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	23	50	17	2	8
The school is well led and managed.	43	49	2	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	35	57	3	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	40	4	2	4

## PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- Results in national tests and examinations are now rising and 2002 results are much better than in 2001
- Very good improvement since the last inspection
- Students' positive attitudes towards the subject
- Subject leadership and management
- Procedures for assessing attainment, monitoring students' progress and setting targets

#### Areas for improvement

- The attainment of girls at the end of Year 9
- The use of the library to support teaching and learning
- Links with drama

77. Attainment in English at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 is below the national average, although 2002 results in both National Curriculum tests for Year 9 students and in GCSE examinations show an improvement on the 2001 results. In addition, while 2001 results for Year 9 students were below the average for similar schools, 2002 results show that attainment is now broadly the same as in similar schools. The results at the end of Year 11 present an even more positive picture; attainment is now better than in similar schools with students making much better progress than that predicted by their results at the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement for these students. Results in recent years have fluctuated and there is no clear trend over time. However, the subject area has suffered from staffing instability since the previous inspection. It is only with the appointment of the current subject leader in September 2001 that a sense of stability has been achieved, providing a climate in which improvement can take place.
78. Girls' performance in English is better than that of boys, particularly in writing, although at the end of Year 9 the difference between them is much less than the national difference between girls and boys. This indicates a degree of underachievement by girls and is reflected in some lessons where girls are reluctant to answer questions and less likely than boys to participate in discussion or to ask for clarification if they have problems with their work. At the end of Year 11, however, the difference between girls' and boys' attainment is greater than nationally, possibly because girls have been able to sustain motivation more effectively during staff changes and instabilities. Students with special educational needs achieve well because of the good teaching in small groups by specialist staff.
79. Work observed in lessons, books and discussions during the inspection confirms that standards of attainment are below average but also that attainment is rising at a rapid rate because of the improvements since September 2001. English teachers have enthusiastically adopted the Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy and are well supported in their drive to raise standards of literacy by the literacy co-ordinator and by other subjects. Students in Years 7 and 8 have a good knowledge of language and the increased emphasis on the analysis of texts is enabling students in all years to develop a more objective view of their own writing. Students make good gains in their reading and can recognise different layers of meaning in a text. Many enjoy the unfamiliar and sometimes difficult language of the Shakespeare plays they study and Year 11 students have a good understanding of the poems they are studying in preparation for the GCSE examinations. Speaking and listening skills are satisfactory in those lessons where teachers encourage a range of speaking activities. However, in some lessons from Year 8 onwards, and particularly where boys outnumber girls, teachers do not always ensure that girls have equal opportunity to explore their ideas through talking in class sessions. In these lessons, the girls retreat into a passive role that impedes their progress.

80. Most students are positive about their work in English. New assessment procedures now enable them to have a very clear idea about their attainment, progress and individual targets. This makes them feel they are equal partners in their education and encourages good motivation. In most lessons students are well behaved and they appreciate the ways in which teachers help them to see how to improve. Some Year 11 students described how they now have a much clearer picture of what the GCSE examinations and course work require of them and several have revised and improved earlier course work assignments in the light of teachers' comments about current work.
81. The quality of teaching overall is good. The adoption of the Key Stage 3 Strategy provides a clear framework for lesson plans. Teachers are clear about what they expect students to learn and there is a good focus on raising levels of literacy. Together with good relationships, this leads to students who are willing to make good intellectual and creative effort and who are developing an understanding of language and how they can use it more effectively. For instance, in two good Year 11 lessons, students made good gains in their understanding of the ways in which poets write about injustice and cultural identity because of the focused and imaginative teaching. In the best lessons there is good pace, high expectations and a very good focus on what is required to achieve high standards, both in their work and in tests and examinations. When teaching is satisfactory, or, very rarely, unsatisfactory, rather than good, it is because teachers are not clear about what is to be learned, talk too much or fail to recognise when girls are not being given opportunities to contribute equally to the lesson.
82. The subject is very well led and managed. The subject leader has accomplished much since her appointment and has tackled all the issues identified in the last inspection. There have been major improvements to assessment procedures and the way in which assessment data is used to inform planning. There is now a consistent approach to teaching the National Curriculum and teaching and learning are well monitored and evaluated. Drafting is used well, opportunities for extended writing are built into schemes of work and students write for a range of audiences. Teaching caters for the whole ability range in most lessons; there is more use of ICT and a consistent approach to raising standards of literacy across the curriculum. Resources have been rationalised but there is an urgent need to improve the usefulness of the library as a resource for teaching and learning. This committed team has shown by the way in which so many improvements have been effected in such a short space of time that it has plenty of capacity for further improvement.

## Drama

83. Drama is taught as a separate subject within the creative arts faculty to all students in Years 7 to 9 and as an optional subject in Years 10 and 11. Standards in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 are very high and students display much maturity in the planning and development of their work. They create and maintain role, are focused and have good improvisation skills. This is because of the good teaching they receive and the encouragement to be independent and responsible learners. Standards at the end of Year 9 are as expected and teaching of classes in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Students' dramatic experience is much enriched by a very wide range of extra-curricular provision. For instance, there are opportunities to perform in school through drama clubs and as part of the GCSE course and at the Courtyard Theatre in the Herefordshire One Act Play festival. Since the previous inspection progress has been made in establishing links with English but drama does not as yet contribute to the assessment of speaking and listening skills, nor does it have a separate formal assessment of students' attainment at the end of Year 9.

## MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **very good** with several outstanding features.

### Strengths

- Teaching is very good
- Rising standards at the end of Years 9 and 11

- Very good relationships have a significant impact on students' learning
- Leadership and management are outstanding and team work is very effective
- The effective implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy
- The use of assessment information to set targets and monitor students' progress

#### Areas for improvement

- Girls' achievement and oral participation in lessons
- The level of challenge presented to higher attaining students

84. As part of the inspection of mathematics an evaluation of the effectiveness of the National Numeracy Strategy was also carried out
85. Standards of attainment at end of Year 9 in 2002 were above the national average both for students attaining the expected Level 5 and the higher Levels 6 and above. In comparison with similar schools the proportion of students attaining these levels was above average. Standards in mathematics are higher than those achieved by students in English and in science and have risen at a faster rate than results nationally over the past three years. These results represent very good achievement when standards on entry in Year 7 are taken into account. This improvement has occurred largely as a result of very good teaching and the increase in students' numerical confidence. In contrast to the national picture, boys outperform girls in the National Curriculum tests.
86. The proportion of students achieving GCSE A\* -C grades in 2002 improved significantly in comparison with 2001, but remained below the national average. The proportion of boys achieving the higher grades was significantly higher than girls. No student achieved an A\* grade in 2002. The proportion of students achieving the A\* - G grades continues to match the national average. When standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are taken into account, students' achievement in the GCSE examination was above expectations.
87. Inspection evidence is consistent with the results obtained in the National Curriculum tests. Students in Years 7 to 9 are gaining considerable benefits from the effective implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy and standards in lessons are above expectations overall. For example, in one Year 9 lesson students were able to find the volume of a cube by entering the formula for volume into a spreadsheet and programming the correct instructions. Higher attaining students were able to extend this by finding the volume of more complex objects. In Year 7, students display a sound knowledge of geometric transformations, and are able to use vector notation to translate a shape in the x-y plane with confidence. Although boys and girls achieve similarly in lessons, boys are more active and willing to demonstrate their understanding. They are quick to answer questions or provide ideas, and more demanding of the time of teachers in lessons.
88. Inspection evidence shows that standards in Years 10 and 11 are improving and that the attainment of students presently in Year 11 is slightly better than indicated by the results in recent GCSE examinations. In one Year 11 lesson, for example, higher attaining students were able to apply their knowledge of angles to explain clearly the angle theorems of a circle. These students successfully tackled a number of challenging questions that helped to consolidate their understanding. In a Year 10 lesson, students quickly grasped the technique required to determine the rule for a given sequence of numbers. These students then went on to consider more complex arrangements where the patterns were not uniform, and through guided discussion used the method of finding the differences to determine the rule. This well managed lesson enabled students to extend their understanding and confidently tackle more complex problems. However, no student has gained the highest A\* -A GCSE grades in the last two years. This is mainly due to not enough challenging extension activities being provided to stretch these students to reach the highest levels.
89. The achievement of students with special educational needs is very good. In Year 7 students demonstrate a satisfactory ability to manipulate number and are able, for example, to calculate missing angle values by adding up known values and accurately subtracting for either 180 or 360. The support that students with special educational needs receive from teachers and teaching assistants make a significant contribution to their learning.

90. Teaching in mathematics is much improved since the last inspection. It is very good overall and occasionally excellent. The majority of the very good teaching occurs in lessons in Years 7 to 9. One of the strengths in teaching is careful planning to ensure that lessons are interesting and proceed at good pace. This helps to motivate and stimulate students, and is having a positive impact on achievement. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and this is effectively used through exposition, demonstration and questioning to ensure that students have a good understanding of mathematical principles and are able to work with numerical accuracy. Very good use is made of the time and resources available, including the use of ICT.
91. Where teaching is at its best, as in two excellent lessons observed in Year 10 and Year 11 for example, the lessons start briskly with an effective oral or mental activity to develop students' basic numerical skills. In almost every lesson white boards are used by students to display their answers to questions. In this way teachers are able to quickly assess students' understanding and this allows lessons to proceed at a rapid pace. Expectations are high and the pace of working in some lessons is exceptional. In the Year 10 lesson, for example, not a minute was lost from the time students entered the room and students worked and concentrated hard for the full 50-minute period. Teaching takes account of the needs of students at different attainment levels and those with special educational needs. As a result their achievement is consistent with that of their peers. However, teachers have to make conscious efforts to ensure that girls participate fully when the class is engaged in question and answer sessions, whereas boys display greater confidence and respond without undue prompting from the teacher. The three-part lesson has been widely adopted by teachers across the year groups. However, at the end of lessons, some teachers do not lead effective reviews of the learning that has taken place and students are not always in a position to assess the progress they have made in the lesson.
92. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good and underpinned by the very good relationships that are evident in lessons. Assessment procedures and the use of assessment information to set targets and monitor students' progress provide a model of good practice for other subjects. Students are encouraged to improve on their performance and many take up the offer of additional help at lunch times or after school.
93. The leadership and management of the department are outstanding. The CAM provides excellent leadership and a clear vision for the future development of the subject. As a leading mathematics teacher for the LEA she provides a model of good practice both within Whitecross and other schools. The department has fully embraced the requirements of the National Numeracy Strategy and is fully committed to the continued raising of standards. Teachers work most effectively as a team. They share good practice and embrace new ideas and challenges with enthusiasm. The department is accommodated in adjoining classrooms that are in need of repair. The rooms are brightened by stimulating displays that encourage students to broaden their thinking and learning about mathematics. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

## SCIENCE

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

### Strengths

- Good teaching
- The attitudes and behaviour of students are very good
- Students work well together and with their teachers
- Very good leadership and good management

### Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 and Year 11
- The amount of curriculum time allocated for science
- Schemes of work

94. As part of the inspection of science an evaluation of the effectiveness of the National Strategy for Science was also carried out.
95. In 2002, National Curriculum test results for students at the end of Year 9 were average for both boys and girls, but boys' results were significantly better than those for girls. Compared with similar schools, results were above average for Level 5 and average for Level 6. Science results were better than those for English but not as good as those for mathematics. Since the last inspection results have varied but have improved significantly since 2001. Compared with attainment on entry to the school these results represent below average achievement.
96. The number of A\*-C grades gained in the GCSE dual award examination in 2002 was below average. Boys' results were better than girls'. However, results in the A\*-G grade range were average with boys' and girls' results being similar. Compared with similar schools, these results were above average. While girls performed better than boys at the higher A\*-B grade range, no students achieve the highest A\* grade. Science results were below those for English and mathematics and have improved slightly since the last inspection. Compared with attainment in Year 9, these results represent above average achievement. Inspection evidence suggests that results in 2003 should be better than those in 2002.
97. As a result of good teaching, students are making gains that are at least satisfactory in their knowledge, skills and understanding in science. Standards have improved throughout the school and attainment is now at least in line with expectations. Higher-attaining students, in Year 9 for example, have a good understanding of the reactions of metal with acids, and can write chemical symbols and formulae. Lower-attaining students are less secure in their knowledge of chemical reactions. Higher-attaining students in Year 11, have a good understanding of chemical bonding, of the electromagnetic spectrum and of the genetic factors leading to diseases such as cystic fibrosis. Lower-attaining students are less confident in their understanding of science and, for example, have more difficulty in explaining chemical bonds. There is evidence that girls underachieve because they are not as well engaged in science lessons as boys are. The standards of literacy and numeracy in science throughout the school are at least satisfactory and often good.
98. Teaching is good overall with a minimum amount unsatisfactory teaching. Some lessons have a number of very good and occasionally excellent features. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection in which teaching was, overall, unsatisfactory. Students learn well as a result. The principal features of teaching are the effective use of teachers' good subject knowledge, high expectations, well focused planning and, in many lessons, a range of methods that maintain interest and promote learning. In a few lessons, however, there was not enough opportunity for students to work independently. Homework was set which extended or consolidated work done in lessons.
99. Even though the National Strategy for Science was only introduced at the beginning of this term, there is evidence that it is already having a positive impact upon standards as a result of improved teaching and learning. This is because the starter activity provided at the beginning of each lesson creates an atmosphere of expectation, improves thinking and discussion skills and reinforces what has been learned in previous lessons. Clearly explained objectives inform students about what they are to learn during the main part of the lesson and the concluding plenary session, which is still in the process of development, reinforces what has been learned.
100. Assessment is now being used very well to monitor the progress of students, set targets, identify underachievers and adjust teaching, but it has yet to be fully used to guide curriculum planning. Day-to-day marking has improved since the last inspection. Whilst being satisfactory overall, marking does not always indicate how students could improve, neither does it always provide targets for future work. The identification of appropriate learning objectives coupled with good support for students' learning, enables students throughout the school, including those with special educational needs to make satisfactory progress. In the majority of lessons students work hard and at a good pace.
101. The amount of time allocated, throughout the school, for the teaching of science falls well below that recommended. This has a negative impact upon standards because teachers have to cover



the schemes of work in a much shorter time than in many other schools. Whilst all components of the National Curriculum are well covered, investigative science, highlighted as a particularly important feature of the new National Strategy, is yet to be fully integrated into lessons. However, in the light of this new strategy, schemes of work are being reviewed to include a more investigative approach to science teaching. The science curriculum, considered as being unsatisfactory at the last inspection, is now much more coherent. Reports issued to parents provide useful information on attainment, attitudes and progress in science, but they rarely indicate strengths and weaknesses nor do they provide focused, subject specific, targets for improvement in each component.

102. Leadership and management are good overall, with leadership being very good. The subject is led by a dedicated teacher who provides the department with a clear vision for future development. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection when leadership and management were judged to be poor. However, science is understaffed and is housed in laboratories, which are too few in number and often too small to safely accommodate the size of classes taught in them. This situation will be partly alleviated when an additional part-time teacher joins the school at the beginning of next term. Development planning, which reflects overall school development planning, is effective and manageable, but planning for long-term development with longer-term targets, costing and focused success criteria has yet to be carried out. Whilst the implementation of the National Strategy is still in its early stages, a detailed action plan has been agreed for further development following a thorough audit of the strengths and areas for improvement within the subject. Monitoring of the quality of teaching by lesson observations is thorough and is used very well to develop good practice. Resources, in terms of equipment and books are good but there are an inadequate number of computers for a department of this size.
103. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. Provided that the current good quality of teaching is maintained and that there are improvements in the allocation of curriculum time and the number of teachers, the capacity for improvement is good.

## ART AND DESIGN

Overall the quality of provision in art is **satisfactory**

### Strengths

- The department is well organised and energetically run
- Rising standards at the end of Year 11
- Increasing numbers of students choosing art as an option in Years 10 and 11
- There are well presented displays all around the school
- Teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm

### Areas for Improvement

- The accommodation for lessons not taken in the main art room
- Resources to support teaching and learning
- The amount of curriculum time allocated to art in Years 7 to 9
- The size of some teaching groups

104. Standards show an improving trend. During Years 7 to 9, most students are achieving standards that are above expectations for their age groups. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 show standards to be well above average at the expected Level 5 or above. This is a marked improvement on the previous year. Girls achieve slightly higher standards than boys. The GCSE results over the last three years have also risen and in 2002 the proportion of students achieving A\*-C grades was above average. These results compared favourably with the results students obtained in the other subjects taken.
105. Inspection shows that by the end of Year 9, students' work is above average. Students' sketchbooks show that drawing and painting skills on transfer from the primary schools to be below what should be expected at this age and so achievement is good by the end of Year 9. Both boys and girls have a good subject vocabulary, which they use effectively to express a range

of ideas and feelings. In Year 7, students are able to discuss the work of Seurat and how long a particular piece must have taken him. In the ICT project in Year 8, students are able to use their study of the work of William Morris in their own careful studies of natural forms. Computers are then used competently to scan their drawings and form a regular repeating pattern. The homework seen during the inspection was not of the same standard as the class work. Students' achievement and commitment is good through Years 10 and 11 and inspection evidence shows standards to be above average at the end of Year 11. Their planning, research and organisation bring diversity and richness to their painting and drawing. Students of all attainment levels create interesting and original pieces based on solid research and observation. Their enthusiasm for the subject was very evident in the lessons observed. For example in one lesson in which Year 10 students worked on the 'sea life' ceramics project, based on a study of the work of Palissy, achievement was good because the students clearly enjoyed the activity and were prepared to put much effort into their work. In Year 11 students are able to use ICT confidently and creatively in their work.

106. The attitudes and behaviour of most students in the lessons observed in Years 7 to 9 were satisfactory and often good. This was in spite of the very poor accommodation offered by the one of the two rooms used for the teaching of art. The room is too small for the size of the teaching groups and the conditions are inadequate. Most students are good-natured and show remarkable tolerance of the conditions and work with enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the lack of space when large classes are being taught puts a strain on students' attitudes and behaviour, as it is difficult for teachers to move around the room to offer individual advice and guidance. Nevertheless, most students are patient and well behaved as they wait their turn for the teachers' attention. The attitudes and behaviour of students in Years 10 and 11 are good. They work quietly and thoughtfully and, despite the lack of overalls, manage to remain very clean and tidy. They show tolerance to other students and are responsible and careful in their use of materials.
107. Teaching is good and this is reflected in the good progress and achievement of students in the subject. Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable about their subject. They have planned a good course and resources are well used to support teaching and learning. Good use is made of questioning at the start of lessons to recall previous learning and learning is consolidated by thorough evaluations at the end of lessons. Teachers pay close attention to the development of students' drawing skills from the start of Year 7 and these provide a secure foundation for the creative work seen in the upper years. However, some class sizes in Years 7 to 9 are too large, and there is not enough additional support for students with special educational needs to be given the attention they need.
108. The subject leader is energetic, well organised and has established a good ethos for the teaching and learning in the subject. This is evident in the good teamwork of staff and the good quality of the relationships with students. The department makes a significant contribution to the general ethos of the school through the well-presented displays of students' work seen in the school corridors and other communal areas. The department has one spacious art room, which is light and provides a stimulating environment for teaching and learning. However, the second teaching room used by the department offers very poor accommodation. The room has no water, is too small and has no atmosphere. It is unsuitable for the teaching of the subject. Because of the increasing numbers of students opting to take the subject in Years 10 and 11 there is a shortage of books and other reference materials, and access to ICT is difficult. The teaching and learning of some classes in Years 7 to 9 are adversely affected by the two-week timetable. These classes have two lessons in alternate weeks and this affects continuity and progression. The department does not receive enough technician support.
109. At the time of the last inspection the art department was one of the few successful departments in the school. The department has built on this success and made good improvement since that time. The department has good capacity to continue this improvement.

## CITIZENSHIP

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

#### Strengths

- Excellent leadership has led to the development of a very good citizenship programme
- The contribution the programme makes to students' personal development
- The wide range of learning activities provided for students

#### Areas for improvement

- Consistency in teaching and learning
- The contributions of other subjects to citizenship education

110. Overall, students achieve standards that are consistent with expectations and sometimes above by the end of Years 9 and 11. They are enthusiastic and enjoy the content of the modules, particularly those concerned with lifestyles and relationships. Achievement is good across all year groups.
111. Students of all attainment levels make good progress due to careful thought and attention that the school pays to this aspect of students' personal development. Citizenship education is taught as part of the PSHE programme and supported by related themes and topics covered in other subjects. Students also have many opportunities to develop an understanding of responsible citizenship and the democratic process through activities such as elections to the School Council, consultations on school policies and plan, and the curriculum enrichment programme. Students gain an understanding of the parliamentary process through mock parliamentary debates and of the workings of the judicial system through mock trials. Form tutors devote an afternoon registration session to School Council matters, and other subject areas make worthwhile contributions to citizenship education. Discussion of the work of Charles Dickens in English for example, contributes to students' understanding of the impact of poverty on people's lives. Many assemblies focus on topics that are relevant to citizenship and international responsibilities. Overall, these activities provide an unusually wide range of opportunities to enhance the development of citizenship and ensure that by the end of Year 11, students have a good knowledge and understanding of what responsible citizenship entails
112. Teaching is good overall and occasionally better. Teachers prepare their lessons well and through the skilful use of questioning challenge students' thinking about social issues. Effective use is made of a range of resources, including visiting speakers, to support teaching and learning. Teaching time is well used with time limits set for the completion of learning activities. This helps to focus students' attention and ensures that lessons proceed at a good pace. Students' learning is underpinned by effective classroom management, which is based on the very good relationships observed in most lessons. However, although the overall quality of teaching is good, there is some inconsistency. PSHE and citizenship lessons are at present taught by ten members of staff, some of whom lack confidence in teaching these subjects and this affects teaching and learning. Although teaching in these lessons is never less than satisfactory they lack the expertise and confidence necessary to take full advantage of the spontaneous opportunities to explore controversial social issues that arise in lessons.
113. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent and make a significant contribution to students' progress in the area. The teaching of citizenship is very well supported by a comprehensive scheme of work and a very good student self-assessment procedure that enables the coverage of topics across subjects to be recorded. Well-focused training is helping to promote higher standards in PSHE and citizenship and these subjects are making a valuable contribution to the ethos of the school as a whole. Good progress is being made in these areas and there is a very firm base for further improvement.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

#### Strengths

- Teachers' understanding and application of the design process model
- Students' positive attitudes and productive relationships with teachers
- The cohesive approach across all design and technology subjects
- Well structured lessons that focus students' learning

#### Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning
- The marking of students' work in Years 7 to 9
- The quality of design work and the accuracy and final finish of manufactured artefacts in resistant materials in Years 10 and 11

114. Standards of work are average overall by the end of Years 9 and 11. Students in Years 7 to 9 make good progress as a result of good teaching. They have an understanding of the basic skills of designing and making. In Years 10 and 11, these skills are applied and extended as students become more familiar with and adept at developing investigative problem solving tasks in more detail. Students within food and textiles studies demonstrate good examples of such work. Students with special educational needs make good progress and benefit from the attention of their teachers. Particularly good evidence of such support was observed within a Year 11 resistant material lesson.
115. In 2001, GCSE examination results were above average in food, textiles and child development and below average in resistant materials. Girls outperformed boys. In 2002, above average results were achieved in all subject areas with much improvement in resistant materials. Girls' performance remained at a higher level than boys. Virtually all students gained a grade in the A\*-G range in both the 2001 and 2002 examinations.
116. In work seen during the inspection, students by the end of Year 9 are achieving standards that are consistent with expectations for the group. They are able to approach problem solving situations with a realistic understanding of needs and constraints, making use of simple investigative and analytical strategies to create a variety of possible solutions. Students of all levels of attainment are able to acquire new skills and awareness of techniques and processes through participation in well thought out tasks. Observation and recording skills are developed through the sensory analysis of food. Both textile and graphical studies support the acquisition of techniques to present and explain ideas and thoughts and make use of a range of media and resources. Design and making tasks provide students with valuable basic skills in the handling and use of a variety of materials.
117. Although some good designing work was observed in Year 9 resistant materials, with students developing individual ideas for a clock project, some students are not always sure how to develop and express a range of ideas. They are uncertain when making judgements about their work and their planning lacks detail. Students do not always identify clear links between their early designs and final manufactured outcomes. This leads to confused working and an over reliance on teacher support. Students gain some basic skills in electronics, although there are not enough examples of this work in the upper years. Not enough use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning.
118. Students' achievement by the end of Year 11 is good in food studies, textiles and child development. The standard of work in the re-organised graphical course, which is due to be examined in 2003, shows improving quality, relevant subject content and offers an interesting and challenging variety of tasks. Students produce well considered design folders that contain some useful examples of investigational work, extended writing and some objective and evaluative reflections. Students also demonstrate orally and practically an appropriate knowledge of the design process with relevant experience and understanding of materials and processes. They incorporate this knowledge into their design work. In resistant materials there are some well-designed and well-made practical artefacts. Students can generate design ideas for their coursework tasks. However, these are often limited in range and depth and a number of students are uncertain and superficial in their approach to making decisions about their work. They are reluctant to co-operate fully in design and making and this limits the quality and accuracy of their work. Not enough use is made of ICT applications in the students' work.

119. The quality of teaching in the department is always at least satisfactory and mostly good. Teachers have a solid depth of subject knowledge and expertise and a broad range of experience. The subject is taught with an agreed common approach. Lessons are well prepared with clear objectives that are shared with students. There are good levels of challenge and high expectations with secure classroom management and concern for students. Teachers encourage students to think and they structure lessons to provide opportunities for them to discuss and apply their designing and making skills. The approach to teaching in Years 10 and 11 is not as cohesive as in the earlier years and the degree of challenge and use of time is more variable between the compliant and resistant material areas. In all years students with special educational needs are supported well in lessons and achievement is comparable to their peers.
120. Leadership and management are good. Teachers in the department have very clear roles and responsibilities and co-operate well. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. There is a focus on graphical communication within the department and good progress is being made in the re-organised course. The monitoring of students' progress has improved, as has the provision for students with special educational needs. However, the use of ICT applications remains limited and although there are some examples of well-executed work, it is not yet purposefully integrated into all students' design and technology experience. Students design folders are marked regularly. However, there is inconsistency in the guidance teachers offer through marking on the ways in which students can improve the quality of their work. Such guidance is more likely to be given in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- The consistently good teaching and learning seen in lessons
- Students' positive attitudes and good relationships with teachers

### Areas for improvement

- Procedures for assessing students' attainment
- Subject leadership and schemes of work for all year groups

121. In 2001, students' attainment at the end of Year 9 was assessed by the school as well above the national average and well above the standards achieved in other subjects at the school. In contrast to the national trend, boys performed better than girls. In the most recent assessments in 2002 standards were judged by the school to be below national expectation and below most other subjects. Girls achieved better than boys with the gap in line with the national picture. In lessons observed during the inspection, and from analysis of samples of students' work, the attainment of both boys and girls is close to national expectations. The procedures for assessing attainment at the end of Year 9 have been unsatisfactory because they were not sufficiently moderated and referenced to National Curriculum levels.
122. GCSE examination results show a very marked fluctuation in the last two years. In 2001, all students gained a pass grade with about half the entry achieving at the higher grades of A\*-C. This was close to the national average. In 2002, in a year when the overall results of the school showed improvement, students' attainment in GCSE geography fell well below national average and well below standards achieved in other subjects at the school. At the higher grades, A\*-C, results were well below the school's estimates. Girls achieved better than boys and unlike the previous year a significant number of students failed to obtain a pass grade.
123. Standards of work seen during the inspection are close to national expectations and from Years 7 to 11 most students make good progress. Students with special educational needs benefit from the growing range of well chosen resources and the additional support provided in some lessons by a classroom assistant. In Year 7, geographical skills are emphasised and in lessons students examine how settlements develop so that they can describe and begin to explain shapes, patterns and functions. In Year 10, students begin preparatory work for a study of models of urban land use in order to formulate and test hypotheses in relation to the central business district of Hereford. Strategies for accelerating the learning of higher attainers, so that they achieve higher standards at GCSE, are developing but are as yet not fully integrated into the schemes of work.
124. Geography lessons are generally productive and enjoyable because of the very good relationships between students and their teachers. High expectations by teachers of effort and behaviour are matched by students' positive attitudes. In many of the lessons there is increasing opportunity to work cooperatively in groups as well as independently and this promotes students' personal and social development. Students show respect and many are willing to discuss with growing confidence and pride their work and progress. For example three Year 11 students willingly offered in their own time to assist the inspection by discussing in detail how they had undertaken fieldwork as part of their GCSE coursework.
125. The quality of teaching is consistently good. The teaching is shared by two well-qualified and highly committed staff who while relatively inexperienced are making a major contribution to the recent rapid improvement seen during the inspection. Lessons are well planned and, especially in Years 7 to 9, they are often lively and stimulating. This is because of the effective use of a good range of resources and lesson activities that encourage participation. Effective use is made of ICT and in many lessons there is clear support for school strategies to raise standards of literacy. Class work and homework is regularly marked and assessed and the arrangements for providing feedback to students are developing well. Students are managed firmly and fairly with a strong emphasis on encouragement. In one excellent Year 8 lesson students examined the causes and effects of population migration and related this to Mexico and the USA. The excellent use of

resources and the clear structure of the lesson stimulated curiosity and promoted discussion, and analytical thinking. As a result students grasped the key ideas and demonstrated their understanding through good oral and written work. Lessons have pace and challenge. Occasionally not enough time is provided at the end of lessons for checking that the learning objectives have been achieved.

126. Geography is part of the humanities curriculum area together with history and religious education. The CAM, whose subject specialism is history, was appointed from September 2002 to co-ordinate the work of the area. The two teachers of geography work well together and receive good support from the CAM and the senior leadership group who have provided an appropriate framework for improvement. The school's arrangements for the leadership and management of the subject are however unsatisfactory. There are issues to be tackled that require a more specifically geography focussed action plan so that there are fully developed schemes of work and valid and reliable procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress. Progress since the last inspection is limited and below what could have been expected in the overall context of the school. The emerging good practice seen during the inspection indicates that there is both the commitment and capacity to raise standards further.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- The quality of teaching
- Support for students' learning
- The leadership and management of the subject
- Rising standards at the end of Year 11

### Areas for improvement

- The amount of curriculum time allocated to the subject
- The proportion of specialist teaching
- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning

127. The 2002 teacher assessments showed the attainment of students at the end of Year 9 to be very close to the national average. There was a slight fall in the numbers reaching the expected Level 5 compared to the previous year, but this was most probably the result of more accurate assessment methods. The gap between the attainment of girls and boys was less than that observed nationally.
128. The proportion of students gaining GCSE grades in the A\*-C range has risen significantly over recent years and is now much closer to the national average. Boys performed slightly better than girls, in contrast to their counterparts nationally. Few students achieve the higher A\*-A grades but, in relation to prior attainment, overall achievement is good.
129. Inspection evidence indicates that students, who entered the school with below average attainment, make good progress by the end of Year 9 to reach standards consistent with national expectations. Students complete good quality extended writing on the origins of the Native Americans, but lower attaining students misspell even some quite straightforward words. The majority describe and interpret sources accurately and present their work well, but their grasp of chronology is not always secure. The limited time allotted to the subject restricts the breadth and balance of the curriculum. Some individual use is made of ICT in researching and presenting work but access difficulties prevent this happening on a whole class basis. Students with special educational needs make good progress as a result of suitably adapted tasks and resources.
130. In lessons and work seen the attainment of students at the end of Year 11 is close to national norms. Students undertake independent research and enquiry, and show developing organizational and communication skills in good quality coursework. Many candidates complete lengthy and detailed extended writing in technically accurate English although, despite the efforts

made in the subject to improve literacy, some errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar remain. As in the lower years, girls are less likely to volunteer to answer oral questions, and with a few exceptions, they are less adventurous in the contributions that they do make. They make good progress in the handling and interpretation of sources in coming to conclusions about the failure of the Gallipoli landings in the First World War. Students respond positively to the opportunities that are open to them. For example, one group who are unable to take the subject as a GCSE subject because of the option blocking arrangement, meet weekly for an hour and a half after school to take the GCSE course as an extra-curricular activity. Classes are very well managed and students appreciate the gentle humour that often accompanies lessons.

131. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers plan lessons well setting clear objectives and selecting appropriate resources that cater for a wide range of ability. In a Year 8 lesson on Elizabethan portraits, question and answer was very well used to build on students' ready awareness of current media manipulation techniques, in explaining the symbolism used in projecting Elizabeth's desired image. Learning is effectively supported through educative display, the close monitoring of students' attention in lessons and the extent of helpful comment on their work, although errors in spelling are sometimes overlooked. Much attention is paid to literacy through drafting and redrafting work, the display of key words and subject specific glossaries, reading aloud and the use of writing frames. In some lessons seen insufficient attention was paid to chronology and lower attaining students' understanding of concepts such as 'Manifest Destiny' was limited.
132. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The recently appointed head of department has an accurate perception of the subject's areas for improvement identified in the last report and has already begun to address them. The other history specialist in the school has heavy responsibilities elsewhere; therefore, subject development, and the monitoring and support of non-specialist teachers, has rested almost solely with her. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the provision for information and communication technology is **satisfactory**

### Strengths

- Standards show a substantial improvement
- Subject leadership
- Students' positive attitudes and achievement in Years 10 and 11

### Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning across the curriculum
- Expectations and the achievement of students in Years 7 to 9

133. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 show students' attainment was below national expectations. The trend over recent years has been upwards and attainment is higher than at the previous inspection. Girls' attainment, although above boys' attainment, was further below the national average. As students' attainment on entry to the school was below average, the teacher assessments show satisfactory achievement at the end of Year 9. Students in Year 9 are able to use the Internet effectively to research opposing viewpoints relating to contentious issues. They are able to log the sites visited and evaluated each in terms of its value to support a point of view. Students are able to engage in sensible discussions with their teachers about the value of different web sites found by a search engine. However, many of the learning activities in the discrete ICT lessons in Years 7 to 9 do not offer students enough opportunities to reach the higher levels of attainment. This is because teachers underestimate students capabilities on entry to the school and much of the work consists of using computers for inputting text and data. This is well below their capabilities as indicated by the work undertaken in other subjects where they demonstrate that they are able to engage in higher level work such as combining text with images from electronic sources.



134. The proportion of students achieving GCSE A\*-C grades in 2002 was just below average although the proportion gaining A\*-G grades was closer to average. Girls achieved higher standards than boys, although no students achieved the higher A\* or B grades. Continuity in teaching and learning was affected by staffing changes during Years 10 and 11 and when this, and students' attainment at the end of Year 9, is taken into account, the results represent good achievement. The trend in results over recent years has been upwards. Year 10 students make rapid progress early in their course and pay due attention to course requirements with regard to the quality of presentations. They are able to use digital cameras and scanners to good effect. Year 11 students are competent users of ICT and this was evident in the design of their own web sites.
135. Attitudes and behaviour are generally good. Students quickly acquire new skills, make good effort and are well motivated. This is more apparent in Years 10 and 11 where they are given more clarity in academic targets and assessment criteria and they display maturity in working without direct supervision. The maturity and good behaviour seen in a class of Year 11 students, for example, allowed the teacher to devote more time and attention to students with special educational needs and a student for whom English is an additional language. As a result these students made comparable progress to their peers.
136. The quality of teaching in discrete ICT lessons is good overall, although the scrutiny of work shows that teachers underestimate students' capabilities on entry in Year 7. There is some teaching of ICT by non-specialists in all years. The co-ordinator provides good support for these teachers and also provides good support for the graduate trainee. This support includes the provision of assessment criteria, assessment tasks and information to set targets for all students. This was seen in a Year 11 lesson where the teacher demonstrated good knowledge of the software and of examination requirements when helping students who were writing macros when creating spreadsheet pages to record bookings for an activity centre. Teachers make good use of projectors linked to computers and interactive whiteboards to demonstrate the skills and techniques needed. Students quickly learn these skills and understand when and how to make use of them. Lessons are well planned, assessment criteria are shared with the students and literacy skills are well developed through the development of new vocabulary and its appropriate use. Teachers draw on students' prior knowledge and skills and apply these to new situations. This ensures students are actively involved in lessons. The pace in lessons is good, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use good behaviour management strategies. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, expectations were low and the lesson objectives were unclear with the result that students unsure of what to do. The lack of challenge and lack of direction led to unsatisfactory behaviour.
137. The subject co-ordinator provides effective leadership. Informal daily contact between the co-ordinator and other teachers is an important factor in the management and direction of the discrete ICT lessons. Most of the teachers of ICT have commitments in other subject departments and this limits the time they can devote to subject meetings. Good use is made of the Wednesday afternoon enrichment time where the co-ordinator can ensure all teachers have knowledge and experience of the software they are to be using in lessons. Teaching is monitored regularly and senior managers have reviewed the department regularly. This review includes actions for improvement and shows the determination to improve on the position at the last inspection. Resources in the specialist ICT rooms are good, but class sizes mean that there are occasions when students have to share computers or work in other classrooms where there are smaller classes. The subject is not well supported by the library where there are very few texts and a lack of newspapers that could be used by students when evaluating research on the Internet with more traditional means. The time allocated to the discrete subject in Years 7 to 9 is low and not enough to provide higher attaining students with the time necessary to achieve success at the highest levels. This is compounded by a lack of assessment and monitoring of the application of students' ICT skills in other subjects.
138. Since the previous inspection there has been considerable improvement in ICT provision for all students. There are discrete courses for all students and these lead to successful examination courses in Years 10 and 11. ICT is now used to support teaching and learning in many subjects and is used particularly well in English and religious education. Information from the assessment of students' capabilities in this use of ICT in other subjects does not yet feed the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9.



## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

### Strengths

- Good use of the foreign languages in lessons
- Good assessment procedures, which are well used
- Good support from teaching assistants

### Areas for improvement

- The grouping of students so that tasks can be better matched to their prior learning
- The provision of book resources so that students can work more independently
- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning

## French

139. French is the first foreign language, which all students learn for the first three years. Standards both at the end of Year 9 and in Year 11 are below average. This is shown in teacher assessments and in GCSE results for 2002. GCSE results were an improvement on those for 2001, which were significantly below average for both boys and girls and below those of other subjects in the school. Girls performed better than boys overall, as is the case nationally, though no candidate obtained a grade above B, and lower attaining girls performed worse than boys and worse than girls in other schools. There has been a history of staffing problems, which are now resolved but which have contributed in the past to low achievement.
140. Inspection evidence indicates that standards are still below national expectations but improving as students respond to better and more settled teaching. In particular, speaking, which was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection, is now a strength for all students. Writing is a weakness. Some students have difficulty with the activity of writing itself, which slows progress for other students because full sentences are not attempted. What most can do is understand classroom French as spoken by the teacher, recognising for example that *une volontaire* has to be a girl. In a Year 9 lesson, students were using earlier learning about telling the time to talk and write about their own school timetable. Although their standard was as yet below national expectation some Year 9 written work was seen in which students demonstrated their understanding of a range of tenses, indicating attainment for some students consistent with national expectations. No students have their own copies of the course books, so their ability to work independently is limited. Students with special needs do as well as others in speaking and listening though their writing may be weaker. All students have computer lessons twice a term: students can compose simple word-processed texts, but the school lacks suitable software and the time available is insufficient. Having regard to the fact that when they entered the school, these students were below or well below average, achievement is good. Only 25 students now take French in Year 10, though 87 Year 11 students do so. Two Year 11 classes were seen. Although higher attaining students are now in reach of their full potential the standards overall are below average. Speaking is a strength, with correct pronunciation insisted on. Students are able to use French for real communication, for example about healthy eating. Achievement for the majority in Year 11 is satisfactory.
141. Attitudes seen were good, and there was little unsatisfactory behaviour because students are well managed. Relationships are good, and students co-operate well with teachers and with each other. Students in all age groups are eager to learn and respond enthusiastically to the teaching, which is planned well enough to ensure that purposeful activity fills the available time. However in the recent past many students now in Year 10 have demonstrated negative attitudes by opting out of learning a foreign language when given the opportunity to do so.
142. Teaching is consistently good throughout the school, with some very good lessons given by different teachers. Teachers are competent linguists and use their foreign languages well in lessons. They plan their lessons well and manage their students well. Formal encouragement plays an important part in improving learning, but the usefulness of homework is limited because no students have books to take home. Teachers have worked hard to include ICT in their planning,

but the usefulness of this is limited because the school still lacks suitable software to support language learning.

143. Leadership and management are satisfactory with some strengths. Assessment has been improved since the previous inspection and is now well used to set targets and involve students in self-evaluation. Monitoring of teaching and learning is satisfactory and measures are in place to promote sharing of best practice. The whole curriculum area with its three languages contributes a strong European input to students' personal development, and the school is working on links with a partner school in Alsace. Since the previous inspection this area of the curriculum has experienced a sharp decline in its fortunes but is now enjoying a degree of stability that could provide the basis for further improvement. Overall progress has been satisfactory.

### German

144. German is taught as a second foreign language from Year 8 to middle and higher attaining students. GCSE results in 2001 were close to the national average, and in 2002 they were well above average. The highest grade in 2001 was B, although all students got at least a grade G. Standards seen in a Year 9 class were close to the national expectation with students confidently using regular and common irregular verbs in the past tense. Teaching and learning are good, with characteristics similar to those for French, which the sole German specialist also teaches. Attitudes to the subject are good, although numbers are relatively small – 12 in Year 10 and 16 in Year 11. Standards observed in Year 11 were below average at the time of the inspection but there is the potential for the students to match the 2001 results. Achievement, in Years 9 and 11, is good in view of the relatively short time the students have in Years 8 and 9.

### Spanish

145. Spanish is also taught from Year 8 to most of those who do not do German, leaving a small number who do not take a second language. 14 students in Year 10 and 35 in Year 11 take Spanish. The school takes account of parental preferences. GCSE results in 2001 were well below the national average but in 2002 they improved to above average. Low attaining girls achieve worse than boys do, as in French. One Year 9 and one Year 10 lesson were seen as well as students' written work. Standards in both were below average despite good teaching with good lesson planning leading through a progression of activities covering the four skills listening speaking reading and writing. Where younger students have just one lesson a week some find it difficult to remember what they have learned till the next week. For the older students the teacher could draw on her own experience of Spain, and the presence of a Spanish *assistante* enriches their cultural experience as well as their spoken language. Attitudes are good but in Years 8 to 11 there is such a wide spread of prior attainment that learning is adversely affected. Leadership and management and school improvement are as for French.

## MUSIC

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

#### Strengths

- Enthusiastic subject leadership
- The practical nature of lessons, which engage students in enjoyable music making activities
- The growth in numbers of students participating in extra-curricular activities

#### Areas for improvement

- The amount of curriculum time allocated to the subject
- The accommodation and the condition of percussion instruments
- The structure of the two-week timetable

146. Teacher Assessments show that at the end of Year 9 in the summer of 2002, the attainment of a large majority of students was above national expectations. The assessments show that more than double the number of students reached the expected Level 5 than in the previous year. In

the 2002 GCSE examinations the percentage of students obtaining A\* - C grades was below average although the percentage of students obtaining A\* - G grades was above average, and above the school average. These results show an improvement on those of the previous year. A significant proportion of students achieved the highest A\* and B grades.

147. Inspection evidence shows that standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with expectations. However, students do not receive enough opportunities to use ICT due to a lack of computers in the teaching rooms and the complications caused by the two-week timetable. Although students arrive in Year 7 with a wide range of musical experiences and attainment levels the teacher's enthusiasm and generally good quality of teaching enables students to achieve satisfactory results within a short period of time at the school. In two Year 7 lessons students were observed making a musical contribution to group ensembles, which were their own rhythmic compositions using a variety of percussion instruments on different beats of the bar. Students in Year 8 were observed enthusiastically singing a spiritual and working on the different parts of a classroom ensemble which varied in difficulty. Year 9 students were composing melodies based on a chord progression taken from previous practical work. All students were able to provide one melody note per chord, a large majority provided two separate notes per chord through listening to several possibilities and rejecting the less suitable, and a few were able to provide four separate notes per chord.
148. In work seen in Years 10 and 11 standards are in line with expectations or better. Students in Year 11 have worked on a series of classroom ensembles by composers from different centuries and are at present working on a piece based on the techniques of the gamelin. This involves playing a series of different rhythmic patterns at the same time. The students also composed their own pieces using similar techniques.
149. Attitudes and behaviour in music lessons in all year groups are generally good. Students enjoy the practical nature of the majority of lessons and are keen to perform well. They participate positively in group work, collaborating constructively with their partners. Very often the more able students help their less able peers. Relationships are good between students and between students and teachers. Some students in Year 11 however need to meet the teacher's deadlines for completion of work so that all course work is finished in time for internal moderation.
150. Teaching in all year groups is generally good. The teacher has a very good knowledge of the subject and experience as a practical musician, which are used to enable the students to achieve well in practical activities. Lessons are well planned to cater for the needs of all students and there is generally an appropriate sense of pace. On occasions however there was a tendency to overstate explanations with a consequent loss of student attention. Teachers' expectations are appropriately high and these serve to reinforce the targets the students have set themselves in the self-evaluation activities that take place at the end of each module. Students enjoy their practical music and this is evident particularly when they play to the remainder of the class.
151. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Since the arrival of the present subject leader, a new scheme of work has been devised, and assessment now plays a more important part in raising standards through target setting and the monitoring of students' results. However a heavy teaching commitment only allows enough non-teaching time for basic administrative tasks. Further complications arise from the timetable's requirement for eight classes in Years 7 to 9 to be taught two lessons in one week and then have to wait a fortnight for the next two lessons. This is having an impact on standards, as more lesson time has to be spent revising previous work. Six instrumental teachers from Herefordshire Instrumental Services provide lessons for sixty students and assist in school concerts. Further opportunities for the more musically able are offered in the form of extra- curricular activities mostly run by the head of music. These activities are usually intended for school concerts or the visits to external venues including a local hospice, the Salvation Army or concerts involving local feeder schools.
152. There are not enough teachers in the department and this has an impact on the options available in Years 10 and 11. Some students are unable to choose music as a GCSE subject because of clashes with other subjects. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. There is only one main teaching room, which has inadequate storage facilities, and there are not enough practice rooms. Activities in the practice rooms disturb those in the main classroom due to inadequate

soundproofing. Students have to rehearse in the main music room on keyboards without any headphones, making the individual refining of work difficult. The lack of ready access to computers prevents full coverage of the syllabus in Years 7 to 9. Pitched and non-pitched percussion require either renovating or renewing, and increasing in range to broaden the students' experience of music from other cultures.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Physical education makes a distinctive contribution to the social development of students and to their language skills
- Achievement at the end of Years 9 and 11 is in line with national expectations and in some aspects better
- Teachers' commitment to their students and to the school
- The department is very well led and managed

### Areas for improvement

- Criteria for assessment in Year 9 and its operation
- A broader curriculum in terms of the aspects taught
- Time allocation to deliver the Programmes of Study and specific components of the curriculum

153. Teacher assessments show standards at the end of Year 9 in 2002 to be well below the national average. However, inspection evidence indicates that standards are close to national expectations rather than below. The reason for the discrepancy is related to the methodology used for assessment that resulted in an underestimation of students' attainment levels. This was clearly seen in a Year 10 basketball lesson, for example, where a large class performed at an above average level. They showed well-honed skills, good knowledge and understanding, good tactical awareness and application, the capacity to evaluate and improve their own performances and to apply their knowledge of fitness and health to the activity.
154. Results in the GCSE examination have fluctuated over recent years. In 2001, the percentage of students attaining A\*-C grades was significantly above the national average whereas the 2002 results were close to average. Nevertheless, the results show a significant rise since the last inspection and the achievement of the targets set for 2003 would continue the rise.
155. In games and gymnastics in Years 7 to 9, students make appropriate progress in all of the required aspects of knowledge, skills and understanding. Students are articulate, knowledgeable and perceptive and are able to demonstrate with confidence. In one Year 7 gymnastics class, for example, students were able to observe accurately and anticipate the next development in the lesson. In games, clear progression was seen between the year groups in hockey, both in the refinement of their skills and in their tactical awareness and its application. Work in gymnastics can be improved by greater attention to the way in which movements are performed with greater emphasis on quality in movement. In games, students need to keep their learning in focus when in the applied context of competition. Non-participant students are always gainfully employed either with worksheets related to the subject matter, or officiating.
156. Teachers' planning takes account of students with special educational needs. These students integrate well and make progress in line with their peers and work on common tasks in practical activities. They are willing to demonstrate and share their quality performances and ideas in the same way as their peers. Where learning support is used, it is used constructively. Lesson plans are often provided to support assistants before the start of the lesson. The achievement of the few minority ethnic students and those learning English as an additional is similar to their peers. Inclusion, in its broadest sense, permeates provision in physical education.
157. Student attitudes and behaviour are never less than satisfactory and typically very good or excellent. Students are invariably pleasant, positive, co-operative, constructive and well

mannered. They respond well to the expectations of teachers and act responsibly. Students show respect for each other and the social and moral dimensions of well-taught physical education are strongly represented in this department. Participation rates in the subject are high and this reflects students' enthusiasm for the subject.

158. Teaching and learning are generally good in Years 7 to 9 and slightly better in Years 10 and 11 where more examples of very good and excellent work were seen. Where teaching and learning are most effective, lessons are well planned with clear objectives and teachers draw on their strong subject knowledge to check learning and to reinforce learning with specific teaching points. In the best GCSE lessons there is lively dialogue between the teacher and students, which stimulates learning and encourages students to take greater responsibility for their learning. In all lessons there is strong underpinning of literacy work. Technical terminology and key words are introduced and reinforced, although this reinforcement is more likely to be seen in gymnastics than in games. White boards are used effectively in the gymnasium, the sports' hall and in the changing rooms.
159. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The department uses quality assurance procedures in accordance with the school improvement plan and, in addition to peer and line-management review, staff have begun their own programme of training to share their individual expertise. The head of department has a clear vision with regard to the future development of the subject and for expanding its links with the community and with the primary and other secondary schools. The department has a lively presence in the school and is proactive in devising ways of motivating and engaging students, for example through achievement awards for effort and progress, and for representative awards. Resources are well deployed and good use is made of the time available. The fifty-minute period makes it difficult to deliver well-balanced games lessons, once changing time and moving to and from the working areas are taken into account. Nevertheless, satisfactory progress is made. The curriculum is heavily weighted towards games and this is to be reviewed. Accommodation is adequate but is still in need of refurbishment. Accommodation for teaching staff it is poor.
160. A planned programme of extra-curricular activities is in place, but this is disrupted when matches are played because of the conflicting time demands upon teachers. A valuable enrichment programme has been introduced for all students on Wednesday afternoons, much of which offers a broad complement to the physical education programme. Included are activities such as fencing, squash, climbing and the opportunity for students to take GSCE dance. The department is well placed to make further improvement.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths.

- Good teaching and very good student management
- The curriculum is good
- The very good contribution of the subject to students' SMSC development
- Subject leadership is very good

### Areas for improvement.

- Standards in Years 10 and 11

161. Standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with expectations in relation to the Herefordshire LEA Agreed Syllabus. At the end of Year 11, results in the GCSE short course are below average.
162. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the end of Year 9 is consistent with expected levels. There are some good examples of students developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts. In one Year 7 lesson, through a well-directed question and answer session, students made good gains in knowledge and understanding of the significance of special places and how this could be applied to Buddhist places of worship. In a

Year 8 lesson, students were provided with an insight into the Hindu story of Ramah and Sita. Through the good use of video illustrations by the teacher, students made important links with concepts of good and evil in today's world. In a Year 9 lesson, students showed a good understanding of the concepts of life and death. The teacher's variety of approaches enabled students to form their own views, whilst respecting the views of others. The use of peer review of research material enables students to make good progress. Students with special educational needs make good progress. The use of key words, technical language and good oral discussion work were useful aids to improve speaking and listening skills. Overall, learning is good.

163. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the end of Year 11 is below expectations. In Year 10, student achievement is satisfactory, although their attainment is below national expectations. They show a clear understanding of moral issues within a religious context. As a result of a very good lesson using ICT, students were able to research the Muslim view of marriage and family life. The teacher's expertise and enthusiasm helped students to develop the use of computers for research and presentation of work. In Year 11, attainment is also below the GCSE short course expectations, but indications are that good teaching is having a positive effect on attainment and standards should rise before the examination. In a well-structured Year 11 revision lesson, for example, students demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of different beliefs about God. They expressed their own views and feelings about the characteristics of God as they apply to the problem of suffering.
164. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by students of different gender or ethnic background. Students with special educational needs, and those who are gifted or talented make good progress.
165. Overall, students' attitudes to learning are good. They behave well, are well motivated and apply themselves to the work. They collaborate very well with each other and work at a productive pace. The relationship between teachers and students is very good, and teachers support individuals both academically and personally. Students' behaviour makes a good contribution to their achievement and progress.
166. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory and often good with some very good features. This has a significant impact on student achievement. Planning is good. Lesson aims were shared well with students in all cases. Teachers make very good use of questioning to consolidate current learning and to review previous work. They use a suitable range of styles such as discussion, video material, ICT, question and answer and worksheets that match the needs of individual students. This enables students to *learn from* as well as *learn about* religion, and assists them to maintain their interest and develop understanding of religious principles and concepts. Teachers manage student behaviour very well, contributing to a very good climate for learning. Extension work and homework are used to good effect in allowing students to reflect on the information they have gained in class. Teachers have clear expectations of students and challenge them to succeed, and these are effective in contributing to student achievement.
167. Assessment of students' work is generally good and helpful comments are made in exercise books. The current procedures do provide a sound basis for assessing what students know and understand. Marking of students' work is good and consistent. The department's use of levels of attainment and the setting of detailed targets needs extending in order for students to be clear about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve.
168. Subject leadership and management are very good. The subject leader approaches the task with great enthusiasm and deep commitment to the students. There is excellent support from other staff. The humanities improvement plan provides a good basis for development. The monitoring of students' work is good and enables the department to have a clear view of the progress students are making. Students are provided with a rich diet of religious education. The quality of classroom display is very high and celebrates students' achievement.
169. Since the time of the previous inspection, standards, the quality of teaching, curriculum planning and student management have all improved. There has been good improvement in the contribution religious education now makes to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of



students. Overall, the improvements since the last inspection have had a good impact on standards, student achievement and progress.