

INSPECTION REPORT

THE HEATH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Runcorn

LEA area: Halton

Unique reference number: 111400

Headteacher: Mr P. Mather

Reporting inspector: Ms J. Jones

12460

Dates of inspection: 14th – 17th October 2002

Inspection number: 252299

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:	Clifton Road Runcorn Cheshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M. Marsh
Date of previous inspection:	3 rd April 2000

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12460	J. M. Jones	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well are students taught? How well the school is led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
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27050	V. C. Blackburn	Team inspector	Science	
13734	H. Davies	Team inspector	Geography Religious education	
8756	P. Hanage	Team inspector	Mathematics Key Stage 3 numeracy	
20287	D. S. Harris	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
22906	B. Hodgson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Physical education	
19915	P. Hooton	Team inspector	History	
3943	D. Innes	Team inspector	Educational inclusion Provision for students with special educational needs Provision for students with English as an additional language	
22524	S. Innes	Team inspector	Design and technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
18589	M. King	Team inspector	Music	
30046	R. J. Parker	Team inspector	English Key Stage 3 literacy	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Heath is an average sized mixed comprehensive school serving part of the town of Runcorn and the surrounding area. Until recently the school had a small sixth form but this closed at the end of July 2001. The school now caters for about 1000 boys and girls. There are very few students from ethnic minorities. The proportion of students entitled to free school meal is about average. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs is below average, but rising slightly. The proportion of students with a statement of additional physical or learning difficulties is above average. Included in this group is a unit, designated to serve the borough, for students with visual impairment. At present there are four students who are given this support, which enables them to be taught mostly in normal lessons. Students' attainment when they start in Year 7 is broadly average.

The school gets additional funding and support through being part of the Excellence in Cities initiative in Halton.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school gives its students a good education. Very good leadership and highly effective management, together with good teaching enables students to make good progress and achieve well in most subjects. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Leadership is outstanding and there is very effective management at all levels.
- Standards are rising in most subjects, and there was a dramatic rise in GCSE results in 2002. Behaviour is good and students enjoy working hard.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Students' personal development is very good and they leave school well prepared for future work and education.

What could be improved

- The curriculum for modern languages is inadequate and is lowering standards.
- There is not enough time allocated to religious education to meet the requirements of the agreed syllabus in Years 7 to 9.
- Although the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is growing, it is still not used sufficiently in a number of subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in 2000, when it was found to have serious weaknesses. Improvement since then has been very good and the school no longer has serious weaknesses. Standards have risen significantly in most subjects, and students are no longer underachieving. Leadership has improved at all levels and is now very good. Teaching and learning have improved significantly and are now good across the school. The curriculum now meets requirements in design and technology. The quality of the accommodation and resources has been improved and both are used efficiently. The school no longer has a deficit budget.

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
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	D	D	D	C

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

National test results and achievements of Year 9 students

Over the four-year period 1997-2001, the results of national tests for students aged 14 were close to the national average and improved at a similar rate to the national trend. In 2002, the results rose more rapidly than in previous years. By comparison with those of schools where a similar proportion of students have free school meals, the overall results in 2001 were above average.

The standards of work seen of the present Year 9 students are close to average overall. Standards are above average in mathematics and average in English and science although higher attainers achieve well above average standards in science. Standards are also above average in history and ICT. In music, students underachieve because they do not have enough teaching time. Achievement overall is good.

GCSE results and achievements of Year 11 students

The GCSE average point score¹ was below average in 2001, although the proportions of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C was average. Improvement was broadly in line with the improvement nationally over the four-year period 1997-2001. In 2001, the results were close to the average for similar schools and the governors' targets were achieved. There was a dramatic rise in results in 2002 and governors' targets were exceeded. In 2001 the highest GCSE results were in English literature, home economics and ICT.

The standards overall of work of the present Year 11 students are above average. Standards are above average in English, science and mathematics. Standards are well above average in history and above average in design and technology. Overall, the students achieve well. Standards in literacy and numeracy are average, and are above average in ICT.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students are proud of their school and enjoy learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good, both in lessons and around the school. Because of the mutual respect between teachers and students. The incidence of exclusions is below average.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students are thoughtful and considerate and older students are mature and responsible.
Attendance	Satisfactory

¹ Where A*=8, A=7, B=6, C=5, D=4, E=3, F=2, G=1

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	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 in all years and there is a slightly higher proportion of good and very good lessons in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning is good in English, being good or better in two out of three lessons seen and very good in about a fifth of lessons seen. In mathematics all teaching seen was at least good, and about three in ten lessons were very good. Two thirds of the teaching in science is good or better, with more good and very good or excellent lessons in Years 10 and 11. There is a high proportion of excellent teaching in history that inspires and challenges students. Teaching in modern languages varies, with some very good, but also a small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching in which students are not challenged enough. Teaching and learning in art and design and in physical education are satisfactory but lessons generally lack the sparkle seen in other subjects. Most lessons engage students, encourage them to think and work independently and demand high standards of work and behaviour. Students are given clear objectives and expected to reflect on how well they meet them. Students with special needs, including those with visual impairment, make good progress because they are supported very well both by the learning support department and by classroom assistants. Literacy and numeracy are well taught throughout the curriculum. Students use computers competently but ICT is not used widely enough in teaching a number of subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. There are good opportunities to take up psychology and astronomy in Year 10, but not enough lesson time for music or religious education in Years 7 to 9. The curriculum for modern languages is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 because lessons are bunched together and students forget in the intervals. There is an appropriate programme of sex and drugs education. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. There is satisfactory careers guidance and good links with further education colleges and the community. Links with primary schools are very good.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good in all years. Some students who should have individual education plans do not yet have them. The department is being reorganised and is catching up after a period when some aspects of the Code of Practice were not fully implemented. In spite of this, provision is good and students are well supported in and beyond lessons.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for personal development is very good. It includes very good provision for moral and social development, and good opportunities to learn about other cultures. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. In some lessons and in assemblies there are good opportunities to think about the values underpinning our everyday lives. The daily 'thought for the day' does not always amount to an act of worship.
How well the school cares for its students	Arrangements for child protection are satisfactory, and students are well cared for in a safe environment. Students' work is assessed frequently and accurately, and good use is made of this information.
How well does the school work in partnership with parents	There are very good links with parents, and good opportunities through meetings with teachers for parents to find out how their children are getting on. Written reports do not have enough specific detail about how well students achieve year by year.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. He has a distinctive and highly effective style of management that has taken the school from serious weaknesses two years ago to be a successful and flourishing institution today. Management insists on high standards in teaching, learning and behaviour and has strategies that bring these about.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses and keep a watchful eye on the school's rapid development. They play a full part in decision-making. They do not ensure that the school provides a daily act of worship for all students.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school has numerous effective systems for checking that what it does works. The management responds quickly to any need identified.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of its funding and staffing. Accommodation is generally good and resources satisfactory. The library is inadequate: it is currently being remodelled, with better facilities and more computers. The number of computers is growing rapidly and their use is increasing. The school obtains the best value for all its goods and services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching is good and the school has high expectations. Strong leadership has helped the school improve significantly in the last two years. Children like school and are learning to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About a quarter of those responding to the questionnaire, and some parents at the meeting, do not like seeing only their child's form tutor at parents' meetings. Some parents are not happy about the work their children are given to do at home.

Inspectors agreed with everything parents like about the school. They felt that by offering parents the opportunity to meet other teachers by appointment, the school makes it possible for parents to have additional contact with teachers, and the benefits of the system outweigh the disadvantages. Homework is usually suitable and helps to support the work covered in lessons.

PART B: COMMENTARY

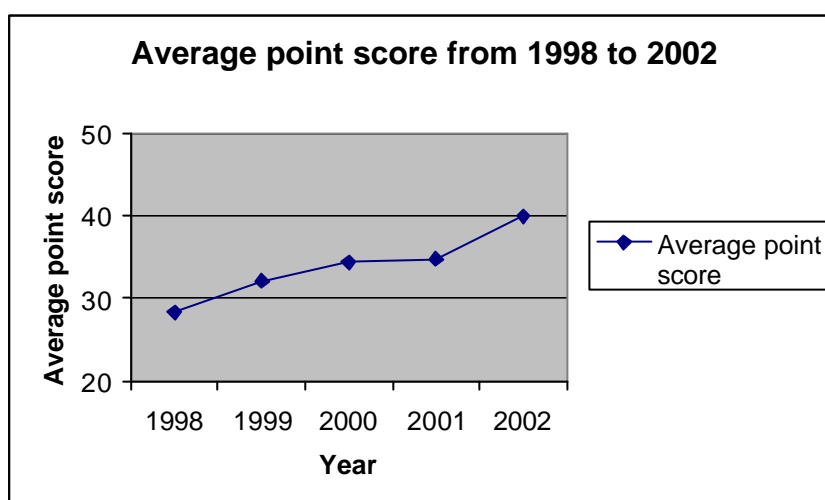
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

Test and examination results

1. Results are summarised in the tables below. Both test results at the end of Year 9 and GCSE results show steady improvement. Results overall in English, mathematics and science tests at the end of Year 9 are close to average. Mathematics results were above average in 2001, and were average in science and below average in English.

2. GCSE results have increased steadily over the last five years, with the biggest improvement in 2002, as the graph below shows:



Results by subject are summarised below.

Tests at the end of Year 9

Subject	2001 results in relation to national standards	Trend between 1999 and 2001	Comment
English	Average	Upwards	Upward trend continued in 2002
Mathematics	Above average	Upwards	No clear pattern in the difference between boys and girls.
Science	Average	Upwards	Boys do better than girls

GCSE results

Subject	2001 results in relation to national standards	Trend between 1999 and 2001	Comment
English	Above average	Upwards	Boys' attainment improved significantly in 2002
Mathematics	Above average	Upwards	A particularly big increase in the number of A* to C grades in 2002
Science	Average	Upwards	Much improved in 2002
Art and design	Average	Unchanged	Some of the drop in 2002 was due to textiles being moved to the technology course.
Design and technology	Well below average	Unchanged	In 2002 design and technology was examined in all material areas and was above the national average. Resistant materials and graphic products rose sharply to reach average standards and in food technology high standards were maintained.
Home economics	Well above average	Steady rise	
Geography	Average	Significant rise	2002 results maintained the improvement seen in 2001. Girls did much better than boys.
History	Below average	Little change	Very big improvement in 2002.
ICT	Above average	Rising fast	Very big improvement since 1999 when results were well below average.
Modern languages	Well below	Upwards	Great improvement in 2002, with girls doing much better than boys.
Music	Well below average	Variable	The standard of 16 year olds taking GCSE music is variable because of the small numbers involved
Physical education	Just below average	No clear pattern	Small rise in results in 2002, but improvement is less than in many subjects.
Religious education	Well below average	Variable	Very few entries

Standards of work seen in lessons

3. Standards in most subjects are at least as high as the test and examination results suggest, and in many cases, they are higher. This is in line with the improved results in 2002, and the predicted results in 2003.

4. By Year 9 students' attainment is above average in mathematics, history and ICT. In most other subjects attainment is average at this stage. Only in music is attainment below average, and this is partly because students have little experience of music before they come to the school; their progress is unsatisfactory during the first three years because there is not enough lesson time allowed. The highest attainers in science are working at levels that are well above average and have already made a start on their GCSE course.

5. By Year 11 the standard of work seen in history is well above average. Standards are above average in English, mathematics, science and design and technology. Students reach average standards in most other subjects, though standards are below average in religious education, because there is not enough time in the curriculum to study the subject in enough

detail. Standards are also below average in art and design in Year 11, though this is due to the low starting point of many of the students who choose the subject.

Students' achievement

6. Students' achievement (in other words, the progress they make) is at least satisfactory, and in history their progress is very good. Achievement in modern languages and religious education is satisfactory, in spite of some good lessons in which students were seen learning well, because there is not enough time for study, or because the timetable is not well planned. In art and design and physical education, achievement is satisfactory rather than good because the lessons, though at least satisfactory in their content, are workmanlike rather than inspirational, so do not demand the same degree of commitment from students as is expected in other subjects.

7. Standards of literacy in the school are above average overall, though almost one third of students come to the school in Year 7 needing extra support to catch up with their peers. By the time they leave, lower attainers can understand quite complex text, and can draw their own conclusions about the reliability of information contained in it. They answer questions confidently, though they are less prepared to listen to their peers, and tend to discuss things directly with their teachers. They write simply and clearly because they have been well taught. Middle attainers contribute readily to whole class discussions, and are beginning to be able to listen and develop ideas within small groups. They produce accurate, fluent and carefully structured writing in subject such as English, history and art and design. Higher attainers speak with confidence either in small groups in more formal situations.

8. Standards in numeracy are above average. Many subjects give students the opportunity to develop numeracy skills, and in all cases students cope well with the demands. For example, they construct accurate drawings for rigidity testing in design and technology, and in science, by Year 9 they carry out calculations usually met in Years 10 and 11.

9. Standards in ICT are average, in spite of the limited use made of computers across the curriculum. Students word process their work accurately when required and use the Internet confidently for research.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

10. The attitudes of students' towards school are very good. They demonstrate a high work ethic and determination to succeed. Students are highly motivated to take part in events organised by the school such as the recent school production of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream coat. Prefects take their responsibilities seriously and make a significant contribution to the smooth running of the day-to-day life of the school. Students from ethnic minorities, or with special educational needs, are fully integrated into the school community.

11. Relationships between students and with staff are very good. One of the most striking characteristics of the school is the respect shown by staff towards students. Students are valued for their individuality and helped to achieve their potential in as many ways as possible. They respond positively to this and develop during their time at school into confident young people. Students are happy to approach members of staff if they are experiencing difficulties with their academic work or have personal problems. There are many opportunities, in collaborative and group work, to develop further students' social skills and they willingly share and support each other in their learning. Students are encouraged, through debate, to express their feelings on a wide range of moral and social issues. They listen with sensitivity to the views and opinions of their peer group that may differ from their own.

12. The school is a socially harmonious community. Behaviour in lessons was rarely less than satisfactory, and on many occasions excellent. The clear procedures for dealing with potentially disruptive behaviour effectively support teaching staff to maintain the high standard expected by the school. Students state that bullying is unacceptable within the school and is not an issue. The ethos of the school encourages students to accept responsibility for their actions, and treat everyone with respect. This is a significant strength.

13. By the time they reach the end of Year 11 students are confident and articulate and can express their feelings and concerns cogently. From first entering the school students are encouraged to accept responsibility for managing their own learning. Homework often involves independent research and expectations of teaching staff are high in this respect.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

14. Teaching and learning are good overall. In about a quarter of lessons both teaching and learning were very good; in seven out of ten lessons, teaching and learning were good or better. Only five lessons were seen that were less than satisfactory out of a total of nearly 150.

15. The effectiveness of the teaching is due to a number of factors, of which the most powerful is the ethos of the school. The school motto 'No Compromise on Standards' is blunt, but it is no meaningless mantra. Every student and every teacher and classroom assistant knows and accepts that only the best will do. The achievement of these high expectations are made possible by the culture which encourages and values everyone.

16. In a very effective science lesson, a class of nominally less able students coped well with the difficult idea of the composition of compounds because the teacher broke the lesson into short steps, keeping students to a tight time scale, while being vigilant about the quality of their work and the way it was presented. Students were expected to explain their ideas clearly and write accounts about what they had seen in a previous practical lesson, in their own words. The teacher helped by suggesting a number of words they could use. Although this was a demanding task, students settled quickly, with no sign of helplessness, and all produced short but accurate accounts very quickly. Some accounts were individual and vivid – for instance, one student described how he was dazzled by the sight of magnesium burning in oxygen. The emphasis on working independently and individually leads to greater commitment by students, and hence better ability to remember what they have already learned. By the end of this lesson, in which an apparently low ability group was working at an above average level, students had a good grasp of the difference between the result of an investigation and the conclusion to be drawn from it. They could also use technical language to summarise their investigation and had a good grasp of the meanings of several chemical names.

17. This emphasis on learning is built into lesson planning, so that students know at the outset what they should learn in a lesson. At the end of most lessons there is a useful session to sum up, and, more importantly, to look at how much they have learned. Students are encouraged to think about how they learn and to realise that they can do much better than they thought they could, and recent examination results show that they can indeed achieve high results.

18. Teachers are developing good methods of accelerating or enriching the learning of the most able students. Very good examples were noted in history and food technology. A good range of activities not based upon particular subjects is also being considered.

19. Praise and encouragement are tempered by a realistic assessment of students' work, and frank advice about how to improve. In a Year 10 business studies lesson the teacher drew the class together towards the end of the lesson to discuss the progress they were making with their project. He used questions effectively to get students to think about how they were getting on, and got them to see for themselves that they were not working quickly enough. He used an example of the way businesses work to emphasise the need for faster and more efficient working, illustrating the danger of getting behind, and making them want to spend extra time in the ICT suite after school in order to catch up.

20. Many lessons are inspiring – three of the ten lessons seen in history were excellent, for both the teaching and the learning. In an excellent Year 9 history lesson on the influence of Robert Owen on factory conditions, students worked in pairs on source material to answer questions that had been presented in the form of a letter. This demanded that students put themselves in the shoes of a factory owner in the eighteenth century wanting to improve conditions for the workers. Students felt themselves to be challenged but not pressured. They could remember earlier work clearly, referred to homework done in preparation, wrote eloquently at length, and a number added footnotes (“like you do at university”).

21. A few lessons lacked this element of innovation, and though they were usually satisfactory, they contrasted strongly with the more effective lessons seen elsewhere. For example, some language lessons do not encourage students to try to remember and use what they have already learned. In these lessons students are given little opportunity to think for themselves or use the foreign language. In art and design the work is sometimes mundane and directed too closely by the teacher, so that students do not have to think enough for themselves. In physical education also teachers sometimes miss opportunities for students to work independently. For example students are instructed and supervised during warm up sessions, when they could easily organise this for themselves.

22. Generally homework is used to reinforce what has been learned in lessons, though this varies, even within subjects. For example, modern languages homework is sometimes demanding and challenging, but at other times tasks are too vague and do not reinforce students' skills with the foreign language.

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

Learning opportunities

23. Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 the school succeeds in providing access to the full range of National Curriculum subjects for all students. The requirement to provide personal, social and health education, including sex, health and drugs related education, is met within the planned programme of study for citizenship. Although it was not possible to observe any of these lessons within the inspection period, students spoke of them appreciatively.

24. Although provision is good in most subjects in Years 7 to 9, provision for religious education and modern foreign languages is not satisfactory. The time provided for teaching religious education is insufficient to cover the requirements of the programme of study so statutory requirements are not met in Years 7 to 9. Provision for modern foreign languages is unsatisfactory because all lessons are clustered together in Years 7 to 9 and this results in inefficiencies in teaching and learning.

25. In mathematics, the curriculum is well matched to the individual learning needs of students through appropriate groupings and in English the newly developed scheme of work is enhanced by strong moral and cultural elements. In science, Year 9 students are given the

opportunity to begin GCSE courses early. The curriculum for design and technology has significantly improved since the previous inspection and now meets statutory requirements. In all subjects, students have good opportunities to transfer between groups according to their needs.

26. Since September, the school has included an additional option block for students in Year 10. This gives students wider choice that includes astronomy and psychology. The unexpected increase in student numbers in the current Year 10 has placed a strain on staffing resources and led to some bigger teaching groups. This cannot be put right until September 2003. In modern foreign languages in Years 10 and 11, most students are entered for the short course because insufficient time is provided for them to complete the full course. The school is considering, but has not yet introduced, many vocational courses.

27. There is a good range of extra curricular activities that includes visits to museums and residential study visits to places in this country and abroad. Students can take part in a satisfactory range of sporting activities. A new club for more able students to extend their knowledge and skills of computer control technology has just been introduced and is well attended. Students are clearly excited by the prospect of opportunities for building and programming robots. Extra curricular activities in music are increasing and there are now more opportunities for students to learn to play musical instruments. Students are given good help to improve their examination results through additional workshops in design and technology and revision clubs for examinations in science, including a residential weekend for Year 11. Most subjects offer extra study/revision sessions.

28. The curriculum for students with special needs is good in Years 7 to 9. It is successful because it allows all students to have similar access to subjects of the national curriculum to other students. A small number are withdrawn from modern languages for extra help with reading. Withdrawal from other subjects has been very much reduced since the time of the last report and is mostly organised on an occasional basis so that students may see visiting specialists.

29. Students identified as having special needs can follow a reduced range of courses to enable them to spend more time developing literacy and numeracy skills. In Years 10 and 11 students take Certificate of Achievement examinations in some subjects but otherwise the school provides few non-GCSE routes for its lowest attaining students into post 16 education and training. Provision for visually impaired students is very good. It includes providing copies of enlarged text and the use of modified or specialist equipment to enable increased participation, for example, in practical science and technology lessons. The most able students are effectively provided with opportunities to accelerate and enrich their learning. Very good examples of these were noted in food technology, history and science.

Personal development

30. There are opportunities to reflect on less everyday matters in school assemblies and in subjects such as English, drama and history. Year group assemblies have an element of contemplation and an act of collective worship. The morning tutor periods, though they include a thought for the day, often do not explore the meaning sufficiently. The school does not fully meet the statutory requirements for a daily collective act of worship. Though assemblies are effectively used to celebrate the achievement of students, and reward them for their efforts, there is little active involvement of students to share their intentions and concerns for others.

31. The school's moral code is very strong and students are encouraged to develop an understanding of living in a community. The 'zero tolerance policy' for unacceptable behaviour plays a significant role in this. The clear guidelines, displayed in each classroom of

acceptable behaviour, also reinforces this aspect of students development. Issues such as racism and sexism are discussed and challenged in a variety of subjects. Religious studies ensure that moral issues such euthanasia, death and abortion are tackled.

32. The elected school council is able to bring issues to the attention of the head teacher and governing body. The head boy and girl represent the school in the wider community, such as the annual Remembrance Day service. They and the other prefects set a very good example for younger students.

33. There is a range of visits, both in this country and overseas, to broaden students' appreciation of their own and other's cultures. Links have been established with a school in South Africa with a member of staff teaching there during the summer holidays.

34. Provision for careers education is satisfactory. Visiting speakers supplement the course and a significant contribution is made by the Connexions service. All Year 11 students have individual careers interviews to help them decide on future education or training. Students with statements of educational need have reviews, involving relevant specialists, by the start of Year 10 to plan their future education and training.

35. Links with partner institutions are good, and are very good with primary schools. Teachers visit primary schools and teach lessons to Year 6 students which inspire great enthusiasm, for example in modern languages. There are similar links with English and mathematics and increasingly with other subjects. Year 5 and 6 students participate in science, art and design and ICT lessons at The Heath School. There is a summer school for gifted and talented Year 6 science students. There are appropriate links with local colleges for post 16 education. Students have visiting speakers from higher education and opportunities to visit universities. The armed forces also visit the school to provide careers information.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

36. This is a school where the personal and academic needs of individuals are identified and met. The educational and personal support and guidance that students receive is very good. A lot of care is given to the transition of students from primary school to secondary school. In some cases, mentors work with Year 6 students in primary schools to support their transition into Year 7.

37. Information about students' progress, attendance and other aspects of their lives is increasingly being used identify any students who are underachieving, or likely to underachieve. Particularly good practice has been established, for example, in Year 9 where the year leader systematically tracks students whose attendance is falling below 90 per cent. Discussions are currently being held about the role of pastoral staff in monitoring students' academic progress across the curriculum.

38. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are good. The efficient use of an electronic registration system ensures that absent students are quickly identified and, if no message is received from parents, the school contacts the home. Regular reports of attendance enable pastoral staff to monitor students but there is an inconsistency in the rigour of this monitoring. There are various systems of reward to recognize improved attendance but these are not consistently used amongst all year groups.

39. Excellence in Cities funding has enable the school to employ learning mentors who offer considerable support to students who have poor attendance as well as other difficulties that affect their ability to learn effectively.

40. Provision for students with general or other, specific, learning difficulties is now much better than at the time of the previous report. The newly appointed co-ordinator is introducing improved means of identifying such students and assessing their needs. Sharing of information with subject teachers is much improved. A good start has been made to the introduction of more effective individual education plans with much more precisely described targets capable of being achieved within a stated period. There are still students waiting for plans, but these are scheduled to be completed soon.

41. The merit system is well used to reinforce positive behaviour and attitudes. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are monitored systematically by senior management and parents are called in to discuss strategies to reduce these incidents.

42. The Student Development Centre, funded through Excellence in Cities, effectively supports students who are having difficulty with their behaviour both in and out of lessons, but more effective liaison needs to be established with the Student Development Centre by teachers to make sure students who would benefit have work set by their teachers.

43. The arrangements for child protection are generally satisfactory in that the nominated person has received training and all the appropriate procedures are in place. However, staff have not received any training that raises their awareness of child protection issues. Risk assessments are not fully in place in all departments.

44. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good. The results of external examinations are systematically analysed and this information is used effectively. In mathematics, for example, the results of external examinations are analysed and checked against the departments' own predictions for accuracy. The achievement of boys and girls is monitored and some departments are making use of this information to plan strategies to address any differences. For example, some teaching is in single gender groups.

45. Teachers are given detailed and useful information about students' attainment and their potential for improvement. National test results from primary schools, and information from nationally recognised tests taken early in Year 7 form a baseline for tracking students' progress over their time in school.

46. The school's system of predicting future attainment is not suitable for music, and assessment here is not effective.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

47. Parents are pleased with the school. Nineteen parents attended the meeting prior to the inspection and twenty four per cent of parents completed the questionnaire on parents' views. Their views were generally positive.

48. The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is very good. Most parents willingly collaborate with the school to resolve difficulties when they occur. The quality of information provided for parents, particularly about the progress of their child, is satisfactory. Parents receive a termly progress review and an annual report. However, annual reports do not ensure that parents can see what their child has studied, what they have learned and what they need to do to improve their work further. There is a range of letters that are sent home to parents when concerns arise about such things as attendance or behaviour.

49. The main area of concern expressed at the parents' meeting centred around the annual Academic Review Days. Many parents felt that contact with the tutor only, and not

subject staff, was detrimental. However, this is balanced by tutors' role in monitoring the overall academic progress of students, their personal knowledge of students and the opportunity for parents to make an appointment to see subject staff independently. The school's survey of parents' views on Academic Review Days indicates a high degree of satisfaction and inspectors supported this view, especially as the school invites parents to make appointments to see other teachers if they wish.

50. The Parent Teacher Association organises both social and fund-raising events. A few parents support the day-to-day work of the school by acting as volunteers carrying out a range of tasks such as supporting the work of the Student Development Centre. The views of parents about the school are canvassed and taken seriously by the school and form part of its future development plans. The improving results attained by students in external examinations are due in part to the high quality support of parents. However, there is a significant number of parents who do not ensure that their child attends school on a regular basis.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

51. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. It is a measure of this leadership that the Heath School, judged only two years ago to have serious weaknesses, is now a good and effective school.

52. The improvements needed to turn the school around in such a short time have been inspired by the headteacher's energy and very clear vision. This vision, shared by staff and students alike, is, quite simply, to turn The Heath School into the best school in the country by 2006 at 'adding value' and fulfilling students' potential. The four main objectives laid down for achieving this ambitious aim are already well on the way to being fulfilled. The governing body is a key part of this vision and each of the objectives has two governors to oversee it. The governing body is effective in helping to identify the school's priorities and making sure the school is equipped, with both staff and resources, to meet these. Governors have a good understanding of their role, and know when to be involved and when to observe critically.

53. The dramatic rise in the school's GCSE results in 2002 compared to the previous year is the most immediate example of how the vision is being turned into reality. Staff and students testify openly to the positive changes they have seen over the past two years. Parents share the same view. Perhaps the most striking aspect of these changes is that, despite their powerful momentum, they are happening in a spirit of good humour and mutual respect. It is an enabling culture that builds confidence and self-esteem.

54. All the reservations in the previous report about the way the school had been managed have been put right. The senior management team, for example, is now effectively structured and provides very good support to the headteacher. Both deputy headteachers are involved, with the head, in the central task of assuring the quality of teaching and learning. Together with some strong appointments to the teaching staff, this has brought about a rise in the quality of teaching, and students' learning, since 2000. Very close links between senior staff and middle managers are now established and ensure frequent dialogue between them through the twice termly reviews of subject departments. This rigorous approach is helping to spread good practice more widely and to identify areas for development. Heads of subject departments receive good training in management. They are fully accountable but at the same time have the freedom to manage in their own way. The effect of this has been to increase the amount of delegation to senior managers and staff leading subject departments and year groups. In turn this has improved their effectiveness as managers.

55. Prefects have a clear management structure with senior prefects having responsibility for ensuring that prefects are on duty and carrying out their roles responsibly.

56. The school's further development is guided by a very clear and well constructed school improvement plan that forms a platform for the school's future steps towards its goals and takes good account of funding implications. At its heart is the raising of standards. To this end the school gathers good information about students' levels of attainment, assesses their work carefully and sets targets for them so that they know what to do to progress. In this the school has responded well to the criticisms of the 2000 report. The school knows it has much further work to do to achieve its goals and is now in an excellent position to succeed in doing so.

57. There are enough teachers in all subjects to meet the needs of the students. There is a shortage of technicians in practical subjects that the school has already recognized. Arrangements for performance management are well established and a strategy for professional development, that meets both the needs of the school and the personal training needs of staff, is in place. The school provides funding, for example, to enable staff to gain further qualifications, such as Master of Science. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that new staff are familiarized with the systems and procedures of the school. The local education authority's programme for newly qualified teachers has been adopted by the school.

58. Apart from the need for even more access to computers for some subjects, there are sufficient resources within subjects. The library is inadequate at present because it is being refitted to provide a better working space; new books and computers are expected soon. Accommodation is pleasant and very well cared for. It is very well managed by the site improvement officer and has been improved imaginatively since the previous inspection. Site staff wage a steady battle against litter, but it remains a problem at times during each day.

59. At the time of the previous inspection there was a considerable budget deficit. The school had agreed with the local education authority to clear this within three years. Very good financial planning, and rigorous monitoring at governor and school levels, has resulted in this deficit being cleared a year early. The school now has an appropriate surplus budget. Resources allocated to departments have been increased and money has been earmarked for projects linked closely to the school's development planning. The school uses appropriately the money allocated for specific purposes, for example for special educational needs. Often additional funding from outside sources, for example Excellence in Halton, is for a specified period of time. When possible the funding for these activities is then incorporated into the school's longer term financial planning, to maintain the benefits to staff and students.

60. The main recommendations from the last financial audit have been carried out, and improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

61. In order to raise the attainment of students, the governors and management should:

- (1) Improve the curriculum for modern foreign languages by:
 - spacing language lessons more evenly through the week.
 - clarifying the status of German as a second foreign language.
 - allocating more teaching time to students on the full GCSE language courses.(Paragraphs: 24, 26, 135)

- (2) Allocate more time to the study of religious education in order to meet the requirements of the agreed syllabus in Years 7 to 9.
(Paragraphs: 24, 158, 162)

- (3) Increase the use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum.
(Paragraphs: 65, 91, 105, 118, 130, 144, 162)

In addition to the above key issues, the school should consider the following other less important issues for inclusion in its action plan:

- Improve the information about their children's progress in parents' annual reports.
(Paragraphs: 48)
- Ensure that all students who need them have individual education plans as soon as possible.
(Paragraphs: 41)
- Bring all staff up to date with child protection procedures.
(Paragraphs: 43)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	150
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	54

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	10	25	71	39	4	1	0
Percentage	7	17	47	26	3	.01	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 students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	1023
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	161

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	29
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	148

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	5

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	37
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	20

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.3

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	2.0

National comparative data	8.1
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National comparative data	1.1
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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)

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	115	95	210

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	53	78	76
	Girls	61	73	65
	Total	114	151	141
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	55 (59)	72 (75)	67 (63)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (24)	45 (39)	28 (26)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	61	79	70
	Girls	69	70	50
	Total	130	149	120
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	63 (76)	72 (72)	57 (52)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (36)	47 (40)	19 (24)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	84	100	184

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	33	76	82
	Girls	43	89	99
	Total	76	165	181
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	41 (46)	90 (91)	98 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	34.8
	National	39.0

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

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1014	28	4
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	56.5
Number of students per qualified teacher	18.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	392.75

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

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

Key Stage 2	24.1
Key Stage 3	23.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	2 763 457
Total expenditure	2 702 483
Expenditure per student	2 746
Balance brought forward from previous year	(11 984)
Balance carried forward to next year	48 985

Figures in parentheses indicate negative values

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	21.3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	16.9

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	6
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	1023
Number of questionnaires returned	256

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	51	6	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	48	43	5	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	55	8	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	57	13	3	4
The teaching is good.	29	59	5	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	19	46	25	4	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	46	5	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	37	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	16	53	20	4	7
The school is well led and managed.	40	51	4	0	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	49	4	0	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	24	53	11	3	13

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

- Standards by the end of Year 11 have improved substantially over the last three years.
- Teachers have very high expectations, which motivate students to work hard.
- There is sound preparation of middle attainers for GCSE examinations.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching methods in Years 7 to 9 do not allow all attainers to be active and independent in lessons.
- Marking does not consistently make clear to students what they are doing well, and what else they need to do to improve.
- Though students are encouraged to use ICT, appropriate experiences are not guaranteed for every student.

62. Work seen during the inspection week shows that attainment in English is average by Year 9, and above average by Year 11. This is because teachers vary their methods to suit capabilities of different classes, although the approaches used with middle attainers work better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9.

63. Learning in lessons is good in all years. This leads to good overall achievement in Years 7 to 9, and very good achievement in Years 10 and 11, in relation to what could be expected of students. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Teaching is good because newly appointed teachers have brought more appropriate teaching skills, and established teachers are gaining confidence with the new approaches. Systematic and methodical guidance for students in Years 10 and 11 are the main reasons for improving standards and better GCSE results.

64. Students in Year 7 to 9 who need extra support with basic skills are working hard and making good progress. Teachers and support staff understand their individual needs. They help them to grasp ideas that have been holding back their reading and spelling skills. They show them methodical ways to pull ideas together so the length and organisation of their writing develops quickly. They reward their efforts with justified praise, and build their confidence so that speaking and listening skills develop quickly, and students can work together well to discuss their opinions, or gain better understanding of the work they are doing. Above all teachers keep students busy, so that they are enthusiastic, successful, and consequently well behaved.

65. Lower attainers in Years 7 to 9 get the least exciting diet. Teachers prepare thoroughly, but some rely on strategies that they know to be safe. They maintain good behaviour, but students are placid, and sometimes under-occupied. This is because resources are not sufficiently well tailored to meet their needs, and they struggle to read them, or to see any significance when they have read them. There are too few opportunities to use discussion to explore and clarify ideas. ICT is not systematically used with all students to save time on low level tasks and enable them to focus on important skills and concepts. Some crucial steps in the process of introducing, practising and then applying new skills are not used as effectively as they are with higher and lower attainers. As a result students speak confidently when they talk to teachers, but use discussion less effectively. They are led to a

good understanding of the books that they read, but their written responses are weaker because they spend too long on aspects of the work which do not need new skills, and do not make new demands.

66. Higher attaining students in Years 7 to 9 are helped to learn as quickly as they can. Teachers maintain high levels of activity, and set stimulating tasks that challenge students and grab their attention. As a result students are prepared to make a real commitment to writing about deeply personal experiences such as a “Roller-Coaster Ride”. They gain real benefits from the very good opportunities to discuss social, moral and cultural issues that they encounter in their reading. Students in one Year 9 class reinforced their ability to put ideas into words when they debated political repression in Nigeria and the resulting plight of an asylum seeker, as well as reading classical and early English fables, which focused on the same problems.

67. In Years 10 and 11, the achievement of lower and middle attainers, including students with special educational needs, is good. Teachers have a very clear grasp of what is needed in GCSE examinations, and they prepare students methodically. They learn to explore and explain the methods that writers use to convey their ideas. Students carefully evaluate ideas from texts as varied as “An Inspector Calls” and the film “Thelma and Louise”, so they can discuss them confidently, and write about them at length. The writing itself is less competent than the reading and discussion, but it is generally accurate, clear, and well organised. Learning is better when activities are varied, and when clear targets show just how much work can be completed within each session. Teachers make their high expectations clear, and mark in detail to show whether students are reaching their targets. However, they do not always identify specific parts of the work where students have demonstrated skill successfully, as well as those parts that are less satisfactory and therefore students are not always clear about what they have to do to improve.

68. Higher attainers in Years 10 and 11 quickly adopt the teachers’ high expectations. They respond well to the varied opportunities to refine their understanding of texts – by re-locating “Romeo and Juliet against a background of apartheid for instance, and editing scenes from a director’s perspective. They make good use of the chances to research and debate, and relish the independence that teachers encourage. Some make good use of the Internet and computer presentation techniques - for a polished and witty defence of blondes through history, for instance - though this is not yet regarded as an entitlement for all students. They talk with confidence, listen critically, and write with flair. Their reading is perceptive, and they express mature judgements, well supported by evidence.

69. A new head of department is working effectively with a team that had already made good improvement since the previous inspection. Improvement is now very good. They provide a broad variety of literary experiences and enrich their teaching with consideration of wider issues about life and society. They have developed a very effective system for assessing progress, and supporting students who fall behind expectations. They have a clear view of what else they need to do, both to maintain the momentum in Years 10 and 11, and to raise standards by the end of Year 9. They are continually refining the scheme of work to allow greater levels of activity for younger students, and to build on the improvements to teaching methods that were introduced by the national literacy strategy.

Literacy across the curriculum

70. Standards are above average and this is due to the effective literacy policy that is evident in subjects across the curriculum. Teachers plan for improved literacy in their lessons, and put these plans into action. Students are helped to write accurately in subjects as diverse as science and history. Generally they express themselves clearly and their spelling is usually accurate, but punctuation is a weakness.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are above average and well above average for similar schools
- Teaching is consistently good and this helps students to achieve better standards than expected.
- Very good management has identified the key priorities for improvement and the actions needed to realise them
- Students enjoy mathematics, work hard and behave very well.
- Systems for assessing students' work, setting targets and monitoring progress are very good, and are a key factor in improving standards.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is not consistently used as a tool for teaching and learning.
- The sharing of good practice by teachers is not systematic enough.

71. Students' attainment in mathematics on entry to the school in Year 7 is average. They make good progress and achieve well throughout the school. By Years 9 and 11 the standards reached are above national averages, and well above those for similar schools. This good achievement for all students is the cumulative impact of consistently good teaching combined with well-behaved, hard working students.

72. During the inspection, no significant difference was seen in the attainment or achievement of boys and girls, although in some classes boys took a more active role in discussions in class.

73. Students with special educational needs generally make similar progress to the others in their class. This is because teachers plan work to meet their individual needs, for example producing materials in enlarged print, or use certain colours on the whiteboard, for visually impaired students. Learning support assistants are briefed and work well with students. This level of individual support, together with carefully planned and targeted work, is a strong factor in the continued progress of students with special educational needs. Classes for slower learners are usually smaller, and this helps them to feel more confident and so learn more effectively. As a result of this the majority of those who enter Year 7 with below average standards in mathematics have improved considerably by the end of the year. This good achievement is shown by the fact that in Year 11 virtually all students are entered for GCSE, and nearly all achieve a grade. In 2001 all students achieved a grade.

74. All students make good progress in acquiring a mathematical techniques, with higher attainers developing their algebraic skills well. Higher attainers in Year 11 use complex notation confidently, and have learned techniques for successful algebraic manipulation. Average attainers get a good grounding in all aspects of mathematics and, with growing confidence, apply these skills to more difficult problems. Lower attainers improve their basic mathematical skills. They learn to apply these by practising with carefully graded examples, often using diagrams to help them. This reinforces their learning. The level of difficulty increases by small steps each time, so eventually students are able to tackle more difficult problems than they originally thought they could.

75. The very good systems for assessment, target setting and monitoring progress help students to know the standards at which they are working. They also know how they can improve. An analysis by the head of department of individual targets set, and GCSE grades

achieved in 2002, showed that assessment is accurate. Students have confidence that targets are realistic and they can achieve them. These systems are an influential part of the successful drive to improve standards.

76. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with no unsatisfactory teaching or learning observed. Most is good, with about a fifth very good. All teachers observed, including a supply teacher, have a secure base of mathematical expertise. Students say that teachers explain things clearly and are prepared to explain in different ways until they understand. Students enjoy the range of methods teachers use, for example the use of a counting stick as a focus in a lower set in Year 7, in order to increase the accuracy and speed of mental calculations.

77. All teachers provide good individual support to students, in and outside class, and students appreciate this. The pleasant, purposeful relationships between teachers and students mean that students are not afraid to contribute ideas in class, or ask questions if they do not understand. Classroom routines are well established, which means that students settle down to work quickly. All this, combined with students' positive attitudes and very good behaviour, means they make good use of the opportunities for learning.

78. When teaching is satisfactory, but not good, the teacher often spends too much time dealing with minor disruption or some students' inattention. This does slow the pace of the lesson. Very good teaching captures students' interest and enthusiasm through challenging tasks and questions, which means that students have to concentrate and think very hard to keep up. Students are expected to explain and justify the methods they use, and to explore other possible methods of solution.

79. There is some effective use of technology, such as spreadsheets by students in Year 11 for data handling projects, and a PowerPoint presentation on angles in polygons. However not all teachers in the department use ICT consistently. Teachers do share ideas, but there is not enough systematic sharing of good practice to raise the quality of teaching still higher.

80. The mathematics curriculum is increasingly enriched by methods and ideas from the National Mathematics Framework. Teachers, led by a very effective head of department, have worked well as a team to integrate these into their practice. Plans are regularly updated, using national frameworks and syllabi as references, and building on the improving standards in each year. The new ideas and resources are being successfully used in Years 7 and 8. These are also influencing methods of teaching in other years by widening the range of teaching and learning methods used.

81. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Standards have risen. Teaching has improved, as have students' attitudes and behaviour. There has been a big improvement in the assessment, target setting and monitoring of students. Strong leadership and management have achieved this through clear identification of priorities and taking the appropriate action. The areas for development are similar to those in the current departmental plan.

Numeracy across the curriculum

82. Students' numeracy skills are above average and help their progress in other subjects. The whole school training day on numeracy in March helped teachers in other subjects to identify when they can, or could, reinforce students' numeracy skills. Students in design and technology can construct accurate drawings for rigidity testing and can use charts and graphs to present the results of surveys. Science teachers have high expectations of students' skills in algebraic manipulation.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The Head of Faculty shows strong effective leadership, and has a clear vision for future development of the subject.
- There has been very good improvement made since the previous inspection including examination and test results, and achievement is now good.
- Teaching is good in all years and is often very good or excellent.

Areas for improvement

- The skills of writing at length need developing
- The contribution of science to spiritual, moral and cultural aspects is not fully identified.

83. In all years students are making good progress and achieve well. They enter the school with average levels in science and by the time they reach Year 9 they have made such good progress that many are attaining levels above or well above those expected nationally. This reflects the work done by the faculty since the previous inspection to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Many lower ability students attain average levels and in most groups there is little difference seen between boys' and girls' attainment. This is a direct consequence of the high expectations and challenge presented to students in lessons.

84. Students' work is above national standards overall in Year 11. Many Year 9 students who will take GCSE a year early are already attaining standards expected at the higher grades in the examination. This is an exceptionally high standard.

85. The underachievement of some groups of girls as indicated by the test and examination results up to 2001 was not evident in lessons. The use of single sex groups in Years 9, 10 and 11 has helped to create a culture of achievement. For example, in a Year 9 middle set of all girls, students were able to calculate values for energy, power and work deciding which equation to use. This is a very high attainment for their age, equivalent to a higher grade GCSE.

86. Students with special educational needs also learn well in lessons, particularly when they are helped by resources specifically matched to their needs or by learning support assistants working with them. Those identified as gifted scientists make very good progress because they are given plenty of intellectual challenge and activities designed to make them think for themselves, both in lessons and in extra curricular activities provided.

87. Since the previous inspection the standard of teaching has improved significantly and now is good overall. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching is good or better in three out of every four lessons, half of these being very good or excellent. In Years 10 and 11 there is more consistently good teaching than lower down the school.

88. All lessons are well planned with the objectives of each lesson shared with students and often reviewed at the end. Lessons start with activities designed to focus students' minds on the subject of the lesson or 'brain gyms' to improve thought processes. Teachers give students a considerable amount of intellectual challenge by providing a range of activities designed to make them think for themselves, explain to others and so reinforce what they have learnt. Students in a Year 11 top set of all boys researched aspects of the life cycle of a star individually and then taught the other members of their group very effectively what they had each learnt.

89. Because teachers set such high expectations of application, behaviour and achievement, lessons are well-ordered, students want to succeed and good learning takes place. Only in a very few lessons did the behaviour of a small group affect the learning of the other students or the teachers not present sufficient challenge because the pace of the lesson was too slow.

90. The department is very well led. The newly appointed head of faculty has had a considerable impact on the very good improvements made since the previous inspection and has a well planned scheme for future developments. Many of the teachers have joined the school in the previous few years and work very well together. They are consistent in the way they approach the teaching of the subject, providing students with plenty of activities to think for themselves. A new teaching scheme for Years 7 to 9 has been produced which is matched to the needs of all students and offers a variety of resources. This has now been produced commercially and is generating additional funds for the department. However, it lacks details of the spiritual, moral and cultural contribution made by science. Since the previous inspection several of the laboratories have been upgraded and all have been redecorated creating a suite of colourful stimulating teaching spaces.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Colour work is bright and bold.
- Three-dimensional work is well made and richly decorated.
- In the best lessons, there is a good match of materials and methods to the attainment and interest of students.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough use of ICT.
- Students' drawing lacks confidence.
- There is a lack of urgency in some lessons, and a slow pace.

91. Standards of work in Year 9 are average. Students produce work in a range of materials and processes in two and three dimensions. Their colour work is bright and bold, and they make attractive paintings based on the study of the patterns seen in animals, and good compositions informed by the work of Henri Rousseau. Their three dimensional work is carefully made, and they produce richly decorated vessels in papier-mâché which form attractive displays. However, their drawing is laboured and heavy, and too much pencil work is on too small a scale. In addition, there is not enough use of ICT to support and extend their work, and access to computers is restricted in the teaching rooms.

92. Standards of work in Year 11 are below average. Students learn to make sculptures in wire and plaster which are based on a study of the work of Giacommetti. These are lively, and effectively capture the attitudes of the human form in action. Their drawing in charcoal shows an increasing ability to handle a wide range of tones, and they use blending techniques well. Students' sketchbooks are lively, and show an active approach to gathering information and research. However, their approach to painting is rather hesitant, and it lacks a sense of excitement or discovery. Their drawing skills are weak, and they do not undertake enough work from observation. As a result, they lack the confidence to observe closely and record accurately what they see.

93. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory, and students make steady gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall. However, their learning in those lessons where support assistants are provided is good. This is because relationships with support assistants are good, and students try hard as a result.

94. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory, given the below average attainment at the beginning of Year 10 of those students who take the course. However, a small number of students, mostly boys, show little sense of motivation or engagement with their work, and their achievement is unsatisfactory as a result.

95. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in all years. In the best lessons there is a good match of materials and methods to the interest and attainment of students. For example, in a lesson based on the study of patterns in nature, students were able to cut brightly coloured paper and card and make decorative pieces using transparent tape. They were able to work directly with the materials, interest and engagement levels were high, and good learning was the result. However, in some lessons there is a lack of a sense of urgency, and a slow pace. Students chat among themselves, and do not try as hard as they could. As a result, learning is no better than satisfactory.

96. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory, and results in GCSE examinations in 2002 fell as a result of changes made to the option system. In addition, however, the quality of teaching and learning has fallen to a satisfactory level, and students' achievement is now no better than satisfactory as a result.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- The introduction of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been planned well.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- Monitoring of the quality of provision is still in the early stages of development.
- Students' written work is rather brief, and does not always reflect the complexity of the issues that are being studied.

97. Overall, students achieve above expected standards in Year 9 and Year 11. They show very good attitudes to the subject and are keen to take part in community-based activities. They have only recently started their course, but they are making good progress in gaining skills, knowledge and understanding in this new subject.

98. Students show a developing knowledge of the criminal justice system, and the need for rules and order in society. They learn to express clearly their views on a range of issues including the rights of consumers and the dangers of smoking. They also make plans to improve local facilities, such as parks and recreational areas, and think of practical measures to reduce the incidence of problems such as vandalism and violent crime. They speak confidently, and debates are lively and explore issues thoroughly as a result. Their written work, however, is rather brief, and as yet does not fully reflect the complexity of the issues they study; for example, when considering human rights and responsibilities.

99. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching styles at present particularly promote debate and discussion, building on students' strengths in speaking and listening skills. For example, in a lesson on global warming, the teacher used a recorded television report showing recent flooding in Britain to stimulate group work. This created good levels of interest, students discussed the issue of global warming with conviction, and good learning was the result. However, assessment systems are not yet refined enough to give clear guidance to students. This means that students are not sure how well they are doing, or how to improve.

100. The curriculum is well planned, and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. There are separate lessons in citizenship, and some planned coverage of topics in other subjects such as personal, social and health education, religious studies and science. The school council gives students an insight into achieving change responsibly, and members are careful to represent the views of all students, even if they hold opposing views themselves. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme makes a substantial contribution to the subject, especially in promoting students' involvement in community-based activities. Examples are, encouraging fund raising for local charities, and helping to care for disabled and underprivileged local people.

101. Leadership and management are good; the introduction of the subject has been well planned and resourced, and very enthusiastically promoted. Systems for monitoring the quality of provision are still in the early stages of development. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development, by planning and promoting a wide range of activities, which help students to mature responsibly and become active citizens.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The quality of leadership and management is now very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good.
- The assessment of work and monitoring of students' achievement are very good.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient access to ICT for students studying food technology.
- Matching of tasks to students' abilities is not consistent across the subject areas.

102. Improved GCSE results stem from a change in leadership and management, which has led to the introduction and effective use of assessment information to monitor progress rigorously and set targets for further improvement. This has been particularly effective in resistant materials areas. Food technology and textiles have continued to build on the successful standards already established.

103. Overall, in work seen, standards are average by Year 9. Students have satisfactory practical skills and they understand and use the design process effectively. In food technology, students show good analytical skills when carrying out sensory analysis tests during the development of food products. Students have a sound understanding of environmental issues, for example when using wood. In electronic products lessons, students recognise and can describe the function of components and construct circuits that include timing devices. Drawing skills are not consistently good enough across the materials

areas and restrict students' ability to communicate ideas. They are satisfactory in graphics lessons where students are taught these skills in a well-structured way.

104. Standards in work seen are above average by Year 11. Students are highly motivated and both boys and girls take care to present work well. Their folders are well-organised. Students evaluate their work and make appropriate adjustments to improve it. This process is strongly emphasised and monitored by teachers who assess work to measure progress and set targets for improvement. In food technology, students have very good understanding of nutrition and ingredients that helps them to develop food products to a high standard. Year 11 students have developed good drawing skills to communicate their ideas in resistant materials which compensate for the lower standards in literacy of some students. Students have good practical skills in all materials areas and make appropriate use of technical language.

105. Achievement is good. Students enter the school with varied but generally below average experience and knowledge. They make rapid progress with learning to use a wide range of hand and machine tools and learning to plan and evaluate their work. This is particularly evident in Year 7 when the work is new to them. The enthusiasm of students and their very positive attitudes to learning serve them well throughout the school so they make good progress and achieve well. Students continue to build skills and knowledge through a well-structured programme in Years 7 to 9 and through GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11. Work completed in earlier years prepares students well for examination courses. They learn to manage coursework projects well, partly because they are given clear guidance on meeting deadlines, and also because they work hard in lessons and keep up with coursework. Students learn to use computers effectively, for example to design and make products and to model electronic circuits. In food technology, students have insufficient access to computers and this restricts their ability to present their work effectively and to use computers for analysis of food.

106. Students with special educational needs make good progress because they are well supported by teachers and learning support assistants who know how they learn best and provide appropriately for them. A visually impaired student who has enlarged text and appropriately coloured paper to aid vision made very good progress in an electronics lesson. The most able students have opportunities to extend their skills and knowledge of concepts by working on appropriately challenging tasks so they often learn very well.

107. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is sometimes very good, occasionally excellent and never less than satisfactory. Teachers communicate their very good knowledge with enthusiasm. They expect high standards of work and behaviour. Students respond very positively. Teachers provide challenging and interesting tasks that encourage students to think and work independently. In food technology, teachers plan work which is exceptionally well matched to the different abilities of students. Occasionally, in electronics, the work is too difficult for some students and they struggle to understand the concepts. All students, including those identified as having behavioural difficulties, are managed very well so that a very good atmosphere for learning is established. Teachers use examples of materials well to promote high standards but there are not enough examples of good work by students on display. Exceptions to this is the good quality of graphic work and some textiles projects on display.

108. The department has made very good progress since the previous inspection, particularly in the quality of leadership and management. Improvements in monitoring progress and setting targets are helping to raise standards.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- There is very good leadership and management of the subject.
- Procedures for assessment are very good. Data is used very effectively.
- There are good opportunities for the development of enquiry, team and independent skills.
- Standards at GCSE are rising.
- Teaching is good and students have very positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- The standards achieved by boys are low.
- Regular homework is set but tasks are sometimes too easy.
- Teaching is good but would benefit from sharing the best practice.

109. Students make good progress and achieve well across the first three years in relation to their knowledge, understanding and skills in the subject on entry in Year 7. From observation of lessons and looking at books, standards in Year 9 are average. Students display satisfactory mapping skills and are able to work well in groups, analysing and evaluating data. This was seen in lessons on coastal management. In some of the middle and lower sets, weaker presentation and literacy skills impede progress. In relation to their standards at the end of Year 9, current GCSE students in Year 11 are also making good progress and are working at a level close to the national average. In all years, girls are achieving at a higher level than the majority of boys.

110. Teaching and learning are good overall. There is a proportion of very good teaching, which has a very positive impact on learning. The majority of lessons are well planned to meet students' individual needs. In a very small percentage however, the pace is not rigorous enough and work is too easy for some of the more able students. Students are expected to think about what they are doing and in many lessons appropriate emphasis is placed upon the development of independent enquiry and team working skills. This was seen in lessons on the causes of precipitation and the difficulties associated with coastal management on the East Coast of England.

111. In Year 11, in a lesson on internal migration of population, tasks were well-structured and careful use of focused questioning resulted in good gains in knowledge. In Year 11, students are being carefully tracked to ensure they achieve their full potential. Relationships are very good and teachers create a good environment for learning, which is assisted by very positive attitudes on the part of students. Expectations are mostly high and teachers are very clear about the quality of work required. Students with special education needs are well catered for so that they are able to make similar progress to their peers within their groups.

112. The subject is very well led and managed by an enthusiastic and hard working head of department. The scheme of work provides very clear guidance to teachers. Development planning is thorough to ensure the upward trend in standards is maintained. There has been very good progress in tackling the issues raised in the last report. The weaknesses identified in students' mapping and graphical skills have been successfully tackled. Very effective work has been carried out on procedures to assess progress and data is well used to recognise individual student weaknesses and to plan lessons. Computers are now used regularly and effectively to assist students to find information and to analyse data. There are still some lessons where the teacher directs the class too much, and in few lessons students are not always provided with appropriate work to meet their individual needs. Practical and field

studies have increased but this aspect of teaching and learning has been quite rightly recognised as an area for further development. Monitoring of teaching and learning is carried out, but teaching would benefit from increased sharing of the best practice. Boys' attainment is much lower than that of the majority of girls.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Clear-sighted, energetic leadership has revitalised the subject.
- Procedures for assessing students' progress have contributed to rising standards.
- Teaching leads students to respect other societies and care about human struggles behind the headline events of history.
- Students' have excellent attitudes to their learning.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient time for evaluating good practice and how it might be more sharply matched to individual needs.
- ICT is not sufficiently integrated.

113. Standards of work seen during the inspection reflect a clear improvement since 2001. By Year 9 they are above average, indicating very good progress when compared with students' history skills on entry to the school. By Year 11 standards are well above average. The department's new Year 7 assessment provides a benchmark for judging subsequent progress.

114. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 because students are also making very good progress in the GCSE courses. Standards of work seen during the inspection, including already- completed GCSE coursework, are well above average, reflecting the teaching and support which brought about a dramatic rise in results in 2002 when over three-quarters of students gained A*-C grades. Almost all performed in line with, or better than predicted. Boys continued to do well and girls regained lost ground, both achieving well above national levels. Predictions for 2003 are even higher; testimony to well-judged changes in the course itself, intensified support for students and joy in learning inspired by the relatively recently appointed head of department.

115. In all years, challenging learning and homework tasks, together with target setting and numerous ways of helping students to know the skills and levels they are achieving, ensure that they do their best. Very good behaviour follows.

116. Throughout, students' skill in analysing historical sources is at the heart of learning. They accurately use accumulating amounts of knowledge, seen, heard or read, as a stepping stone towards making judgements. They recall previous learning to make comparisons across periods of history to understand religious, social and political change in Britain, Europe and America from Mediaeval Times to the Second World War. They use evidence to explain biased attitudes and tease out the reasons for conflicting points of view which they express, at times in a newspaper report, a letter, an obituary, a site development plan; at times in oral presentations, mock trials, role-play. These opportunities help them to account for the disregard for human life, the different guises of slavery and suffering whether among the Plains Indians and plantation slaves in America, children in factories of northern England or women. They respect those who took risks to trigger change.

117. Literacy skills are well developed because teachers expect students to explain and illustrate a point using appropriate terminology both in speaking and writing. Higher-attaining students in all years use summary statements, connecting words and other conventions to keep a theme alive throughout their writing. Year 11 coursework is particularly impressive when feeling and knowledge are brought together in one image. For example, a student summarised her analysis of conflict in Northern Ireland as leaving "resentment.... ..still burning in the hearts of their descendants today."

118. Students with special educational needs achieve well. They are confident in oral work and when they acquire knowledge step by step. The newly designed GCSE coursework field study on re-structuring Conway Castle, suits them well because they express their ideas visually as well as in writing. Through Internet investigations and projects, students in all years and of all abilities develop independence and the skills of planning; in groups, they learn to collaborate and reconcile different ideas. There is insufficient use of computers for analysing complex data, using graphs and numerical forms and for discriminating between types of information.

119. Teaching and learning overall are very good. Nearly all teaching is good or better; almost a third is excellent. The several criticisms of the previous report no longer apply. Students' learning is more active, despite unsuitably small classrooms, because teachers involve them in a variety of ways and expect them to meet task deadlines, in groups and for homework, and to match written work to specific skills needed in studying history. Teachers' questioning encourages independent, extended responses often enriched through exploring feelings. They respect students and consequently commitment is the norm. Most teaching excites students because it is driven by the wish to share passion for the subject.

120. The absence of tasks more tightly focused to specific needs, at both ends of the ability range slows the pace of learning at times, for some students. For example, some students may at times need more help when interpreting texts and writing about what they have found out.

121. Very good leadership has brought dynamism into a department previously judged to be unsatisfactory, and improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Important checking strategies are improving teaching and development targets are in line with raising standards. A priority now is to capitalise on the talents of a stable team through regular sharing of good practice and integrating ICT.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The leadership and management of the department is excellent
- Teaching is good
- Teachers have very good relationships with students.
- Students are very interested in the subject.
- The monitoring of students performances in Years 7,8 and 9 and in GCSE classes

Areas for improvement

- There is room to further develop criteria for National Curriculum levels and use them more frequently in teaching.
- There is a need to continue to provide active support to other departments to develop the use of ICT in all subjects

122. The standard of work seen in Year 9 and in Year 11 matches that seen nationally. Teachers' assessments of students aged 14 in 2002 indicate an improvement on the previous year and a steady and significant improvement since 1999, with students now reaching national levels.

123. There is good achievement by all students in the subject. Students in Year 7 arrive with a variety of skills and understanding in ICT. In this year and in Year 8 the well-planned schemes of work provide a clear structure in which students learn new skills and make increasing use of a range of software. This then provides students with sufficient skills to work at GCSE projects in Year 9. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good as students complete GCSE project work, making use of previously learned skills.

124. In all years, students with special educational needs learn well in lessons because the teacher builds their self-esteem by helping them to recognise their very real achievements, and by planning work that enables them to succeed. These students also benefit from working individually, going at their own speed on computers.

125. In Year 7 students have a good understanding of the technical aspects of PowerPoint presentations. They can use a range of fonts and appropriate clip art to produce slides. Even after only two lessons students are able to compose short presentations. In Year 8 students understand how to build simple web sites. They are able to use hyperlinks as well as animated text to display attractive web pages. Students in Year 9 make use of word processing skills to create data capture forms for a travel agency. In this year some students understand how to make effective use of a template by modifying it to create a custom made data capture form, although some students are able to make effective use of desk top publishing and create these forms from scratch.

126. In GCSE classes in Years 10 and 11 students draw on a variety of skills to complete examination projects. Students use word-processing extensively, as well as spreadsheets. Databases and desk-top publishing. Some students are unsure of the way spreadsheets can be used to make mathematical models of situations, although most understand how to make advanced searches in databases. Higher-attaining students have good skills in evaluating their projects on completion.

127. Teaching is good. Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject and of the requirements of examinations to give clear explanations, which help students learn. The very good relationships between students and teachers, means that students respond well to teachers' instructions and this contributes to their learning. Lessons are always well planned and tasks selected are appropriate to students' attainment levels. Teachers have high expectations of students being able to work independently. Good explanations and use of focussed question and answer sessions at the start of lessons help students understand what is expected of them. Very good and excellent lessons are a result of meticulous planning, very good understanding of students learning needs and very good relationships between teachers and students, leading to significant achievement by students.

128. There is excellent management of the department, with clear leadership and a commitment to improve standards, which has already been done in under two years. The curriculum has been improved, with schemes based on those provided nationally in Years 7 and 8 and GCSE type work in Year 9, allowing higher attaining students to take GCSE examinations by the end of Year 10. All students in Years 10 and 11 take GCSE based courses. The curriculum for all students meets statutory requirements.

129. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards in Year 9 and in GCSE have risen significantly. This is a result of the not only the vision of the leadership, but also of the structures in place to monitor teaching and students performance. The provision of equipment and technical support with the appointment of a full time technician is a further improvement.

ICT across the curriculum

130. Cross-curricular ICT continues to be developed and particularly good use is made of this science, mathematics, design and technology and in geography. Standards overall are average. Although departments have planned ICT use in their schemes of work, there is still insufficient use made of this technology in teaching. The New Opportunities Funded training for ICT was only started in March of this year, but good progress is being made as teachers have completed over 100 modules to date. All faculties are equipped with interactive white boards, projectors and lap top computers, however because of the demands on the computer rooms by ICT and business studies, there is still a shortage of computers for students to use, which means they are unable to make enough use of their ICT skills in other subjects.

Business studies

131. Business studies is taught to those who choose it as a GCSE option in Years 10 and 11. Students are well taught and achieve well. They are taught within the ICT department and their ICT skills both develop as a result of the business studies lessons, and draw on their ICT skills learned elsewhere. The courses are imaginatively planned to interest both boys and girls, and teaching and learning are good. Students are given the opportunity to choose some of the tasks they carry out, and this leads to a strong sense of commitment to their work. Younger students are particularly confident when using computers.

132. Teachers are particularly good at using the final part of each lesson to review what has been done and strike a good balance between praising good work and explaining what has not been done so well. This is often done through subtle questioning that gets students to think and put into their own words what they feel they have done well, and what they still need to do.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9 is good and students learn well as a result.
- The majority of students behave very well and have positive attitudes to learning.
- GCSE results in French in 2002 were much better than those of 2001.

Areas for improvement

- The timetabling of modern foreign languages is unsatisfactory and compromises standards.
- The majority of students do not speak enough French and have poor pronunciation.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to extend their experience of French and German beyond the classroom, and through the use of ICT.

133. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards overall are similar to the national average in Year 9 and Year 11. There have been some recent staffing difficulties but these are now resolved. The impact of the department's greater stability is beginning to be felt and most students are achieving satisfactorily given their attainment when they entered

the school. Students' written work in French and German is particularly strong. Year 11 coursework shows careful, accurate work and, in a few cases, some good use of complex language. Equally, more able students in Year 9 use different tenses to describe simple events in the past and plans for the future. By contrast, students do not speak enough in the foreign language and many of them, especially those of average and lower attainment, have poor pronunciation. Standards among higher-attaining students beginning German in Y9 are above expected for such a brief exposure to the language. Most of them can give at least six pieces of information about themselves in well-accented German.

134. Students with special educational needs are doing as well as expected because they are in smaller sets where the work is well suited to their needs. Although boys are often more ready to volunteer answers in class, girls generally score higher marks because they are more accurate in their writing.

135. Although achievement is satisfactory overall in all years, standards are lower than they should be in groups of students who are affected by unsatisfactory timetabling and other curriculum arrangements. This is true, for example, in Years 7 and 9 where most students have all three lessons of French in two consecutive days. This means that they have two lessons of French on the same day, resulting in a loss of productive learning in the second lesson. Students also forget much of what they have learnt in the long gaps between lessons during the rest of the week. What is more, those doing German as well as French in Year 9 have only three periods a week in which to learn both languages. This is not enough time to cover the necessary ground before the GCSE course. In Year 10 the time allowed for French is reduced to two periods per week. This is well below the recommended time and inadequate for a proper coverage of the full course GCSE work. Some teaching groups in this year are unmanageably large. No students are continuing to learn German in Year 10 in spite of many having started it in Year 9.

136. Teaching of French is satisfactory overall, and so is learning. In Years 7, 8 and 9, however, it is good and teaching of German at both stages is also good. Of the lessons seen more than half were good or better. A small amount of teaching is unsatisfactory and does not allow students to learn well. This occurs in Years 10 and 11.

137. Teachers are mostly very good at managing students, treating them with courtesy and creating a quiet atmosphere where learning can take place. In turn, most students work hard, respond well and behave very sensibly. Lessons start well so that students know what they are going to learn and look forward to it. The very best teaching is brisk and challenging, using the foreign language sensitively and encouraging students to use it. Good planning creates plenty of chances for students to speak and be active. In a very well taught lesson with Year 7 students, for example, the teacher used French for most of the lesson and as a result students understood many more words for classroom objects by the end.

138. In too many lessons, however, teachers do not insist enough that students use the foreign language actively in building sentences and for simple classroom requests. As a result students have too little opportunity of hearing and speaking the language, or of correcting their anglicised pronunciation. In a few lessons activities are not well timed or thoroughly enough rehearsed so students cannot answer the teacher's questions and are embarrassed. Some teaching relies heavily on the written or spoken word and gives students too little visual stimulus or opportunities to practise. In such cases students lose concentration and learn less. Teaching does not make enough use of ICT for motivating students, especially boys. Keen young linguists would benefit from more opportunities of enriching their experience of learning a language through contacts with the foreign country.

139. A particular strength of the department is its very good use of assessment to track the progress students are making and set them goals for improvement. As a result of this, students are aware of the levels they have reached and what they must do to get to the next one. The department has very good links with local primary schools. Through the excellent teaching they receive many Year 6 children are making a good start in French. Since the previous inspection the department has focused well on the raising of standards and has made good improvements in this respect. Much remains to be done to improve further the quality of teaching and learning. With a more stable and unified staff the department is well placed to make this happen.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Lessons are well planned.
- Singing is taught well and there is an emphasis on practical work.
- High standards of behaviour and respect and always expected.

Areas for improvement

- There is a lack of ICT provision and use.
- Assessment does not help students to know what they need to do to improve.
- The work is not always matched to the ability of the students and the most able students are not challenged sufficiently to achieve their potential.
- Some basic musical skills need to be taught more systematically.

140. The standard of work of 14 year olds seen during the inspection is below the national expectation although there has been an improvement since the last report. The standard of work by students who have just started the school is well below the expectation. The school encourages all students who are interested in the subject whatever their ability to follow the GCSE course, but numbers are low.

141. There are no students currently in Year 11 but the number of students in Year 10 is larger than usual. Standards in this group vary widely and overall, standards are average. Examples of very good standards of performance were heard during the inspection. Two students, on guitar and drums, gave an energetic and convincing performance of *Thunderstruck* and a singer performed *From this moment* with a mature and expressive style. Other students in the group are beginning to gain confidence and are performing at a much lower standard. In a lesson where aspects of listening were being taught, some students showed a good knowledge of technical words such as canon and descant. In another exercise however most students were not able to use notation accurately. There was no evidence of written composition work in this year group at the time of the inspection.

142. Work seen among 14 year old students shows a wide variation in what they can do and understand. The standard overall is significantly below average. Students make insufficient progress between Year 7 and Year 9. This is because of the limited amount of time allocated to music lessons, which means that students are not able to achieve their full potential. In lessons using keyboards, students do not pay attention to appropriate finger patterns and they rely on playing from memory rather than from musical notation. A lack of basic skills restricts the progress of musically able students who are capable of playing more difficult music. The repetition of short pieces was commented on in the last report and is still a feature of some of the work observed. This is in contrast to some more imaginative work. A Year 7 class gave a whole group performance on percussion instruments. They showed that,

with practice and direction from the teacher, their listening and performing skills could improve. Students with special educational needs are well supported, and this leads to good achievement.

143. There has been an improvement in the teaching and learning of singing skills. Another Year 7 class performing *Music Man* sang unaccompanied and confidently with good technique and good tuning. One boy sang a solo with excellent tone and perfect tuning. There is no difference between the achievement of boys and girls and they cooperate well together. The attitude and behaviour of students in Years 7, 8 and 9 is generally good.

144. Students may occasionally have the opportunity to use the department computer but the regularity of this use is inadequate for progress to be made. However the present limited use of ICT in music demonstrates its potential and its use should be expanded to meet National Curriculum requirements. This will enable composition work in particular to improve.

145. The quality of class teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, and sometimes good. A small number of visiting teachers give instrumental and singing lessons and the standard of those seen was at least satisfactory. There has been a significant improvement in class teaching since the last report. Lessons are well planned and there is a new scheme of work and a department handbook. Lessons usually combine performing, composing and listening with opportunities for students to appraise music heard. Less successful teaching lacks pace and does not always match the task to the ability of the students. Also, the teaching of basic musical skills is not sufficiently systematic, particularly in respect of notation, musical terms, keyboard technique and less directed composition.

146. Students' work is marked and assessed according to National Curriculum levels but this is not as successful as it should be. Practice should be reviewed to see if a method can be found of giving students more information about how well they have achieved and what they need to do to improve, particularly in their practical work.

147. The department has a programme of extra curricular activities and it makes a contribution to school productions and events. The school choir is rehearsing for an event involving a choir of six thousand voices. They are enthusiastic and make a pleasant sound.

148. The number of students receiving instrumental and singing lessons from a private company has grown to about 40. The number is still small in relation to the size of the school and the cost of lessons may be a factor. There is no continuity from primary schools and the instrumental resources of the school are not fully used.

149. In spite of remaining shortcomings, there have been many improvements since the last report, including the quality of teaching, accommodation and resources, schemes of work, the number of students taking GCSE music, higher standards at the end of Year 9 and more practical music-making. Overall, the improvement has been good.

Drama

150. All students study drama in Years 7 to 9 and some choose it as an option at GCSE. There have been staffing difficulties over the last year and some discontinuity for students. However, at present staffing is stable and students are getting good teaching and a worthwhile experience. By Year 9 students have a sound grasp of the vocabulary of drama, knowing, for example, the meaning of 'blocking' and 'body language.' By Year 11, standards are close to average, and students have a good understanding of what is required, and looking forward to presenting their project work to younger students. They can express themselves effectively and criticise each other's work constructively.

151. Teaching is at least satisfactory, and some teaching is good. Through teachers' firm management, students are learning to respect rules for behaviour in the drama studio and develop the ability to communicate effectively.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- There are good relationships between teachers and students.
- Students' have a positive interest in and attitude towards physical education.
- Standards in school soccer, hockey and netball teams are above average.

Areas for improvement

- The curriculum should be the same for boys and girls in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Units of work are not long enough to enable good progress.
- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 GCSE classes does not focus enough on raising standards of theory work.

152. Standards of work seen in Year 9 and Year 11 during the inspection are average. There is satisfactory achievement in the subject. Students with special educational needs progress at the same rate as their peers. In activities such as soccer and netball, where students have had some experience, they build on skills they have learned and improve their performances, reaching levels expected for their age in Year 9. Where achievement is less than satisfactory, in some badminton and basketball lessons, students have had insufficient time, because units of work are too short, to develop their basic skills and understanding.

153. In Years 10 and 11 in core physical education students make satisfactory progress in major games as they develop skills further as well as increasing their depth of understanding of tactics and rules. By the time they are in Year 11 their standards are in line with the expectations for their age. In Year 11 students in GCSE classes reach average levels, but only as a result of high standards in their practical performances, which are balanced by lower levels in their theory work.

154. In soccer in Years 7 and 8 students show confidence in the game. They control the ball well showing good dribbling skills. Students in Year 8 understand and demonstrate both defensive and attacking heading techniques. In Year 9 hockey students use both push and hit pass, and have satisfactory control. They understand rules and positional play sufficiently to be able to play organised games. However in basketball in this year students have less well-developed shooting skills and are unaware of basic defensive team formations. In Year 10 GCSE basketball standards are below expected levels, however in hockey in Year 11 there are high standards, with some students attaining very high standards. In core physical education in Years 10 and 11 standards in major games are average. Students understand rules and positional play and have expected levels of performance in soccer, hockey and netball.

155. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is good, enabling them to give clear explanations and demonstrations to help students learn new skills and improve existing ones. Lessons are usually well planned, with well-selected and appropriate practices, for students of all attainment levels. Occasionally there is insufficient challenge in some lessons, and students make less progress than might be expected. Students are given some control of their own learning at the start of lessons by taking charge of their own warm up, but this does not happen in all lessons. Classes are always well managed and students behave well, even when teaching groups are very large, sometimes

with well over 30 students for a practical activity. The good relationships between teachers and students, and between students themselves are major factors in successful lessons. Students are enthusiastic about the subject, there are good levels of active participation and they work hard at tasks set. All of this contributes to their learning.

156. There is satisfactory leadership and management of the department. The curriculum does not enable boys and girls to follow the same curriculum. For example at present it is not possible for girls to take outdoor activities nor boys to take dance. The department has a commitment to providing a range of extra curricular activities, which provides opportunities for all students to extend their performances, and for higher attaining and talented students a route to district and county teams. There are considerable strengths in boys' soccer, girls' hockey and netball, as well as some good development of rugby league.

157. Since the previous inspection there has been satisfactory improvement. Standards have been maintained and students continue to remain very positive about the subject. There has been some improvement in assessment methods with the department piloting a new scheme for the local education authority.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Procedures for assessing students, and use of this information are good.
- The subject makes a good contribution to students' personal development.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to their learning are good.
- Good relationships have been developed in many lessons.

Areas for improvement

- The school is not meeting statutory requirements in Years 7 to 9.
- Time is short in the short GCSE course; this puts pressure on students and teachers and affects standards achieved.
- The development plan is unsatisfactory and the scheme of work needs additional refinements.
- Teaching and learning strategies are too limited.

158. Students make satisfactory progress in relation to their knowledge, understanding and skills in the subject on entry to the school in Year 7. Overall standards in Year 9 are close to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus, although the limited time allocated impacts negatively on the topics which can be covered and therefore on potential learning. From observations in lessons and from looking at books students do have a satisfactory grasp of the relevance of symbolism in religion. They know the major beliefs of the faith covered. Their understanding of the impact of religious belief on the lives of people is less well developed. Higher ability students in Year 9 display good understanding of the differences between facts, opinion and belief. They are able to write accurately and at length. A good example was seen in research work on the Turin Shroud. Many other students' progress is limited by weaker literacy skills and poor presentation.

159. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 in the short course GCSE is satisfactory, particularly considering the low allocation of time. Standards currently are below the national average for the higher grades. Higher ability students display good note taking skills and work indicates a satisfactory understanding of Christian belief in relation to ideas such as sin, judgement,

forgiveness and eternal life. In the books of the middle sets, work is less detailed and weaker literacy and presentation skills negatively influence standards.

160. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are wide variations in the rate of learning, depending on the quality of teaching. In the good and very good lessons, teachers build up very good relationships and plan lessons well. In a significant number of lessons students' very positive attitudes to work contribute effectively to learning. In the unsatisfactory and even in some satisfactory lessons work is not planned well enough to meet the needs of all students. This applies particularly to the more able students when tasks are frequently too easy. This reduces interest and results in reduced learning taking place. While the pace in most lessons is appropriate, in some it is too slow. Pressure of time and the desire to cover the scheme of work often results in too much direction by the teacher to the detriment of the growth of independent learning skills.

161. Marking is very variable and frequently lacks constructive comment to assist learning. In the best lessons, tasks are well-organised and there is a good balance between input from the teacher and the development of students' thinking skills. A good example of this approach was seen in a lesson on the importance of prayer and the place of the Mosque in Islamic worship. Provision is good for lower ability students taking the record of achievement course. This was observed in a lesson on religious buildings in Year 11 where willing students and skilful teaching resulted in very good gains in knowledge taking place.

162. The school is not providing sufficient time across Years 7 to 9 to enable the locally agreed syllabus to be fully covered. This means that statutory requirements are not been met. In Years 10 and 11, the introduction of the short course enables legal requirements to be met. The time allocated however is rather low for a GCSE short course and standards are being adversely affected.

163. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. As a result of the unfortunate long-term illness of the head of department a number of developments have been delayed. The improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The short course has been introduced for a significant majority of students and the remainder takes the record of achievement course. Procedures for assessing students' work and the use of information about students' progress have improved considerably. While the use of computers has also developed, its use as a learning tool can be extended. Monitoring of teaching and learning has increased. There is however, scope for greater sharing of good teaching practice and extending teaching and learning styles. The scheme of work has been rewritten but still lacks detail on learning strategies. It also fails to include important cross-curricular links. Subject development planning is unsatisfactory.