

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST AIDAN'S ROMAN CATHOLIC VOLUNTARY AIDED
COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL**

Sunderland

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 108869

Headteacher: Mr A McCourt

Lead inspector: Mr I Thompson

Dates of inspection: 13th – 17th September 2004

Inspection number: 268918

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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Terms used in this report

Pupils in Year 9 are at Key Stage 3, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools after Year 6. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are at Key Stage 4 of their education. Those pupils who remain at the school after the compulsory period of education are in the sixth form, in Years 12 and 13. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum.

At the end of Year 9, pupils aged 14 take national tests in English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the pupils know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, pupils aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) or the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to these awards, including the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE), or to those of the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (A-level). Students may take examinations leading to the Advanced Subsidiary award (AS), equivalent to half the difficulty of the full A-level, which is gained by further study beyond AS standard. Some students may also take Advanced Extension Awards (AEA).

Inspectors judge the standards reached by pupils by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for pupils of the same age nationally. The pupils' achievements reflect whether they are doing well enough. These judgements take account of the educational value added over time. In this report, similar schools are defined as those with similar standards at the start of the stage of learning in question.

Efforts have been made to minimise the use of abbreviations, though some have been used. Throughout the report, ICT refers to information and communication technology. Comparisons to national averages are based on data for the academic year 2002/2003. PDE refers to personal development education.

Little reference is made to pupils for whom English is an additional language. Very few pupils are from backgrounds where English is not the first language of at least one parent. None are at the early stages of English language acquisition and all have good access to the curriculum.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 – 19
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll:	1165
School address:	Willow Bank Road
	Ashbrooke
	Sunderland
	Tyne and Wear
Postcode:	SR2 7HJ
Telephone number:	0191 5536073
Fax number:	0191 5536077
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr P Wood
Date of previous inspection:	19 th April 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School is a larger than average, 11-18 boys' comprehensive school on three sites. The school is a specialist language college that serves an urban area of Sunderland, drawing pupils from a wide catchment area, including some pockets of considerable social and economic deprivation. There are 1165 boys on roll, 223 of whom are in the sixth form. About one fifth of students join the sixth form from other schools. Lower than average proportions of pupils join or leave the school at other than the usual times. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The majority of pupils are white. Some 39 pupils are from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds – with no groups of significant size among them. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English. National tests show that pupils' standards when they join the school are broadly average. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs is well below average and the proportion with statements of special educational need, most of which refer to emotional and behavioural difficulties or moderate learning difficulties, is below average.

The school is involved in Excellence in Cities – a national initiative aimed at raising standards – and gained a School Achievement Award in 2003 in recognition of its progress.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
12271	I Thompson	Lead inspector	
9742	B Quest-Ritson	Lay inspector	
8341	W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics
19229	S Morton	Team inspector	English; English as an additional language
19913	R Garrett	Team inspector	Post 16 English
17799	A Stoddart	Team inspector	Science
32211	B Geoghegan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
15051	L Kauffman	Team inspector	Design and technology
32208	D Aitken	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
17868	E Metcalfe	Team inspector	Art and design
30427	F Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	History
20716	A Grogan	Team inspector	Citizenship
4697	R Black	Team inspector	Music
30800	B Colley	Team inspector	Physical education; special educational needs
30749	H Boyle	Team inspector	Geography
2141	J Oxley	Team inspector	Post 16 physical education
12408	A Frith	Team inspector	Post 16 French

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides a good standard of education. Good leadership provides clear educational direction and the school has many strengths, particularly in the rounded personal development of its pupils. Standards in GCSE examinations in 2003 were close to average and provisional results for 2004 show an improvement. Boys achieve well as they move through the school. The school discharges its language college responsibilities well and **provides good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Gospel values underpin all the work of the school and result in the overall supportive, diligent atmosphere in which good learning takes place. The school is inclusive in outlook so that boys of all levels of ability are able to achieve well.
- Very good relationships and excellent behaviour make a significant contribution to learning.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very strong features of boys' personal education.
- Links with the community, business and other schools and colleges are very good and contribute much to the school's curriculum provision.
- Provision for work-related learning is very good.
- The school's management structure is overstretched and does not fully meet its needs for monitoring, review and evaluation of planning for improvement.
- Accommodation for design and technology is very poor, adversely affecting standards and presenting health and safety concerns.
- Boys need better, clearer information on how they are doing and what they should do to improve their work.
- Whole-school policies for numeracy and citizenship are applied inconsistently across the curriculum.

Progress since the previous inspection has been **satisfactory**. Standards at the end of Year 9 are rising faster than the national trend and in line with it at the end of Year 11. The key issues have been addressed successfully except that weaknesses remain in accommodation for design and technology and there is work still to do on target setting.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	-	C	C	D
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	D	D	C	

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

The achievement of all boys, including those with special educational needs, is good.

Standards are broadly average at the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement in relation to pupils' standards when they joined the school. By the end of Year 11 standards are above average, representing good achievement in Years 10 and 11 in relation to boys' standards at the end of Year 9. GCSE examination results in 2003 were average compared to all schools nationally but below average in comparison with schools that had similar results at the end of Year 9. It should be noted that both comparisons include girls' results, which are generally higher than those of boys. No separate comparisons are available for boys' schools but results were above the average for boys nationally.

Pupils' personal development is very good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Pupils have good attitudes. Behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Attendance is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement. The school provides a good range of curricular opportunities. Provision for extra-curricular activities, additional enrichment and support for learning outside the school day are very good. Sporting opportunities are excellent. There are good arrangements for pupils' care and guidance. The school makes very good use of opportunities in the community and links with business to support learning and the development of the language college. Achievement is adversely affected because pupils are not consistently clear about the targets set for them or the steps they need to take to improve.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good and effective overall in promoting achievement. The headteacher provides clear educational direction for the school's improvement. The school runs efficiently from day to day. The management team is overstretched so that the implementation of strategic planning and monitoring, particularly in relation to assessment and the use of data, are not as effective as they could be in support of achievement. Governors provide good support for the work of the school and hold it appropriately to account. Financial management is good. Although the quality of middle management is generally good, the planning of teaching at departmental level is not always rigorous enough in ensuring departments' contributions to whole-school elements of the curriculum, such as numeracy. Target setting and the use of assessment in departments is developing but pupils do not consistently know what they need to do to raise their achievement.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are generally satisfied with the service that the school provides and appreciate its distinctive Catholic values. Inspectors agree with parents' views that the school's atmosphere and values support personal development very well. Parents have some concerns about the quality of information provided about progress. The inspection team believes that information about progress is satisfactory but does not always contain enough precise detail about what pupils need to do to improve. Pupils are happy in the school and rightly feel well cared for and supported.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Review the structure of the senior management team to enable more effective monitoring of achievement and target setting so that:
 - pupils know clearly how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve;
 - target setting, monitoring and review are consistent across the school;
 - the application of whole-school policies, particularly for numeracy and citizenship, is consistent across the curriculum.
- Provide good quality accommodation for teaching design and technology in order to improve standards in the subject.

Sixth form

- Improve opportunities to develop students' independent learning skills.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ST AIDAN'S ROMAN CATHOLIC VOLUNTARY AIDED COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

The sixth form is larger than most sixth forms, having 223 students following mainly A-level courses. The school became a specialist school for languages in September 2003.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. It is cost effective because students are achieving well, standards are average overall and its costs are balanced by its income. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Leadership provides clear direction and promotes the school's values well. As a result, students develop a strong sense of the community of the school and recognise their responsibility towards others.
- Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. They begin courses with a wide range of prior attainment and achieve well although many are slow to develop the independent learning skills necessary to gain the higher grades.
- Students appreciate the support they receive, the quality of teaching and the opportunities and facilities available.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to develop independent learning skills.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	English literature – Good. Standards are above average, teaching is good and students learn and achieve well. The department successfully fosters students' interest in English studies. French – Good. Teachers have high expectations, students achieve well and there is evidence that standards are improving.
Mathematics	Good. Though standards are below average, students achieve well because they have very good attitudes to learning and teachers convey their very good subject knowledge effectively.
Science	Physics – Very good. Teaching and learning are very good and teachers show expert subject knowledge. Monitoring of students' work and communication with parents are good. Results over the last few years have been variable, but standards now are well above average.
Information and communication technology	ICT – Good. Standards are above average. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
Humanities	History – Satisfactory. Students' knowledge and understanding are good, but they rely too heavily on their teachers and so their analysis of information and their independent thinking are limited.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Design and technology (Product Design) – Satisfactory. Signs of improvement are apparent as standards approach average. Good teaching and links with industrial designers support students' learning. Design studio accommodation is unsatisfactory.
Visual and performing arts and media	Art – Very good. Committed, enthusiastic teaching conveys a sense of excitement in the subject and enables students to reach well above average standards and to achieve very well. Much is done to enrich students' experience. Music/Music Technology – Good. Standards are above average. Students achieve well as a result of very good relationships and good teaching,

especially in practical work. Practice rooms let down otherwise good facilities.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel

Sports studies – Satisfactory. Though the course is attracting more students, progress is hampered by lack of time for planning and assessment and by limited resources. Standards are below average.

The curriculum areas are broadly common across all post-16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the school. Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Very good. Careful monitoring, checking and tracking of progress take place. Much emphasis is placed on ensuring that all students find a secure environment in which they can develop into well-rounded individuals with a responsible, caring outlook.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Good. Clear direction for the sixth form has brought about useful curriculum development including successful partnership arrangements. Efficient management ensures that students are monitored closely and cared for as individuals.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Good, especially in relation to teaching quality and support. The high proportion of negative comments from a very small sample of students in the sixth form questionnaire did not reflect the views of most students as represented to inspectors. Inspectors endorse the positive views expressed directly to them in classroom and other interviews.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

In work seen during the inspection, standards are average in Year 9. In Year 11, they are above average overall. Achievement is good in relation to boys' standards when they join the school and when they begin their courses in Year 10. Standards in the sixth form are broadly average and achievement is good in relation to students' standards at the start of their courses.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils of all levels of attainment achieve well. Achievement in art and design is particularly good, also in music in Years 10 and 11. Standards in both subjects are well above average by the end of Year 11.
- Standards in the sixth form are well above average in art and design and physics.
- Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 are rising at a faster rate than nationally, despite a slight fall in English and mathematics results in 2003.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs, gifted and talented pupils and those with English as an additional language enables them to make similarly good progress to other pupils.
- Achievement is hindered in design and technology by very poor accommodation and a lower than average time allocation in Years 7 to 9. Achievement in mathematics in Years 7 to 9 is also hampered by a lower than average time allocation.

Commentary

1. Boys enter the school with broadly average standards but with a wide range of prior learning because they come from so many primary schools. It is to the school's credit that they swiftly become productive members of a single school and make good overall progress. Boys' good achievement throughout the school is due to a combination of factors that contribute to the positive ethos of the school. Leadership has created a common sense of purpose based on established values that are shared by staff and pupils. Management has ensured that teaching is good and that the school has the support of parents.
2. In national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, standards in the core subjects of English and mathematics were average and very high in science compared with all schools nationally – which includes results for girls that have been consistently higher than those of boys. Taking the three years to 2003 together, performance in all three subjects was above average. While results have fluctuated over recent years, the most marked improvement has been in science results because of skilful teaching supported by careful attention paid to assessment and target setting. Overall, analysis of work and observation of lessons shows achievement to be good in Years 7 to 9.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.6 (34.6)	33.4(33.3)
mathematics	35.8(37.0)	35.4(34.7)
science	35.6(35.1)	33.6(33.3)

There were 181 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. GCSE results in 2003 were close to the national average. They were above the average for boys. In comparison with schools whose pupils had a similar score in national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9, results were below average. The comparison does not do full justice to an all boys school because the scores for comparison include results for girls. Work seen during the inspection shows good overall achievement and improving standards, matching the improvement in provisional results for 2004.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	50(51)	52(50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91(90)	91(91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97(95)	96(96)
Average point score per pupils (best eight subjects)	35.6(35.7)	34.7(34.8)

There were 192 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. In work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9, standards are average in most subjects. They are above average in English, science, art and design, geography and music. Standards are below average in design and technology. Overall, achievement is good in Years 7 to 9. In an otherwise positive picture, achievement is affected in mathematics by a lower than usual time allocation for teaching. Achievement in design and technology is similarly affected and also by the very poor quality of accommodation. Very good achievement in art and design is the result of imaginative teaching and a carefully designed programme of study. In music pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 in response to enthusiastic teaching. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are well above average in art and design and music. They are above average in mathematics, science, geography, ICT and modern foreign languages. In all other subjects they are average except in design and technology where standards are below average, partly because of inadequate accommodation and partly because of boys' below average standards when they start the course. Overall, achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 – very good in art and design and in music – reflecting the generally good quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils.
5. Provision for special educational needs is good. Boys with special educational needs achieve well and do as well as other boys because of the school's good support systems and the good support that they receive from teachers in lessons.
6. Gifted and talented boys achieve well in most subjects and provision is satisfactory. The targeting of more able boys is very good in art and design and good in science. Standards are raised through clubs in ICT. In these subjects, high expectations and good opportunities are helping to raise standards and achievement. Recording the progress of gifted and talented boys has been established to monitor performance against examination results and to assist target setting but too recently to have had full impact.
7. Provision for boys for whom English is an additional language is good. At the time of the inspection there were no pupils who were at a very early stage of learning English. However, all pupils who have English as an additional language are identified. Within the classroom, the teachers take care to check that they understand the work set. There is an effective programme in place to assess the needs of boys when they join the school and care is taken to ensure that they are also given support to cope with the day-to-day social demands so that they can settle and make friends. A learning support assistant works with the pupils on an individual basis and she ensures that they are helped to understand the language used in the different subjects. This is very effective and boosts the pupils' confidence so that they are able to make the most of the learning opportunities across the curriculum. Because of this pupils with English as an additional language are given the same opportunities to succeed as all

other pupils and their achievement is good. Their progress is carefully monitored to ensure that they benefit fully from the curriculum.

Sixth form

8. Results in A-level and equivalent examinations in 2003 based on average points score were below average overall, but about average for male students. In most subjects, all students entered obtained at least a pass grade. Particularly successful subjects in 2003 with above average results were art and design, biology and religious studies. Subjects with well below average results were English and mathematics. Provisional results for 2004 indicate below average standards overall once again, but there were distinct improvements in English literature, mathematics and ICT, particularly at the highest grades. Over recent years, art and design has consistently obtained above or well above average results for its students, and ICT results show a rising trend.

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	79.1 (90.8)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	16.0 (25.4)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	248.9 (213.8)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 76 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

9. For present students, standards are average overall. This is an improvement on previous years and reflects improved teaching that is better planned to meet the needs of students of widely differing previous experience. Students often enter the sixth form with little experience of a subject or from other schools. If they show keen interest they are taken onto courses willingly, and most achieve well as a result of good teaching. Students receive good advice about their choice of courses and very good support so that few do not complete their studies. In subjects inspected in detail in this inspection, standards are well above average in art and design and physics and above average in English literature, French, ICT and music. They are below average in sports studies and mathematics.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)

Attendance is very good overall. Punctuality is good. Attitudes are good, while behaviour is excellent. Personal development is very good; the spiritual, moral and cultural aspects of pupils' personal development are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships with teachers are very good and a highly significant aid to learning.
- Excellent standards of behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, contribute to learning and to the supportive, diligent atmosphere of the school.
- Attendance levels are very high.
- Personal development is very good.
- Some boys are reluctant to develop and use the skills that would enable them to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

Commentary

10. The attendance rate is impressively high. During the past academic year, the level was just below 94 per cent. The amount of unauthorised absence is also lower than the national figure. These levels have been maintained over several years. They have a favourable impact on how well boys do at the school. Punctuality is also good. Few boys are late arriving at the start of the day or in coming to lessons.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.3	School data	0.4
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

11. The boys have good attitudes to the school. They like coming and enjoy much of the work that they do there. Boys relish the extensive opportunities offered them to take part in sporting activities. They do so enthusiastically, often with considerable success. Boys interviewed appreciate the way the school works together as a community and the very good relationships that they have with members of staff. The quality of these relationships is an important aid to learning. Boys like the friendly 'feel' of the school and share the Catholic values it promotes. Yet while boys work diligently in lessons, a number show a preference for being given information instead of finding it out for themselves. Some are reluctant to develop those skills that would enable them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. This can be a limiting factor – doing well rather than very well – and is the reason why attitudes are considered good and not very good across the school.
12. Behaviour is outstanding. This is so in lessons and as boys move around the school. Boys work purposefully and calmly during their classes. Their behaviour aids rather than impedes the learning of others. They move around the school sensibly when lessons change. At break and lunch time there is an air of civilised and considerate activity. Boys interviewed acknowledged that there are instances of bullying but are confident that cases would be reported and dealt with. Levels of exclusion, both fixed term and permanent, are lower than average for a school of this size. These exceptionally high standards of behaviour seem, to an observer, to be achieved with minimal supervision. Good behaviour is expected. Both the boys and members of staff take pride in keeping high standards. Such excellent behaviour makes a significant contribution to learning.
13. The co-ordination of a coherent programme of personal and social education across the school was a key issue from the previous inspection. The setting up a personal development department with a small team of teachers, who teach citizenship, careers and health education, has solved it. Effective leadership and management by the co-ordinator through well planned schemes of work are ensuring consistency of practice. Very good provision is made for careers education and guidance, in collaboration with the Connexions service. Sex and relationships education is handled sensitively in a course involving health professionals and trained sixth form students.
14. The school's provision for boys' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. As a result, boys grow in respect for themselves and others and in acceptance of their duty of service to the wider community. Religious spirituality is a strong feature of the life of the school, promoted extremely well in collective worship and the liturgical calendar of masses and retreats. Teachers are good role models, leading morning prayers in their tutor groups and raising spiritual and moral issues naturally in lessons. Opportunities for charitable giving are a feature of the school and boys are generous in their efforts at raising money for local, national and international charities. There is also support across the school for the Amnesty group's campaign on behalf of a Vietnamese priest.
15. The personal development education (PDE) programmes and the pastoral period are making significant contributions to boys' social development. In all subjects, emphasis is placed on rewarding positive behaviour through the merit system for younger pupils and the Excel programme for Years 10 and 11. Elected year councils and a school council give boys a forum

for making their views known on school issues. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities enriches boys' cultural development. The school's status as a language college has presented more opportunities for broadening boys' cultural outlook. A multicultural dimension to the curriculum is present in many subjects, notably in English, geography and music. The school encourages pupils to take a global perspective on life through the links it has established with schools in Africa.

16. Behaviour has improved since the previous inspection. The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen considerably

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1110	32	1
White – Irish	7	0	0
White – any other White background	9	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	4	3	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	5	0	0
Black or Black British – African	6	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	7	0	0

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

Sixth form

Attendance and punctuality are good. Attitudes are good, while behaviour is excellent, as in the main school. Personal development is also very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sixth form students are mature and responsible.
- The sixth form is a harmonious community in which individuals are valued.
- Some students can be slow to develop independent learning skills.

Commentary

17. Sixth form students have good attendance and punctuality. They enjoy being there and this is reflected in their good attitudes. The sixth form functions as a harmonious community and its members feel that they are valued as individuals. This helps them to grow in maturity and responsibility. The work done by the sixth form council helps to ensure that students are a visible and beneficial presence in the main school. Yet here too, as in the main part of the school, students can be slow to acquire the skills of independent learning.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education. Pupils achieve well because of good teaching in a very good atmosphere for learning. The curriculum provides well for students' needs. Care and support are very good. The partnership with parents is good. Links with the community, business and other institutions are very good, contributing much to the curriculum and learning.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good. Although the use of assessment to support learning is satisfactory overall, data are not used consistently to set targets and pupils do not always know what they need to do to improve.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and use it to plan lessons that engage and challenge.
- Relationships are very good and pupils bring good attitudes to their work, supporting very good classroom management and the effective use of lesson time.
- Teachers provide good support for pupils to ensure that they learn well.
- Assessment data is not used as well as it could be to support learning.
- Opportunities are missed to contribute to the school's wider aims, particularly the development of numeracy, and to develop pupils' independent learning skills.

Commentary

18. Teaching and learning are good overall in all years. Teaching is very good in art and design throughout the school. It is very good in music for Years 10 and 11 and in sixth form physics. In other subjects, teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 in English, science, geography, ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education. In Years 10 and 11 it is good in English, mathematics, science, geography, ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education. In the focus subjects of the sixth form inspection, teaching is good in English, geography, French and music. It is satisfactory in all other subjects across the school.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 140 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
3 (2%)	30 (21%)	66 (47%)	41 (29%)	0	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

19. Teachers use good command of their subjects to plan lessons well to meet pupils' needs. They build on their own enthusiasm and very good relationships to challenge and engage the boys in learning. The implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy has had a positive impact on teaching and learning. Planning focuses well on clearly shared objectives for lessons that help give them a consistent structure and enable boys to know what they are expected to

learn. Boys bring good attitudes to their work and teachers manage their classrooms very well so that time is used effectively and the whole atmosphere of the school is purposeful. Consequently, learning is good overall throughout the school.

20. A relative weakness in planning is that opportunities to contribute to whole school aims, such as the development of numeracy and citizenship, are sometimes missed. In the case of citizenship, it is clear from the school's success in boys' personal development that a great deal of social learning takes place in lessons across the school, although not formally identified. There is much greater inconsistency in the cross-curricular development of numeracy, which is particularly important in this school where a lower than usual allocation of time to mathematics is having an adverse effect on achievement in Years 7 to 9.
21. A strong feature of teaching is the way in which teachers provide good individual support for boys of all levels of attainment to ensure that they learn well. Occasionally the clear wish to support their pupils leads teachers to talk for too long, providing too much explanation and information rather than challenging boys to think for themselves. As a result, the pace of lessons slows, pupils miss opportunities to develop their independence and teachers work harder than their pupils. Nevertheless, no unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection but it is in this area that there is potential for improvement in standards – by challenging pupils in the broad middle range of attainment to develop the independence they need to reach higher levels. Such improvement would also require a sharper focus on individual performance through the use of assessment data.
22. Overall, the use teachers make of assessment to support learning is satisfactory. The school collects and collates a large amount of relevant data about pupils' attainment on entry to the school. Year 6 national test results and other data are used to place pupils into groups early in Year 7 and targets are set for pupils. These are reviewed as pupils move through Years 7 to 9. The data is made available for teachers but teachers are not yet using the data as effectively as they might to plan for individual pupils' needs or to set specific targets in subjects for pupils. At present, pupils are not involved sufficiently in the target-setting process to ensure that they know their targets and what they need to do to reach higher levels. The good practice in some subjects, for example science and art and design, is not shared sufficiently across the school.

Sixth form

Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. All teaching observed was at least satisfactory and a high proportion was good or better. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is more consistent. Teaching is very good in art and physics.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some very good teaching generates significant enthusiasm and inspires students to achieve very well.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge, effective planning and good use of assessment help students learn and achieve well.
- Good relationships between teachers and students promote good, and often very good, attitudes, confidence and motivation.
- Learning in some subjects is hampered by students' over-reliance on the teacher and a lack of necessary background or skills.

Commentary

23. A strong feature of the good teaching is teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They use these effectively to guide students' learning. In the best lessons this guidance is enthusiastic, exciting and challenging, so that students are inspired and enriched

by the experience. Teachers combine their good subject knowledge with well-planned lessons and a variety of activities that effectively meet the needs of their students and usually encourage independent learning. These attributes of good teaching are reinforced by good relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves. As a result, most students have very good attitudes to their work and achieve well. Students are particularly keenly motivated in mathematics, physics and art. Teachers assess students well and provide much effective support for learning by the imaginative use of resources, including ICT, and by creating opportunities for enriching their experience outside school. At times teachers do too much for students so that they become over-dependent on teachers for their learning. On these occasions, teaching is not so effective. Learning is sometimes slowed because students do not have a well enough developed background in the subjects they are studying. This is partly the result of the school's deliberately open policy that allows students onto sixth form courses in subjects in which they show keen interest but may not have the more usual levels of previous experience.

24. Overall, teachers use assessment well to support learning. The performance of students in GCSE examinations in Year 11 is used well to set targets for GCE A-level examinations. Teachers use the information well to support students' achievement and to plan for the needs of individuals and groups of students. Progress of students is checked regularly and targets reviewed; students are well informed about what they need to do to improve. Teachers assess students' work thoroughly with examination criteria used effectively to ensure that students know how well they are doing in relation to their targets.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good overall. Innovative curricular leadership at senior management level has resulted in a good range of courses. Provision of resources is good. Although the main buildings provide good accommodation that has a positive effect on standards, the overall quality of accommodation is unsatisfactory because of serious deficiencies in design and technology and music that adversely affect achievement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for personal development is very good.
- Very good provision for work-related learning adds to the breadth of curricular provision, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
- Pupils and Students are very well prepared for the next stages in their education or employment.
- Very good support is provided for learning outside the school day and contributes much to the ethos of the school.
- Very good opportunities for enrichment support learning throughout the school. Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good and makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. Sporting opportunities are excellent.
- Very good curricular provision is made for modern foreign languages. The school's language college status has led to an improvement in resources and improved curricular links with other schools.
- Contributions to citizenship and numeracy by subjects across the curriculum are not co-ordinated well enough.
- Lower than usual time allocations in Years 7 to 9 for mathematics and design and technology hamper achievement.
- Accommodation for design and technology is very poor and affects standards.

Commentary

25. The school's curricular provision is good; it has breadth and balance overall and all statutory requirements are met. The principal binding strength of the curriculum lies in pupils' very good

personal development that parents rightly appreciate. The effectiveness of the school's provision is evident in the calm, purposeful atmosphere in the school, mutual respect between pupils and teachers and excellent behaviour, all of which contribute positively to learning. Despite the school's evident success in promoting boys' social and moral development, opportunities to contribute to the citizenship aspect of the curriculum are not consistently identified by departments. Citizenship is mainly taught within PDE and valuable work is going on in other subjects across the school but it is not co-ordinated well enough. Opportunities to contribute to pupils' development of their numeracy skills are also missed because few departments identify them in their curricular planning. Most subjects have an adequate time allocation to teach the curriculum. The exceptions are design and technology and mathematics in Years 7 to 9 where lower than usual allocations of time have an adverse effect on achievement.

26. The school regularly reviews its curriculum and works to improve provision. A good example is the attention given to providing work-related learning opportunities across the curriculum. Part of this provision includes the alternative curriculum for boys in Years 10 and 11 for whom the full curriculum is not suitable. The curriculum is adjusted to meet their needs and there are alternative courses in Years 10 and 11 so that boys can work to their capabilities. Very good links with a local college enable the school to provide construction trades courses for these and other boys who wish to follow them. The school's language college status has led to a strengthening of the curriculum offered in modern foreign languages, particularly in the range of courses offered. As part of its wider responsibilities as a language college, the school is developing curricular links with partner primary schools, particularly in modern foreign languages, with the aim of raising standards in the long term.
27. Support for learning outside the school day is a strong feature of the school's very good extra-curricular provision. Many boys are in the school well before the start of the timetabled day when the breakfast club provides help with literacy. Homework clubs also support learning at the end of the school day as do clubs run by a number of subject departments. Overall, the school's wide range of extra-curricular activities is very good – sporting opportunities are excellent – and does much to enhance learning and the spirit of the school.
28. Opportunities for gifted and talented boys are offered through curricular enhancement, for example following accelerated courses and taking examinations earlier than others, but these examples are limited in number. Some subjects have tried to raise the interests and aspirations of more able boys so that they extend their learning through clubs and after-school activities. For example, talented games players are put forward for club, county and national representation. Some boys have benefited from specialist courses and summer schools to develop their expertise. A gifted and talented policy is in place and boys have been formally identified in subjects. Opportunities for these boys have developed satisfactorily.
29. There is a very good match of teachers to the curriculum both in the main school and the sixth form. The clear expectations of management and good quality professional development do much to enhance the skills and abilities of staff. Teachers are excellent role models for their pupils and lead by example. The school has worked hard to recruit and retain well-qualified teaching and support staff. It has also introduced innovative approaches to the recruitment of supply staff. Well-focused support enables teaching to continue with the minimum of disruption. The match of non-teaching staff to the school's needs is very good and they contribute well to the smooth running of the school and pupils' achievement. Staff working with pupils who have special educational needs and those who require motivation are effective and support the individual needs of pupils well. Induction arrangements for newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school are well established and of a very high standard. Teachers new to the school are encouraged to explore and develop new ideas and skills and they receive very good support and care. The school is a member of the North East Mentoring Partnership and has a high level of involvement in initial teacher training initiatives.

30. Overall accommodation is unsatisfactory because the accommodation for teaching design and technology is very poor. Inefficient dust extraction has an impact on health and safety and fixed furniture in working areas prevents flexibility of use. The furniture is unsuitable for its intended use and the design of the rooms is out of date, with inadequate alterations. Within the music department the space for instrumental teaching is very poor and is not large enough for group activities. Caretaking and cleaning staff prepare the school buildings to a high standard and boys respect the accommodation, which shows no signs of damage. In most departments the bright, airy rooms with colourful displays are a pleasant environment in which to learn and have a positive effect on standards.
31. The school's provision of resources for learning is good. The library is greatly improved and is now part of a new building and well stocked. The number of computers available is well above the number normally seen in a school of this size. Good resources support teaching and learning in English, with texts carefully chosen for boys, science, ICT, geography, and music. Resources for learning in modern foreign languages have seen significant recent improvement as a result of the school's specialist language college status.

Sixth form

Curriculum provision is good, and students have good opportunities and facilities available to support their learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The sixth form curriculum provides a good range of academic and vocational courses for students at different levels of attainment.
- Other provision broadens students' sixth form opportunities well.

Commentary

32. The curriculum allows equality of access and opportunity for all students very well. In line with the philosophy of St Aidan's, students who show a keen interest in sixth form education are welcomed and every effort is made to ensure that they benefit from the opportunities available. Careful consideration is given to the course of study adopted by any students with special needs and extra time is given in examinations and other allowance made as necessary. All students also follow a course in general studies so that their horizons are broadened and they can encounter a wider range of subjects and issues. The key skills of communication, application of number and ICT are provided through subjects, and are available separately at level 3 if required. A level 2 key skills qualification is built in to AVCE courses. This form of organisation provides well for students' diverse needs.
33. There are good opportunities for students to make overseas or other visits, such as to theatres and galleries, to support learning in English, French and art and design, and to experience modern design practice in design and technology.
34. Accommodation and resources are good. Students have their own annex a short distance from the main school where classroom teaching takes place. Common room and study provision are good. Students have ready access to ICT facilities and library resources, though the latter are under-used at present. Teaching staff are well matched to the needs of the subject curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Standards of care are high. Boys are given good advice, support and guidance overall. Arrangements to involve them in the work of the school are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of care and welfare are high.
- Personal support is very good.
- Despite being an issue in the previous inspection, the monitoring of achievement based on target setting is still not firmly established or practised consistently.

Commentary

35. Standards of care are high and reflect the Catholic values which permeate the life of the school community. Welfare arrangements are very good because the pastoral teams know their boys very well and can provide sensitive support for them. Health and health education have a high priority. The very good child protection procedures include displaying rules for Internet access prominently in planners as well as guidance for all members of staff. Safety procedures are generally good.
36. Boys receive very good personal support and guidance. This is largely because of the very good relationships that exist between the boys and their teachers. The commitment of the pastoral teams and the continuity that they provide are also important factors in the quality of the personal support. Learning mentors (funded by the Excellence in Cities initiative) too play an important role here. Induction procedures are particularly good and enable boys to settle easily into secondary education. They include extra help for those who might find the transition difficult. However, educational support and guidance are weaker, and this means that the quality of advice, support and guidance is considered, on balance, as no more than good. This is largely because only during the past year – although this issue was noted in the previous inspection report – have the necessary systems to provide academic monitoring and target setting begun to be put in place. As the school is aware, these procedures now need to be used to guide boys on an individual basis. At present, boys have targets; some know them, yet few are clear about what they must do to reach them.
37. Arrangements to involve boys in the work of the school are good. This is done largely through the work of the school council and the pastoral teams. Boys are now starting to learn to evaluate their own work, though not all subject departments do this consistently.
38. Standards of care have improved in the main school since the previous report. Health and safety issues raised then have been resolved. Personal support continues to be good. Target setting was a key issue then and is still not fully in use now.

Sixth form

Standards of care are very good. Students receive very good support and guidance during their time in the sixth form. Arrangements to involve students are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sixth form advice and guidance are very good.
- Arrangements to involve students in the work of the school are very effective.

Commentary

39. Students interviewed had considerable praise for the advice and guidance they receive. They consider that they are briefed effectively before entering the sixth form. Arrangements for them to change courses, if they feel they have made a wrong decision, are flexible and supportive. Induction procedures were changed this year and current students commented that they found them very helpful as preparation for new methods of study. There is very effective advice and

guidance for students during their time in the sixth form, which gives them confidence to persevere with their studies. The very high rate of retention is evidence of this.

40. Student involvement is also very good. The sixth form council is a large group with a defined structure. Its responsibilities include many practical aspects of running the sixth form, not just charitable work and social activities. The council also organises and provides the prefect system for the main school. They work hard, to help not just their fellow students, but also the whole school.
41. The very high standard of advice and guidance noted in the previous inspection report has been maintained.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents are good overall. Links with the local community are very good. Links with other schools and colleges, including higher and further education institutions, are a further strength. The school makes effective use of its specialist status to strengthen its partnerships.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with the community, business and other schools and colleges are very good and contribute much to the school.
- The school makes very effective use of its specialist status as a language college in the programme with primary schools.
- The school makes an extensive contribution to initial teacher training.
- Reports do not always contain enough detail about what boys need to do to improve.

Commentary

42. The school has a good partnership with parents, who are generally pleased with what it provides for their children. This is because contact between members of staff and parents is founded on good relations and a shared sense of purpose. Parents are interested in the work of the school. They appreciate its distinctive Catholic values and are keen to help their sons do well there. Attendance at consultation evenings is very high. The school gives parents a good range of information about itself. The tri-lingual planners are an effective means of keeping in touch. Some parents have concerns about the quality of the information that they receive about progress. There is some justification for their concerns because annual reports do not always contain precise details about what boys need to do in order to improve.
43. The school reaches out very effectively to the community that surrounds it. Links here range widely and are very strong. They contribute much to the school. As might be expected, links to the parishes that send boys to the school are close. The very effective programme of work-related learning has developed productive links with local businesses and colleges.
44. Links with other schools and colleges are a further strength – and very good. St Aidan's makes an extensive and well-organised contribution to initial teacher training through contacts with the four universities in the North East. A regular flow of trainees helps contribute fresh ideas to the school and provides a good source for recruitment. The links with primary schools have gained added momentum since the school acquired specialist language college status. Year 5 and Year 6 children visit St Aidan's for science, modern foreign languages and ICT lessons. There is an innovative programme whereby teachers linked to St Aidan's visit the ten main partner primary schools to give lessons in modern foreign languages. The programme currently covers children in Years 5 and 6 but will be extended to include children from Year 3 upwards. It is proving very popular with children and their teachers.

45. Links with parents continue to be good. Links with the community have improved greatly since the previous inspection.

Sixth form

Links with parents are good, while links with the community and other colleges are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Close links with higher and further education institutions provide very good opportunities for further studies.

Commentary

46. The links that the school has established with the local community benefit students. Links with higher and further education institutions are also highly effective. Both provide opportunities for enriching students' work during their time in the sixth form, as well as making them aware of possibilities for further study.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good.

The headteacher provides good leadership. Management is good. The governance of the school is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's good leadership provides clear educational direction based on the school's Gospel values. Senior managers work well together to put vision into practice.
- Governors support and challenge the school well.
- Management of provision for boys with special educational needs is good.
- Financial management is good.
- The management team is overstretched with the result that oversight of some aspects of the school's work, for example the use of assessment data, is not as sharply focused as it should be.

Commentary

47. The governance of the school is good. Governors take an active part in shaping the direction of the school, including involvement with the school improvement plan, taking forward the partnership arrangements with other schools and promoting the school's specialist status for languages. They participate in all the significant processes of the school including target setting and financial management. The finance committee has been particularly effective in bringing the school's budget into balance through a difficult period of restraint. The chair of governors has much professional expertise to draw on both personally and from his team, and all work collaboratively with the school to move it forward. Governors understand the strengths of the school well, in particular its strong reinforcement of Gospel values and its concern for pupils' personal and social development. They want to build on these strengths to improve the school's performance. They are used to asking questions of the school and challenging its intentions: "Governors wouldn't bother to turn up if they thought the governing body was just rubber-stamping the school's decisions." Although governors receive reports about the school's work, it is not clear that they monitor departments routinely and with a sharp enough focus on improvement. Nevertheless, this is a governing body that fulfils all its statutory duties and supports the school well.

48. The leadership of the headteacher and other key staff is good. The headteacher's good, confident leadership and clear sense of direction are particularly apparent in relation to improving the quality of appointments, expanding the senior team, creating more realistic targets and developing the school's contacts more widely. He has not shrunk from difficult decisions and acted firmly to raise standards where necessary in areas of the curriculum and teaching. Relationships between headteacher, senior managers and staff are very supportive. The small team of senior managers shares the headteacher's vision for the school and puts the school's philosophy into practice with commitment. An open leadership style provides opportunities for others to be involved in the decision-making process, and this creates a unity of purpose based on shared values. This strong feature of the school's work reflects well on the leadership team. The team is currently overstretched having been reduced because of financial necessity, although there are plans to make an additional appointment. The team is energetic in managing multiple roles but monitoring of some aspects of the school's work is not as effective as it should be. This is particularly evident in the use of assessment to support planning and secure improvement across the school, so that a useful tool is not consistently used to best advantage.
49. Management is good. Effective day-to-day management, supported by a strong administrative team, ensures that the school operates efficiently. The school's work is regularly reviewed and performance management is appropriately focused on professional development. The school provides a welcoming and supportive environment for new staff, and also makes a significant contribution to initial teacher training, with as many as four trainee teachers working in the school at any one time.
50. Good management systems are in place to co-ordinate the work of any boys who have special educational needs. Strategies for effective teaching and learning are discussed regularly with well-trained support assistants. All teachers have had training in the New Code of Practice but its full impact in classroom and on practice in subjects, especially in relation to target setting, is not fully established. There is a detailed school policy on developing the talents of gifted and talented boys. With this guidance in place the school is preparing good plans for more structured opportunities to assist the achievement of these boys.
51. Financial management has been particularly effective in maintaining staffing quality and improving accommodation while at the same time tackling a historical deficit and bringing the budget into balance. The culture of seeking best value extends to all aspects of the school's work. The small size of the management team is itself an example of 'best value', but also limits its effectiveness, as the school is well aware. As a result, monitoring of cross-curricular aspects of the school's work (for example, numeracy, citizenship, and assessment) lacks a sharp focus on the contribution these aspects should make to raising standards. Similarly, because the senior team is so thinly spread, monitoring of the quality of management in some departments is not as rigorous now as should be possible when the intended appointments of a new deputy and assistant headteacher are made.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4023510
Total expenditure	3935990
Expenditure per pupil	3378

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	-86866
Balance carried forward to the next year	654

Sixth form

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Governors are supportive and involved. Financial management is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership's commitment to responding to the needs of individuals results in a community of students that cares for others and achieves well.

Commentary

52. As in the main school, governors know about and support the work of the sixth form well. The head of sixth form and her team have a unity of purpose that they convey effectively to the students, resulting in a community that reflects the school's values well and in which students can achieve successfully. Management is good. Effective day-to-day management ensures that the sixth form operates efficiently. Students and their work are regularly reviewed and benefit from the care with which this is done. Finances are also managed well so that the needs of the sixth form can be met.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning (WRL)

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A strong team of teachers and external agencies ensure the programmes are very well organised and evaluated.
- The programme is comprehensive and meets the needs of all pupils.
- Pupils and students speak highly of the experiences they have in placements and conferences.
- A focus on staff training is part of the development plan in WRL.

Commentary

53. Work-related learning was sampled across the curriculum. Provision for WRL is a developing strength of the school and is very effective in linking pupils' experience to life after school. St Aidan's has been involved in a monitored programme for over three years. During this time the programme has developed from basic work experience to an innovative and dynamic programme that considers the needs of all pupils.
54. Early in the personal development education (PDE) programme, boys explore a good range of material introducing them to the world of work. Departments throughout the school contribute to and support the WRL aspect of the curriculum. For example, the ICT department provides vocational ICT courses and in art and design pupils are made aware of the vocational possibilities in art. Successful collaboration with Connexions in Year 10 prepares boys for their basic work experience. Very good links with the wider community have made the world of work more interesting as the range of opportunities has expanded. The needs of boys who struggle with the formal curriculum have been provided for through the very effective programme of building craft skills at the local college. The programme has made a strong impression on pupils, raising their self-esteem and confidence. GNVQ courses have been less successful in attracting pupils' interest because new programmes lack careful explanation to engage the full confidence of parents and pupils.
55. Management is very good. A well-organised team, including a member of the senior management team, works well together to ensure the programme is monitored and evaluated and that action is taken where problems arise. Whole staff training, already identified in the development plan, is needed to ensure that no opportunities are missed to prepare boys for the next stage in their lives.

56. WRL is well established in the sixth form. All students have a successful work placement in Year 12. The placements have been modified and some more able students shadow a manager in industry, as seen in design and technology. There have also been opportunities for the sixth form to link internationally with Spain and New York, on study tours involving careers, that highlight the school's specialist language college status.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge which they use to provide tasks that interest and challenge the boys.
- Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour; teachers and boys work together respectfully. As a result, the boys are motivated to work hard and they make good progress.
- The planning of lessons takes careful account of the learning needs of all.
- Boys are not clear enough about what they need to do in order to improve.

Commentary

57. Results in the 2003 national tests for pupils in Year 9 were average in relation to all schools but they were above average for boys, with the higher attaining pupils doing particularly well at level 6 and above. GCSE results were below average compared to all schools but only slightly below average for boys. Provisional results for 2004 show an improvement and are in line with the national average for boys. For English literature, the results were below average for boys in 2003 but provisionally were above average for boys in 2004.
58. Overall, achievement is good. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are above average for boys, representing good achievement in relation to their standards when they entered the school. In Years 7 to 9, teachers plan work that takes full account of the Key Stage 3 Strategy's Framework for teaching English. As a result, boys benefit from a good range of opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and tackle interesting work that is carefully structured to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and suitably challenging for higher attainers. Standards by Year 11 are broadly average representing good achievement in relation to boys' standards at the end of Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, pupils respond imaginatively to poetry from other cultures but sometimes struggle with vocabulary and meaning – matters that are now being dealt with more successfully in Years 7 to 9.
59. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall across Years 7 to 11. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and they are committed to their work. Lessons are carefully planned, and the work is broken down into manageable steps and this builds up the boys' confidence so that they can complete the work successfully. This results in good achievement. Boys are enthusiastic about the subject and time is used well. At its best, the written work is lively and imaginative and all boys are given ample opportunities to improve their spelling, grammar and punctuation. There is little evidence of interest in wider reading and limited opportunities to use the library, despite the fact that the library has a very good range of books and videos to appeal to boys. Occasionally, in Years 10 and 11, the tasks set are rather vague and so the boys are unclear about what to do. As a result, they tend to give up and lose concentration. Much of the work is marked with helpful comments but the majority of boys do not know precisely what they can do to improve their work. In addition, some of the grades they are given for coursework are too high, as are their target grades. This is particularly the case for boys who are of below average attainment. This means that they have unrealistic expectations and they may not ultimately value the grades that they achieve.

60. Leadership and management are good. The teachers are well matched to the courses and there is a clear identification of areas of responsibility. Teachers work together collaboratively showing the mutual respect that reflects the values of the whole school. There is a commitment to improvement and a good framework in place for the evaluation of performance of both staff and pupils.
61. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The improving standards in Years 10 and 11 have led to improved achievement and the restocking of the library means that there is a valuable resource for the boys to use.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

62. The contribution of subjects across the curriculum to the development of pupils' language and literacy is satisfactory. Pupils on entering the school have writing skills that are below average but teachers focus attention on improving their skills in spelling, grammar and punctuation. In design and technology, pupils use the library well to research information to use in their projects. However, in other subjects the library is under-used for this purpose. Because there is not a planned programme to teach research and retrieval skills, pupils are dependent on whether or not their teachers choose to make use of the library and there is inconsistency in the pupils' opportunities to learn in this area. The same applies to reading for pleasure. Borrowing rates for books are low and this limits the development of reading skills. Some teachers, such as in art and design, do read out loud to the pupils in a lively and dramatic way and this is also a feature in English lessons. This attention to reading serves as a good model for the pupils. Across all year groups, pupils take a pride in what they do and so the standard of presentation in work is high. ICT is also used to good effect for this purpose.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern foreign languages is **good**.

All boys study French or Spanish in Year 7. Most start a second language in Year 8.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Language college status is helping to raise standards in Years 10 and 11.
- Very good relationships encourage boys to achieve well.
- Energetic and committed leadership provides good direction for the work of the department.
- Boys do not have enough opportunities to take responsibility for their learning.

Commentary

63. Teachers' assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 have consistently been above the national average. Inspection evidence is that these assessments were over-optimistic as standards are average, but above average for boys. Recently, GCSE results have fluctuated between well below average to below average with a significant dip in 2003. However, the provisional results for 2004 are a major improvement. Boys' performance was in line with the national average in French and well above in Spanish. Standards in Year 11 are now above average in both languages.
64. Boys make good progress in Years 7 to 9 because teachers pitch the work at an appropriate level while ensuring all boys are challenged through the use of a wide range of structures and vocabulary. Lower attaining boys gain in confidence through grappling successfully with complex language such as conditional forms and this helps them to achieve well. Literacy skills, particularly reading and writing, are developed systematically. There is no specific material for gifted and talented boys but they do respond well to warm-up activities designed to develop thinking skills. This progress is maintained in Years 10 and 11 where higher

attaining pupils, especially the growing number of dual linguists, achieve a high level of accuracy in extended writing. Improvements in setting arrangements, staffing, accommodation and boys' perception of languages are supporting the rise in standards.

65. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are clearly structured. Teachers are good role models, give interesting lessons and are skilled in linking learning to examination requirements. Relationships are very good and as boys feel valued, they settle quickly to work and concentrate well. They participate fully in the best lessons where teachers make very good use of the language and provide varied opportunities for well-paced oral work. Sometimes boys make less progress where presentation methods are routine and provide fewer inter-active opportunities for them to consolidate and judge how well they are learning. At GCSE level, boys respond positively to the high level of guidance and encouragement they receive. Marking is generally very full and helpful but there is no common system to prompt boys to take responsibility for their learning through self-evaluation and target setting.
66. The curriculum in this language college is developing into a significant strength with initiatives designed to cater for boys of all levels of attainment either in the pipeline or already present, such as early entry for GCSE, increased exposure to ICT and the new entry-level courses as an alternative to GCSE qualification. In 2005, Year 7 boys will have been boosted by two years prior study of French as part of the language college's support of partner primary schools.
67. The department is well led. There is a strong vision and clear sense of purpose to make a success of its new status. Recent staffing difficulties have been surmounted. Policies and monitoring procedures need updating to ensure best practice is implemented across the department. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory as the improvement in standards is only very recent.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good which results in good learning.
- Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 because teachers plan well to meet the needs of different groups of pupils.
- The time allocated is less than that recommended. As a result, progress and achievement in Years 7 to 9 are restricted.
- Insufficient opportunities are provided to monitor teaching. Inconsistent marking results in pupils not being provided with sufficient information about their standards and what they need to do to improve.
- Good leadership provides a clear vision for improving standards.

Commentary

68. Results in the 2003 Year 9 national tests were average. Pupils' achievement was satisfactory in relation to their earlier learning. 2004 results were similar. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, results were average. Pupils did not perform as well in mathematics as they did in most other subjects studied. Achievement was satisfactory. Provisional results for 2004 show a significant improvement.
69. In Year 9, pupils' attainment is average. This represents satisfactory achievement as pupils entered the school with average skills in mathematics. Pupils' achievement does not match the overall good quality of their learning that results from good teaching because it is adversely affected by the lower than usual amount of time allocated for teaching the subject.

Achievement is further affected by the lack of consistent attention given to developing standards of numeracy in departments across the curriculum. Most pupils recall their tables confidently in doing calculations in their heads. In Year 9, most pupils understand how to generate sequences using rules. The highest attaining pupils confidently use algebra to establish rules. In Year 11, standards are above average and pupils' achievement is good in relation to their earlier learning. Pupils are developing well their algebraic skills. Highest attaining pupils can confidently solve a range of equations although the lowest attaining pupils still have difficulty simplifying simple expressions.

70. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7-11 is good. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to ensure that new skills and concepts are clearly explained. Teachers' questioning involves pupils well and provides opportunities for them to share ideas and strategies with each other. As a result, pupils make good progress in lessons in their understanding of new skills. Teachers plan well for the needs of all pupils and, consequently, pupils with special educational needs, as well as those who are gifted and talented, achieve as well as other pupils. The mathematics strand of the government's national initiative in Years 7 to 9 (Key Stage 3 Strategy) is being implemented in teachers' planning although the objectives for lessons and key words are not always used well enough as a focus for learning. Pupils' attainment is assessed regularly and teachers intervene appropriately in pupils' learning in lessons to check their progress well. Marking, however, does not always provide sufficient information for pupils about what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers generally manage and organise pupils well so that they usually behave well, work productively on their tasks and co-operate well with each other when asked to work together. This is encouraged by the good relationships with the teachers and with each other.
71. Leadership is good. Clear vision and direction are provided. Pupils' performance is analysed and evaluated well. Schemes of work have been rewritten to include the new national initiatives. The sharing of good teaching practice is inhibited because teaching is not checked often enough to ensure that all teaching can strive to match the very best. Improvements since the previous inspection have been satisfactory; the accommodation has improved but monitoring of teaching still needs further improvement.

Mathematics across the curriculum

72. Pupils' competence in mathematics is average and numeracy skills are developed well in mathematics lessons. The contribution made by other subjects, however, is unsatisfactory. The school has no policy for developing pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum although teachers have been made aware of the new approaches to the teaching of mathematics. At the moment, few subjects are planning to support these skills in lessons. As a result, opportunities are being missed to reinforce and extend pupils' numeracy skills. The responsibility for checking and supporting teachers' planning is not clearly defined. Good contributions are being made in art and design and geography.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership is raising standards.
- Good teaching promotes good learning and good achievement.
- Very good attitudes help boys to learn well

Commentary

73. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above national and similar schools' averages and very high compared to the average for boys with similar prior attainment. Boys' performance in science has improved steadily since 1999 at a faster rate than the national increase. Results in the GCSE separate sciences – biology, chemistry and physics – were above the national averages for those subjects in 2003 and the proportion of the very highest grades A*/A were also higher than average. Results in the dual award science examinations in 2003 were close to the national average and have improved markedly over the last few years. Provisional results for 2004 are similar to those for 2003
74. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average. By Year 9 pupils have studied a range of topics, perform practical work sensibly and safely, and in groups talk quietly and co-operate very well. Standards seen in Year 11 are above average. Boys studying separate science subjects are very well motivated and work to very high standards while dual award candidates' work is close to the national average. Graphs and diagrams could be improved if teachers were more critical of sub-standard work.
75. Boys' achievement is good. They enter school with average standards, make good progress to the end of Year 9, when they are above average and improve further to the end of Year 11. Because behaviour and relationships are so good, teachers waste little time disciplining boys and lessons are productive as a result.
76. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned. The best are brisk and include a variety of activities, which maintain boys' interest and make learning effective. Teachers give clear instructions so boys work safely and carefully in experimental sessions. Very good relationships and well-structured lessons allow all boys to make good progress and those with special educational needs progress at the same rate as their class because teachers give them extra help. The quality of marking is variable and does not always explain what boys need to do to improve their standards. In addition missing work or errors are not subsequently corrected so gaps remain in boys' knowledge.
77. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear drive to continue to improve standards. The curriculum is evolving to provide for pupils at all levels of attainment. Much work has been done to assess boys' performance, to involve them in setting targets and to inform parents regularly. Day-to-day organisation is good and teachers and laboratory technicians are well deployed.
78. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership along with good teaching and support systems are bringing results well above those seen nationally for boys.
- The number of computers available for boys' use is significantly above the number usually found in a school of this size.
- Planning does not fully provide opportunities for boys to achieve the highest levels at the end of Year 9 or consistently support whole-school policies.
- Boys are not clear enough about what they need to do to improve their standards.

Commentary

79. All boys in the school follow an ICT examination course in Years 10 and 11. A good range of GCSE, vocational ICT and double award courses ensures all boys are provided for, with the work-related curriculum supported well. Results in 2003 were above the national average for all pupils but were well above the average for boys. In 2004, provisional results were higher than those of 2003.
80. In work seen during the inspection, standards are average by the end of Year 9 and above average at the end of Year 11. Resources from the ICT strand of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy are being used well and achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 when boys' prior attainment is considered. The boys have the use of one computer each in lessons and confidently and independently use the school's computer system to store and retrieve their work and to find information from the Internet. The boys also create databases to handle information, use spreadsheets to model, and use presentation and word processing software well. However, more reflection and evaluation are required to develop a greater understanding of their work. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 in relation to boys' standards at the start of the course. Boys produce high quality coursework with great care shown in the design stages that include clear annotation. Good integration of software is practised with high quality documentation being produced.
81. Teaching and learning are good. Boys are achieving well because teachers make it very clear what has to be done through clear objectives. Good questioning is used often to check boys' understanding. ICT is used very well by the teachers in class to stimulate learning and a good range of resources is used well. Target setting is not clear enough to help boys understand how to get to the next step up. This type of target information is also not present in reports so cannot help parents help their boys. Boys use the school's ICT resources very well outside of the school day for homework and coursework.
82. The leadership has a clear vision and high aspirations and is very good. Management is good and has created a caring, supportive team of teachers who are keen to embrace initiatives seen to benefit the boys. Planning does not fully provide opportunities for boys to achieve the highest levels at the end of Year 9; nor does it consistently support whole-school policies for literacy, numeracy or citizenship. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good as every aspect raised at the time of the previous inspection has been improved. A computer network with network management and technical support has been established and the number of computers available for boys is now significantly above that normally seen in a school of this size.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

83. ICT use across the curriculum is satisfactory. Computers are used to support learning very well within the geography department with the Internet, word processing and presentation software used well. Good use was also seen in art and design for creative work using scanners and the digital camera. Computers are used well in science to research and communicate electronically with email; data logging is also experienced. Interactive whiteboards and digital projectors are very well used to capture pupils' interest and get lessons off to a brisk start. Good use is also made in music with satisfactory use in the other departments of the school.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well across all years as a result of good teaching and standards are above average.
- Standards of behaviour and personal relationships are excellent and have a very positive effect on learning.
- Higher attaining pupils are given too few opportunities for challenge within some teaching groups.

Commentary

84. Teachers' assessments of standards at the end of year 9 were above those reported nationally. Although GCSE results were below average in 2003, standards in work seen during the inspection are above average.
85. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average in Year 9. Standards have improved as a result of good teaching which focuses on building up knowledge and understanding and improving geographical skills. The broad and varied curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to learn from different cultures and as a result pupils' sense of place is well developed. All pupils achieve well including those with special educational needs. This is a consequence of effective teaching which demands much of them. Higher attaining pupils make good progress overall but there are few opportunities for developing skills of lesson preparation or independence.
86. Pupils continue to achieve well throughout Years 10 and 11 and reach above average standards. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 lays a solid foundation for the GCSE course and many topics are revisited. This allows pupils to build on prior knowledge and improve their mapping skills. All pupils have a good understanding of both physical and human geography. Pupils' ICT skills are often outstanding. They are able to use these skills to obtain high grades in their class work and coursework. The quality of GCSE coursework is high. This is because pupils' skills of analysis are well developed. They receive effective guidance from their teachers which is linked to examination requirements.
87. The quality of teaching is good across all age groups. Some teaching is very good or excellent. These high standards are a result of strong personal relationships forged between pupils and teachers. Pupils are given a great deal of support and encouragement by their teachers. This gives them confidence and the will to succeed. A good range of activities captures the interest of pupils, who enjoy their geography lessons. Pupils are well motivated and standards of behaviour are high in the majority of lessons. A small number of pupils remain passive in class in Years 7 to 9 and lack the confidence to talk about geography or use appropriate language. Also opportunities can be missed for higher attaining pupils to extend their learning through greater involvement in class activities. GCSE pupils are particularly mature in their approach to study and are very respectful towards their teachers and school visitors. Lessons are thoughtfully planned and well managed to include a wide range of tasks and activities, which involves the pupils in problem-solving exercises and role-play. A strong feature of these lessons is the emphasis placed on local, national and world-wide studies. This contributes strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as they reflect with sensitivity on such issues as urban planning and natural disasters.
88. The head of department promotes good leadership. He provides clear vision and is committed to raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers work well together and share good practice. New members of staff, including newly qualified teachers, are supported well and encouraged to develop new ideas and skills. Improvement since the previous inspection is therefore good.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their knowledge and understanding of the subject well to support learning.
- Teachers set high standards for behaviour so that boys learn in a studious working environment.
- Teachers encourage boys to take pride in their work and they respond positively through the very attractive presentation of projects.
- Behaviour is very good; pupils concentrate well on their lessons.
- Teachers do not use assessment well enough to identify pupils' progress in the key skills of historical study.
- There is not enough emphasis on the analysis and evaluation of material to enable pupils to develop these skills.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunity to work collaboratively or to develop independence and take responsibility for their learning.

Commentary

89. Results in the GCSE examinations were above average in 2003; all pupils gained a pass grade. Pupils performed well in comparison with other subjects. Provisional results in 2004 were lower, but more pupils gained the highest grade.
90. By the end of Year 9, pupils' knowledge and understanding of history are broadly average. Achievement is satisfactory given their prior attainment. Boys have a good overview of the periods studied and higher attaining pupils are beginning to identify the impact of change. They research well using the Internet and the presentation of their findings is often very good. Their analysis of the information they use is very limited and opportunities to develop the key skills of historical study are few.
91. By the end of Year 11, standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils have a good grasp of the events of the Vietnam War and their coursework demonstrates that they understand the links between American involvement and the post-war fear of communism. They recognise the problems faced by a conventional army in a guerrilla war. In general, written answers are clear and accurate and include relevant detail. However, pupils' use of sources is undeveloped and their work contains little evaluation or validation of such evidence. They do not consider the impact of what they learn or consider links between events or changes unless clearly directed to do so.
92. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Pupils benefit from knowledgeable teachers who communicate their enthusiasm for the subject. In most lessons, teachers employ a good range of activities that capture the interest of all pupils. Boys respond well and their very good behaviour and the good relationships they have with their teachers ensure a good working environment. Pupils are not sufficiently involved in the assessment of their work and so they are not familiar with the requirements of the different standards. As a consequence, they do not know enough about how to raise the level of their work. Although teachers ensure that pupils have a good understanding of the periods studied, there is insufficient focus on development of the skills that would enable them to gain a deeper understanding. In the GCSE classes, teachers ensure that boys are prepared for their examination through extra revision classes and the careful planning for their coursework. Additional classes are offered after school for pupils who are unable to follow the course in school time. This determination to support the pupils results at times in teachers dominating the work of the class and pupils becoming too dependent on their teachers. They respond well to direct questions, but do not take responsibility for their learning through investigation and presentation to their peers, other than in their coursework.

93. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The department has managed well the recent staffing difficulties that have resulted in large classes, and day-to-day work runs smoothly. Areas for development in the department have been correctly identified but the reduction in the number of teachers, and significant responsibilities held in other areas, have hindered the progress. Assessment procedures are undeveloped and do not enable teachers to measure pupils' progress in the individual skills needed for the study of history. As a consequence, they cannot identify areas of strength or weakness for further development.
94. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

Provision in design and technology is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE at grades A*-C are well below average because of a lack of rigour in Year 8 and 9 work schemes.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge, behaviour management and commitment make the best of very poor accommodation and minimise its impact on learning.
- Lack of rigour in assessment techniques and limited use of National Curriculum levels in Years 8 and 9 results in pupils not being clear about how well they are doing or how to improve.

Commentary

95. In 2003, results at GCSE A*-C were well below national figures; provisional results for 2004 show a marginal improvement. Results at grades A*-G were average, representing significant achievement for many pupils.
96. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are below average. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 in relation to pupils' standards when they joined the school and taking account of the lower than usual allocation of time to the subject. The revised Year 7 programme of work has begun to tackle the problems of lack of rigour in Years 7 to 9 designing. Lack of time means that by the end of Year 9, pupils are not as well prepared for work in Years 10 and 11 as they should be and this is a factor in below average standards seen in Year 11. However, these standards also reflect the prior attainment of boys who choose to study the subject. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory in relation to pupils' below average standards at the start of the course. Many of the specialist techniques, in designing in particular, are only starting to be taught in Years 10 and 11 rather than being established in Years 7 to 9. Lack of regular access to ICT limits pupils' opportunity to reach higher standards of presentation, research and analysis. In particular, a lack of ICT resources for CAD/CAM (computer-aided design and manufacture) prevents pupils from reaching higher grades.
97. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 but better in Years 7 to 9 because of the revised programme of work and a more rigorous approach to teaching. Teachers plan lessons well within the constraints of the time allocated and the subject's accommodation. They use available resources well – including effective technical support. Teaching methods are chosen with advice from the learning support department. Pupils are given individual feedback and set short-term tasks that clarify understanding and maintain the pace of the learning. Less successful lessons have presentations by the teacher that are too long and do not fully encourage pupils' participation.
98. Leadership is satisfactory because a good team has been developed through performance management and there is a thoughtful approach to development planning. Management is unsatisfactory because there has been no significant improvement in standards over three

years. A recent review by the team has highlighted areas for development. Very poor accommodation has not been improved over 12 years. Inefficient dust extraction, outdated fixed furniture, old equipment, cluttered teaching spaces and poor storage have a negative impact on learning. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in GCSE as a result of very good teaching.
- The quality of leadership is excellent and generates vision and enthusiasm.
- The boys have very good attitudes to art which contribute to very high standards.
- Art and design is a popular subject and is chosen by a higher than average number of boys.
- There is inadequate provision for three-dimensional work and very inadequate storage facilities.

Commentary

99. In 2003 results in GCSE were well above average. Almost half of the boys entered gained A* and A grades and 90 per cent gained A*-C grades. This continues a rising trend in a subject that is chosen by a higher than average proportion of pupils.
100. Standards are above average by Year 9. Pupils have broadly average skills on entry to the school. By Year 9, they acquire very good skills in drawing and painting. They can use an impressive range of techniques to shade for tone and texture. They have a good knowledge of colour theory and can apply colour to get the effects they desire. They gain a good awareness of how to achieve impact in composition. Where three-dimensional work is done in clay modelling it is of a high standard but it is not extensive. By Year 11, standards are well above average. Pupils can observe closely and draw and paint subtly or boldly and dramatically as fits the impact they wish to create. They show impressive confidence and are highly creative and imaginative in developing ideas on a theme. Their work in mixed media, especially in collage, is striking. They are confident and research widely for ideas and inspiration from the work of major artists. They use ICT very effectively for research and in the development of their work.
101. Achievement is very good in all years. Pupils enjoy art and build systematically on their skills and techniques and apply these appropriately. All pupils receive individual attention in lessons so all, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented, make equally good progress. They work seriously and with a clear sense of purpose. Behaviour in lessons is excellent.
102. Teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is lively and charismatic. Teachers' planning is excellent in its detail, structure and the use of illustrations to inform and inspire pupils. Teachers give very good demonstrations of classic skills and techniques such as pen and ink sketching and shading to achieve tone and texture. This visual input adds greatly to pupils' confidence. Assessment is ongoing in all lessons and pupils know what they have to do to improve. There is good promotion of work-related learning and the boys are aware of the wide range of employment opportunities in art.
103. Leadership is excellent in its vision and in promoting enthusiasm for the subject. There is very good supportive teamwork that helps to raise standards. Management is very good. There is a wide range of visits to museums and art galleries that inspires pupils and supports their

learning. The subject makes a very good contribution to the boys' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by looking at these aspects in the work of major art movements including the art of other cultures. There are extensive displays of pupils' high quality work that promote interest and enhance the school environment. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards have improved significantly by Years 9 and 11. Teaching and learning have also improved.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent relationships between pupils and teachers are very supportive of good learning and pupils respond enthusiastically to the good teaching.
- Significantly more pupils are now choosing music in Years 10 and 11 and are reaching standards which are at least average.
- The good resources enable pupils to develop performance skills to a standard which is considerably above average.
- Pupils do not know sufficiently well how to further improve their standard of overall performance because of a lack of rigour in arrangements for assessment and target setting.
- The practice rooms are unsatisfactory. They hinder the development of small group work and are unsuitable for the developing programme of instrumental teaching.

Commentary

104. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003, taken by a small group, were well above the national average. In 2004, a much larger group achieved provisional results which were at least average.
105. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average at the end of Year 9. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 in relation to pupils' standards when they joined the school. In Year 9, standards of group performance are well above average. Pupils show very good knowledge and understanding of musical structures and are able to work very well to a given brief. In Year 7, pupils show a surprisingly good rhythmical ability. Standards are well above average by Year 11. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are working very musically and with genuinely interesting results; there is much group performance of a very high standard and achievement is very good.
106. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the good teaching which is characterised by much practical activity. The teachers have very good personal skills which enable pupils to work confidently and musically and with considerable interest. Pupils interact well and respond well to the musical challenges. There is much evidence of good learning, for example the remarkably good ensemble playing by a large group in only the second week of Year 11.
107. Since the previous inspection good leadership has very efficiently brought the department a long way along the path of improvement. Resources for learning, including all forms of musical technology, have been greatly enhanced and used very effectively to interest and enthuse pupils and to raise standards. The department runs smoothly and the management of many aspects, including the instrumental teaching, for about 100 boys, is very successful. However, the accommodation for this activity is poor and lack of space hinders the development of small group work. Although overall provision for music is good, pupils are not clearly aware of how they can personally improve. There is an absence of assessment procedures which can objectively inform about standards and enable meaningful targets to be set to take pupils forward.

108. Overall, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Boys' very good attitudes assist good learning and achievement.
- Extra-curricular activities give excellent opportunities for boys to extend their learning.
- Inadequate accommodation, timetabling and maintenance of fields constrain teaching and activities.
- Boys do not receive consistent assessment guidance to help them improve further.
- Opportunities to contribute to pupils' literacy, numeracy and citizenship development are not consistently identified in planning.

Commentary

109. GCSE results in 2003 were below average but boys achieved as expected when previous performance was taken into consideration. Results are affected by the level of attainment of those who choose to study the subject and the low entry. They are below those at the time of the previous report.
110. Boys have below average skills in most activities when they enter the school as they have had varying prior experience in sport and the impact of the School Sports Co-ordination Programme has not yet been felt. Boys achieve well in Years 7 to 9, in most activities, because teachers are knowledgeable and boys respect their expertise and behave well. By the end of Year 9 boys reach average standards. Standards in the core curriculum in Year 11 for all boys are above average and boys acquire skills quickly because teachers have high expectations. The standard achieved by talented team players is very high and boys perform at local, regional and national level in a variety of sports. Standards in Year 11 in the examination course are below average because boys start from a low base on entry to the course. Boys achieve well overall because teachers plan well, set appropriate targets and provide good encouragement. Boys improve their practical skills quickly, but teachers are not as effective in raising theory standards as boys are frequently passive learners and not fully engaged in their learning. Theory is not drawn out at an early stage of learning; for example, the muscles used in warming up for exercise are not consistently referred to in the early years of learning.
111. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers demonstrate skills well so that all boys benefit from seeing requirements. Boys benefit from tasks matched to their individual needs that offer them opportunities to extend work and push their achievement levels. For example, in a good Year 7 fitness lesson, the class was given worksheets to trace achievement during the lesson. Boys were able to work within their range of ability and fulfil the task but individual and group planning is not consistent across the department. Boys learn well because they are co-operative and listen well and teachers have high expectations of them. For example, in a Year 10 football lesson boys worked very well together; they saw the importance of team effort in timing and positioning to execute close passes in a confined space. More encouragement for boys to lead activities, view and analyse one another's work, engage in evaluation and share objectives would assist learning. Assessment on the GCSE course is not always used well to help boys to check their progress and measure performance against targets, and marking does not highlight areas for improvement or clearly relate to grades. Good new monitoring systems in Year 7 are starting to make boys more aware of their progress. Teachers usually review lessons but this is not always well linked to objectives and the aims of lessons are not always fully shared with boys.

112. Good leadership ensures that teachers work well together to make the most of limited indoor facilities, which confine the curriculum. Good guidance for teachers is provided in detailed schemes of work but the identification of opportunities to contribute to literacy, numeracy and citizenship development in lessons is not consistent enough to give boys a wider understanding of the impact and value of their learning across the school. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The school has a well-deserved Sportsmark and the A-level course has been introduced. The new pavilion at the games field is now a very good facility. However, there is no specific teaching room for GCSE and the one indoor space is not timetabled for fully effective use. Teaching and learning are hampered by poor maintenance of fields so that lessons have to be adapted. Assessment has been improved but further strategies to improve examination results are still required.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Citizenship modules are well planned within personal development education, forming a substantial part of the programme in Years 8 and 10.
- Teachers make effective use of discussion techniques and practical activities to engage pupils in learning.
- The school offers many opportunities for pupils to develop the skills of active citizenship.
- The contribution that other subjects make to citizenship has not been co-ordinated and incorporated into the formal curriculum for the subject.
- Assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' attainment in the subject are inadequate.

Commentary

113. Citizenship was not being taught in personal development education lessons during the inspection. Consequently, the following judgements are based on observing teaching by the PDE team, discussions with the teachers, looking at boys' work from the last school year and interviewing them about their experience of citizenship lessons.
114. By the end of Year 9, boys' attainment in the subject is average and their achievement is satisfactory. They have a fair knowledge of the workings of British democracy. Those boys who had the opportunity to find out about another country's system of government have gained a broader understanding from the comparison. For many, the skills of researching a citizenship topic and presenting their findings, both orally and in writing, are underdeveloped. Boys' understanding of diversity within society is enhanced by the study of different faith communities in religious education. The school's Catholic foundation encourages responsible action in the service of others. Boys participate in charitable fund-raising and in support for prisoners of conscience. By the end of Year 11, boys' records of achievement show a high level of participation in the life of the school and the wider community, including diaries of successful work experience. Apart from these documents, there was little evidence available for judging standards by Year 11. On interview, boys demonstrated responsible attitudes towards world poverty, informed by their research into aid agencies in religious education. The profile of citizenship has been raised in the PDE modules planned for this year, to achieve expected standards in the subject. It is well supported by the opportunities for exploring social and moral issues in religious education.
115. The quality of teaching and learning in PDE is good overall. Teachers plan their lessons around clear objectives, which are shared with boys at the outset and reviewed at the end, to consolidate learning. Occasionally, the pace of a lesson is not quick enough to cover the

intended learning. Teachers establish sensible ground rules for discussion and create positive relationships, so that boys are confident about expressing their views. Practical activities in pairs or small groups are used well to engage boys in learning, except for the odd lesson when the length of teachers' talk limits pupils' activity. Lower attainers benefit from their classmates' support in the group activities but extra challenge for higher attainers is sometimes missing. Except for self-assessment against checklists of skills, there is no formal system for assessing and recording pupils' progress in the subject. Teachers' judgement of boys' attainment in citizenship at the end of Year 9 is based on general impressions rather than objective assessment. Reports contain little specific information about boys' progress and attainment in citizenship.

116. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory, overall. The citizenship component within PDE is well organised but there is not enough time for it amid competing claims of personal, social, health and careers education. Management of the vital cross-curricular dimension to citizenship is unsatisfactory at present, although a strategy exists to improve the situation. Whilst allied work in other subjects is developing pupils as citizens, it has still to be incorporated in the formal citizenship curriculum so that it can be assessed and monitored as such. The creation of a unified PDE department has ensured good progress since the previous inspection in the organisation and delivery of a coherent personal health and social education programme. It remains to do the same for citizenship.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses							
Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	3	100	73.8	33.3	16.7	43.3	25.6
Biology	14	50	62.9	0.0	10.9	14.3	19.7
Chemistry	8	50.0	70.5	0.0	12.4	15.0	22.9
Economics	6	16.7	71.8	0.0	18.1	3.3	25.2
English/English language	5	80.0	79.4	0.0	13.8	18.0	26.5
English literature	14	64.3	83.8	0.0	16.3	17.9	28.6
French	2	0.0	97.7	0.0	21.0	0.0	28.6
Design and technology	7	28.6	70.7	0.0	11.8	10.0	22.8
General studies	49	51.0	71.6	6.1	16.2	15.3	24.6
Geography	13	76.9	72.5	0.0	16.4	21.5	24.8
History	4	50.0	79.3	0.0	16.5	12.5	27.2
Information technology	34	67.6	65.8	2.9	10.2	19.4	20.8
Music	1	100.0	83.5	0.0	18.8	40.0	28.9
Other Social studies	12	58.3	65.7	8.3	12.4	17.5	21.6
Physics	10	40.0	64.8	0.0	11.6	8.0	20.5
Religious studies	2	50.0	76.4	0.0	18.2	20.0	27.1
Sociology	6	83.3	68.4	0.0	13.7	21.7	23.1

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses							
Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	12	100	97.7	100	41.5	116.7	81.9
Biology	11	100	95.6	27.3	34.6	76.4	75.2
Chemistry	10	90.0	97.0	30.0	45.4	66.0	82.3
Economics	3	100	98.9	33.3	50.7	80.0	87.4
English/English language	5	100	99.2	0.0	34.2	60.0	79.2
English literature	13	100	99.2	23.1	46.1	73.8	86.2
French	2	100	98.7	50.0	52.7	90.0	88.2
Design and technology	6	100	97.1	0.0	29.5	66.7	74.1
General studies	38	94.7	94.1	13.2	29.6	66.7	74.1
Geography	5	100	98.5	20.0	39.5	76.0	80.9
History	8	100	98.9	37.5	40.8	75.0	82.8
Information technology	39	100	95.4	12.8	24.0	63.6	69.0
Mathematics	14	78.6	96.1	21.4	53.3	62.9	87.2
Other Social studies	20	95.0	96.1	30.0	36.6	75.0	77.1
Physics	18	88.9	96.4	27.8	42.9	66.7	80.6
Religious studies	6	100	98.0	50.0	43.3	90.0	83.5
Sociology	12	91.7	97.6	33.3	38.0	70.0	79.3
Spanish	2	100	98.7	0.0	47.2	60.0	85.6
Business	26	98.0	65.0	19.6	14.6	66.7	60.1
Information technology VQ	2	100.0	77.9	33.3	23.4	86.7	64.9
Travel and tourism	1	100.0	62.2	100.0	14.5	100.0	62.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus in this inspection was on English literature and French. Lessons in English language and literature and Spanish were also sampled. Teaching in English was good because of the use of stimulating material and students learned well about the conventions used in fairytale and how they might be used and subverted by modern writers. Achievement was good because demands were made on students to work hard and participate fully. In Spanish, very few students have taken A-level Spanish in recent years and results have been below average, with progress from GCSE no better than satisfactory. In contrast, the number who chose the subject rose this year and standards observed during the inspection in Year 12 were above average. Two lessons were observed and the quality of learning and teaching was satisfactory in both. A strength of the teaching is that very good relationships have been established between staff and students. On the other hand, students do not have enough opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

English literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and good support.
- Leadership fosters an enthusiasm for English studies. This is shared by staff and students and reflected in the teaching and learning.
- Students appreciate the quality of teaching and support they receive. This is reflected in the high proportion of students who complete the course.
- Opportunities to develop students' independence are sometimes missed because teachers do too much for them.

Commentary

117. The recent history of results at A2 level has not been strong at the highest grades and, although most students have obtained at least a pass grade, performance was below average in 2002 and 2003. Provisional results for 2004 show improvement, with all students obtaining a pass grade and a much higher proportion obtaining A/B grades, so that overall results are closer to average. Provisional AS-level performance in 2004 is also better, so that current Year 13 students have a strong foundation on which to build.
118. Standards for Year 13 are above average and this represents good achievement by students whose attainment on entry to the course was broadly average. They show good knowledge and understanding of set texts and are used to working independently. Written work is thoroughly researched and expressed with fluency and accuracy. Students' work folders are well organised and show evidence of drafting. They achieve well because they respond to lively, enthusiastic teaching and appreciate the opportunities to make a personal response. They are encouraged to be independent in their learning. They get a clear idea of what they must do to meet assessment criteria. They are supported well in the classroom and with relevant background or contextual material. A recent visit to Howarth as background research for their understanding of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and the personal work and displays arising from that are a good example of how well students' achievement is supported. In Year 12, students' standards are average and they are achieving satisfactorily at this very early stage of their course.
119. Teaching and learning are good. An improvement in teaching and learning since the previous inspection has led to higher standards. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to convey this in an interesting and lively manner using a variety of methods. Occasionally, in a well-meaning desire to ensure that students understand, teachers explain too much, so that more reticent or less confident students do not have sufficient opportunity to participate or take

responsibility for their own learning, and the pace of a lesson slows. A strong feature is teachers' willingness to accept students onto courses and foster their interest because they may benefit in other ways than just academically. Similarly praiseworthy is the interest teachers generate in the subject so that a good proportion of students wants to pursue their English studies to a higher level.

120. Leadership is good. It is clearly aimed at generating interest in and enthusiasm for English literature. Teachers share this common purpose and successfully convey it to their students. Management is also good, ensuring that courses are administered effectively and that teachers are deployed according to their special interests and where they can be most effective. Improvement since the previous inspection, given the evidence of provisional results in 2004 and above average standards in Year 13, has been good.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards seen in lessons are above average, an improvement on recent years.
- Teaching is good and expectations are high.
- Students are well motivated and work hard to improve their performance.

Commentary

121. Students' performance in A and AS-level French was slightly below the national average in 2003. This pattern is similar to that seen in other recent years, but most of these comparisons are based on extremely small numbers of candidates. By contrast, a positive new pattern has emerged at the start of the current school year. A larger number of students has chosen the course and standards seen in lessons are above average. The achievement of these students is good, as they have made good progress and are working to capacity. They are making the most of the good resources available to them and the very good relationships they have with staff.
122. Students learn well because teaching is good and expectations are high. Teachers use French throughout the lessons and require students to concentrate hard. They know the strengths and weaknesses of their students and pitch work at the right level. Consequently, students are able to focus on what is important and make every effort to speak French themselves, both with the teacher and with each other. Assessment procedures are both informal, based on routine feedback on students' regular work, and formal, based on a school test in February and the AS-level examination in the summer of Year 12. In this way, the school strikes a satisfactory balance between excessive testing and too little.
123. Leadership and management of the sixth form courses are good. The department has established a clear vision, which is successful in promoting an ambitious approach on the part of both students and teachers. Management is informal and generally effective. The department understands fully the importance of independent learning, but strategies and plans for achieving this are still in an early stage of development. Similarly, the department aims to make sure that students have the opportunity to go to French-speaking countries, on exchange visits and work experience. This project is also at the planning stage, but will build on contacts established by the school in the past. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory and recent developments are very promising.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

124. Students' use of language and their level of literacy skills are average overall so that they are able to tackle the demands of their different subjects and courses successfully.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of mathematics are passed on effectively so that students learn and achieve well.
- Good leadership and management ensure that teachers' expertise is used well.
- Assessment of students' work is good; students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- Good relationships result in very good attitudes to learning that help students to achieve well.
- There are insufficient opportunities for students to use computers to help in their learning.

Commentary

125. In 2003, GCE A-level examination results were well below average. This represents satisfactory achievement in relation to students' attainment at the start of the course. Provisional results in 2004 were better.
126. Overall, standards of work seen in Year 13 are below average. This represents good achievement and reflects the progress students have made from the start of the course. Students make good progress in mathematics and achieve well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In Year 12, students are building well on their previous learning. Students are developing their algebraic skills well. In Year 13, students understand how to find areas under curves using calculus and are able to confidently solve a range of trigonometric equations.
127. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teachers are skilful and demonstrate their own very good expertise when introducing new and difficult concepts; these are clearly explained. Lessons are well planned to develop students' learning and ensure that achievement is good. Tasks provide suitable challenge but not enough opportunities are included for students to use computers regularly to develop their knowledge and understanding. Relationships are good and, as a result, students show very positive attitudes to their work; they make considerable efforts to understand the work they are doing and teachers provide good support and guidance so that students overcome their difficulties and achieve well. Teachers question students well so that good links are made with their previous learning. The day-to-day assessment of students' work is good; it supports students' learning well so that they know how well they are doing in relation to examination criteria with the result that they achieve well.
128. Leadership and management are good. Teachers are deployed effectively to ensure that their specialist knowledge is used well and they work well together to ensure that the progress of all students is checked and supported well. Good arrangements have been made to incorporate recent developments in the subject. Students' performance is analysed well and appropriate steps taken to improve standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

129. Students enter the sixth form with mathematical skills that are broadly average. As a result, students' use of mathematics is at least satisfactory in sixth form subjects. Where students have to apply their number skills they do so confidently. In design and technology and geography students apply their mathematical skills well. In art and design, students show a good understanding of proportion in drawing.

SCIENCE

The focus in this inspection was on physics. Lessons in chemistry and biology were also sampled. In a good chemistry lesson, students who had worked through their lunchtime on a practical titration exercise used the results well in class to calculate reaction rates of hydrochloric acid. In a very good biology lesson students were learning very well how the total population of a species can be estimated by using sampling techniques and estimated the total population of maggots in a tray using their new knowledge very effectively.

Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching promotes very good learning.
- Very good relationships and attitudes make lessons productive.

Commentary

130. Results in the GCE A-level examinations in physics vary from year to year. In 2003 results were below average, though in 2002 they were above average. Provisional results for 2004 suggest they will again be above average, with a higher proportion of A/B grades than for some years. Results in the GCE AS-level examinations fluctuate. In 2002 they were very high compared to the national average but in 2003 they were very low. Provisional results for 2004 are likely to be very high with the proportion of the highest grades substantially above average.

131. The standard of work seen during the inspection is well above average. Students in Year 13 use a very wide range of scientific formulae competently. They manipulate equations, substitute numerical values and calculate results correctly. They draw very good graphs and use sketch graphs to illustrate relationships. Students in Year 12 had been in the school for only one week at the time of the inspection but by applying equations from their GCSE course made rapid progress in understanding how bodies fall under the influence of gravity.

132. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. The best lessons are brisk, informative and well planned. Students make valuable contributions and discuss their ideas sensibly. Digital projectors add interest, provide high quality visual images and provide a lot of factual information quickly. Teachers use questions well to allow students to recall previous knowledge, apply it to new situations and draw logical conclusions. They show expert knowledge of their subject and answer questions competently. Students learn very well. Their very good attitudes play a significant part in making lessons effective. As a result of the very good teaching and attitudes, students' achievement is very good.

133. Leadership and management are good. The teachers' work is organised effectively and accommodation for teaching physics is very good. Students' progress is well documented, they play an active part in setting their own targets and parents are regularly informed of

progress made. An effective, science-based, work-experience scheme is in place. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teamwork and teaching based on a very good command of the subject support successful project development and the learning of difficult concepts.
- Access to computers is good with well above the number of computers normally seen in a school of this size.

Commentary

134. Results in examinations in 2003 were in line with the national average and provisional results in 2004 show an improvement. A good range of courses is offered to students and a vocational A-level, supporting the work-related curriculum, was examined for the first time in 2004.
135. Standards in work seen during the inspection are above average, representing good achievement when students' attainment on entry to the courses is considered. Students concentrate and use technical terms very well as they communicate their understanding of the way a data-base structure is improved. They apply the learning well to their own ICT systems and produce high quality project documentation.
136. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a very good command of the subject that is helping students to learn difficult concepts quickly. Teachers also work well as a team to ensure good continuity in students' studies. Students know what they have to do to improve through supportive marking practices and their attitudes to the subject are always good. Students are not asked demonstrate their learning through effective questioning in all lessons.
137. Leadership and management are good. Students are generally recruited well to the good range of courses and there is a good retention rate. ICT is used well to monitor how well students are doing. Accommodation is very good with very good access to ICT resources. There are more computers than usually seen in a school this size so that students have good access to equipment when they need it.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

138. ICT use is satisfactory overall. Very good use is being made creatively by students in art and design and by the teacher. Teachers make good use of ICT in the science department for research and to communicate through email. Learning in English and French is enhanced by teachers' use of ICT with interactive whiteboards. Use of this technology was also seen to engage students very well in leisure and recreation lessons. Other sixth form subjects make satisfactory use of ICT.

HUMANITIES

The focus in this inspection was on history. Geography lessons were also sampled. A-level results in geography are above the national standard and take-up rates have increased. Students make good progress through good teaching which demands much of them. All lessons included particularly good explanation and thoughtful planning which led to high levels of achievement in the classroom. This is an improving department.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' subject knowledge and the encouragement they give to students (especially those new to history studies) support students' learning well.
- Students concentrate well and this enables them to benefit from the clear explanations of their teacher.
- Students rely on their teacher for their success and this results in a lack of independent thinking and discovery.
- Students have insufficient opportunity to assess their own work or the work of others, in order to recognise the strengths and weaknesses in their own responses.

Commentary

139. Results in the A-level examination in 2003 were below average. All students achieved a pass grade. Achievement was satisfactory and there was a significant improvement on their AS-level grades. Provisional results in 2004 were lower, but the number of students taking the examination rose significantly.
140. By the end of Year 13, standards are below average but achievement is satisfactory in relation to students' standards at the start of the course. Students have a secure knowledge and understanding of the periods studied for their coursework and their written work is detailed and well presented. Essays are clear and well researched, but they do not always identify the key points of the title and conclusions do not fully illustrate reasoning supported by evidence. Sources of evidence are well used to select and extract relevant information, but students' analysis and evaluation of material are generally limited.
141. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are well paced and the teacher's clear explanations of the significance of the periods studied enable students to develop a good understanding of events. Because evaluation skills have been underdeveloped, students face a significant challenge in the sixth form. Teachers are very supportive, but students rely heavily on them. Students have little opportunity to take responsibility for their learning through, for example, presentations to the class. Students have insufficient opportunity to assess their own work or the work of others, which would help them learn to identify strengths and weaknesses in their work. There are few opportunities to undertake independent analysis other than through their coursework. As a result they have difficulty achieving the highest grades at A-level. Nevertheless, students are committed to their studies and arrive at lessons ready to work and concentrate well.
142. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Improvements in accommodation now enable better monitoring and communication in the department and resources have improved. Teachers are ambitious for their students and a strong feature of the department is the way that students without recent experience of the study of history are welcomed onto the course and supported with care and commitment. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus in this inspection was on design and technology (product design).

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Signs of improvement are apparent because teachers are making dynamic industrial design links outside the school.
- Leadership capitalises on the expertise within the department, and teachers' enthusiasm cultivates a favourable atmosphere for learning.
- Students lack important background knowledge and skills that would enhance their potential.
- Inconsistent assessment arrangements do not help students understand how they can improve.
- Very poor design studio accommodation does not support the aspirations of the department or the students.

Commentary

143. Following research in 2002, a new AS-level course in product design was introduced for Year 12 in 2003. The course attracted interest and stabilised students numbers – previously, good initial group sizes dwindled because of the impact of poor accommodation and limited resources. The course is 'open access' and students have a wide range of prior attainment. Many come from other local schools because of St Aidan's reputation. Inevitably students find the unexpectedly rigorous academic demand of A-level design and technology very challenging. Action is being taken to tackle this issue.
144. Results in 2003 were below average. In 2004, provisional AS-level results for the new course in product design show an improvement, with some students attaining grade A. Scrutiny of students' work and grades over time shows standards improving to average in design, modelling and making, which represents satisfactory achievement for the majority of students, that has continued into Year 13. Students have limited independent study skills and lack wide reading in the subject and therefore are not always confident in their decision making. The omission of computer-aided designing and manufacturing from Years 7 to 11 is compounded in Years 12 and 13, so that the lack of ICT skills in this area restricts the level at which students can operate in product design.
145. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers make very good innovative use of the community including link studies with some universities and work shadowing in the product design industry. International links, such as lectures and exhibitions on Bauhaus at the art college and a field trip to New York to study Art Deco, have helped to inspire the present Year 13 in the middle of their A2 course. Teachers' enthusiasm cultivates a good atmosphere for students to develop ideas, identify needs and plan specifications for their minor and major projects. Assessment, however, lacks standardisation across the team of teachers and students' understanding of how to improve is confused as a result. Teachers are improving their use of whole-group discussion and prompting students' creative thinking at an early stage, but teachers fail to seize on students' obvious expertise to build confidence and focus on students' personal interests.
146. Leadership is good. All teachers involved in sixth form teaching work effectively as a team. Persistent efforts to raise the profile of design and technology are thwarted by the lack of display area and the very poor accommodation. Management of the courses is satisfactory because the department has been slow to take action on the 2002 review. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory and is continuing because of innovative use of the local, national and international community as part of the school's specialist status.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus in this inspection was on art and design.

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good expertise in the subject and inspire their students.
- Standards are well above average; the vast majority of students have grade A standard work.
- Teachers' planning is excellent and is a key factor in the success of the subject.
- Assessment is ongoing in all lessons and contributes to the very high standards.
- There is inadequate provision for ceramics and three-dimensional work in general and there is a dire need for more storage space.

Commentary

147. Examination results in 2003 were well above average with all students getting A/B grades and ten of the 12 students getting grade A. In AS-level 80 per cent gained grade A. All students obtained at least a pass grade. Provisional results for 2004 indicate a similarly strong picture.
148. Standards are well above average in AS and A2 courses. There has been a very significant increase in the proportion of students choosing art and design in recent years, reflecting the success of the department. Students research their topics in very good depth using ICT very effectively in both research and development of ideas. Work is highly creative and imaginative; mixed media and especially collage are particularly impressive. Work is bold and dramatic with exquisite use of line and colour. Composition is generally dramatic in impact, especially in the use of positive and negative shape and space. Achievement is very good. A significant proportion of students has not taken art at GCSE level but is on course to achieve grade A. Students acquire confidence and work at a very good pace. They respond impressively to the freedom to be creative and imaginative and to seek new boundaries. Behaviour is always excellent.
149. Teaching and learning are very good. Much of students' success is due to the exemplary planning and especially the inspiring illustrations that are used to extend students' vision. The most significant characteristic of teaching is the enthusiasm and love of art displayed by the teachers. In detailed aspects of techniques the teachers give vivid demonstrations so that students can learn from example. There is a sense of excitement and engagement pervading the work that is conveyed to the students. Assessment is also very good and contributes significantly to students' progress because students know accurately how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In addition, teachers give generous time to their students outside of lessons and provide trips to Amsterdam and Paris that enrich students' experience very well. They also promote work-related learning well so that students are aware of the importance of art in the modern world of work.
150. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by studying all these aspects within the chosen topics. Religious art and architecture are well integrated into appropriate topics. Vast displays of students' work create interest and inspiration, and enhance the school environment. However, provision for ceramics and three-dimensional work in general is inadequate and limits the range of students' explorations. There is a dire need for more storage space to accommodate collected work without damage.
151. Leadership is excellent. There is clear vision and immense enthusiasm for the subject that are transferred to the students. Management is very good and there is very supportive teamwork from all the teachers. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good because all the very good features mentioned in the previous report have been maintained and standards are higher.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' very good attitudes provide a positive approach to learning.
- The teaching of performance activities is very good and students' responses are excellent.
- There are good facilities for music technology.
- Students need more facilities for individual listening and performance.

Commentary

152. There has not been a sufficient number of entries at AS/A level to enable any objective judgement to be made about examination standards. Two students were entered for music technology in 2004 whilst two more pursued music studies off-site by visiting a nearby school. The music technology students achieved provisional results of C and D. Currently there are three students in Year 12 following music and one in Year 13 following music technology.
153. Observation of lessons and evidence from recordings indicate that students' standards overall are above average and they achieve well. Students in Year 12 are very adept at grasping technical and analytical principles. Their practical standards, as exemplified in a jazz workshop and in activity investigating minimalist techniques, are well above average. They are extremely convincing, most competent and talk very well and freely about their work. They have very good knowledge and understanding specific to the jazz style, working easily with chords and structure. The development of improvisatory skills is progressing well and the students are engrossed in their work. In Year 13 improvisatory skills are also well developed and form a good basis for the extended composition. Recordings of recent student activity using music technology show good understanding and competence in techniques, to both record and mix down live performances in making realisations of music for brass ensemble.
154. Teaching and learning are good overall. The students interact excellently with the teachers. Relationships are very good and are particularly good in supporting learning. Through their performance skills, the teachers are able to bring considerable strengths to the teaching and the students clearly have a high regard for them, responding with initiative to the teachers' leads. The teaching is at its best in the performance workshop situations, being most effective in developing the students' skills. Sometimes, in less practical situations, such as listening and analysis, there is not enough vigour in the preparation and delivery by teachers and there is little evidence of students giving sufficient time to listening as an individual activity.
155. Facilities for individual study in listening and instrumental activity are unsatisfactory. The existing instrumental practice rooms are unsuitable. Technology and keyboard work is limited to a room in between the main teaching rooms; it is not sound proof and its use depends upon the wider timetable.
156. Leadership is good. Sensible decisions have been made about the wisdom of trying to run two parallel courses in the same year. Considerable expenditure has been made in equipping for technology in music and resources for learning are good, although space is a problem. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus for this inspection was on sports studies. The AVCE course in travel and tourism was also sampled. A Year 13 group experienced very good teaching. Planning and preparation were excellent, ICT presentations were very clear and students' learning was greatly enhanced.

Standards were below average but students were achieving well because of very good teaching. Unfortunately the course has not been a popular option and is not being offered in the immediate future.

Sports studies

Provision in sports studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are increasing numbers of students opting for the course.
- The students have a very positive attitude to the subject, which contributes to learning.
- Assessment procedures are basic and need reviewing if student achievement is to improve.
- Resources, including the use of ICT, are unsatisfactory and theory presentations lack variety.
- One teacher is responsible for the delivery of the course and the overload is affecting the planning and preparation time.

Commentary

157. The course has just commenced its second year so there are no A2 results until 2005. There are no AS-level results for 2003 but provisional results for 2004 appear to be below average for boys.
158. Standards are below average but the course is still relatively new. Targets for the three students in Year 13 suggest they should reach average standards overall. Their written and oral work indicates this target is achievable if current improvement is maintained. The 18 Year 12 AS-level students have been studying the course for two weeks. They are very diligent in their listening skills but show more enthusiasm when the session has a practical approach and achievement is enhanced. Considering their starting point, the students are achieving satisfactorily although their standards are below average. The majority of students began the course slightly below the national average for sixth form entry.
159. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The method of conveying information in theory lessons imparts knowledge but is lacking in ICT and other stimulating resources. Students' note-taking off the whiteboard is not guaranteed to be accurate and clear handouts of the work are not produced. Over time these limitations affect students' learning and achievement. A practical session, involving coaching techniques in badminton, stimulated interest and provided variety of approach, which promoted students' progress. The absence of a regular room for theory lessons dissuades the teacher from experimenting with more flexible methods of delivery. Assessment procedures do not provide students with enough information on how to improve their standards.
160. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The department introduced the course a year ago and the subject has provided many students with an opportunity to study at an advanced level. However, the content of the course is managed with some difficulty because the teaching is not shared within the department. Only one teacher conducts the course and because of other commitments there is limited time for planning, preparation and more detailed assessment procedures. The strain of coping with all the teaching at A-level is beginning to affect the management of the course.
161. The sports studies programme was not being taught at the time of the previous inspection.

BUSINESS

Subjects in this curriculum area were not a focus for this inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Subjects in this curriculum area were not a focus for this inspection.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Subjects in this curriculum area were not a focus for this inspection.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	3	3
How inclusive the school is		3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	4	3
Overall standards achieved		3
Pupils' achievement	3	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)		2
Attendance	3	2
Attitudes	3	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	3	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		3
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		3
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
The effectiveness of management	3	3

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).