

INSPECTION REPORT

SIR GRAHAM BALFOUR HIGH SCHOOL

Stafford

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124444

Headteacher: Mr David Hill

Reporting inspector: Mrs Val Lynch
Rgl's OIN: 1475

Dates of inspection: 18th -22nd March 2002

Inspection number: 244654

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr N Cobon
Date of previous inspection:	14 th October 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Sir Graham Balfour School is an 11-18 comprehensive school with 778 pupils and students on roll. It is becoming increasingly popular with parents. The school serves the north part of the town of Stafford and some of the villages towards Eccleshall. Stafford is a fairly affluent area, but the school serves an area where there are significant pockets of social and economic deprivation. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average because unemployment figures in Stafford are low. Attainment of pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 was broadly in line with the national average when they joined the school. However, the attainment of pupils currently in Years 9, 10 and 11 and those who left in recent years was below the national average when they joined the school. The proportion of pupils on the special educational needs register is below the national average, but the proportion of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need is above the national average. These pupils have a particularly wide range of needs. A very small percentage of pupils comes from ethnic minority groups. Although a few of these do not have English as their home language, none are at the early stages of learning English. After five years of planning, which created significant extra work for the school, the school has moved into brand new buildings funded through a private finance initiative.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school that has improved remarkably since the previous inspection. Pupils whose attainment was below the national average when they joined the school reach standards that are in line with the national average by the end of Year 9. GCSE results are below the national average, but they are better than other Staffordshire schools with similar results at the end of Year 9. Teaching is now good and pupils enjoy coming to school. Overall, leadership and management are very good. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards in ICT, business education and drama are exceptionally good.
- There are good arrangements in place to make sure that pupils of all abilities make good progress.
- Teaching is good, particularly of literacy and numeracy and ICT.
- Attendance is very good because the school does all it can to make sure pupils come to school.
- Behaviour is good and pupils generally have a positive attitude to their learning.
- The leadership of the headteacher is inspirational and he has very good support from the senior management team and governors.
- Accommodation and resources for learning are very good.

What could be improved

- Standards in music across the school and in English and science in Years 10 and 11 are not high enough.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to understand and appreciate cultures other than their own.
- The personal, social and moral education programme does not sufficiently meet the needs of pupils.
- Not all middle managers take responsibility for standards and the curriculum in their subject.
- The school has not identified how it can contribute to pupils' spiritual development.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement has been very good. Results, attendance and behaviour, and teaching have all substantially improved at a time when the school has also been managing its involvement in a major project.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and sixth form students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	C	D	D	D
A-levels/AS-levels	A	B	D	

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

Test results at the end of Year 9 are in line with the national average. Pupils' achievements in the first three years from when they join the school are good. Results in mathematics and science are better than in English. Girls do slightly better than boys, but boys are doing better than boys nationally. GCSE have improved steadily over the last five years. Girls do much better than boys, as they have in recent years. Both test results at the end of Year 9 and GCSE results in 2001 were well below similar schools nationally, but were better than similar schools locally. The school set challenging targets for GCSE results in 2001 and results were slightly below its target. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Some pupils, including those with special educational needs, reach standards that are better than expected. The quality of work seen in lessons is better than the test and examination results, confirming that the standards of pupils joining the school are gradually improving. Although girls do better than boys in their GCSE examinations, there is little difference in all years in the work seen in lessons. Pupils whose home language is not English make equally good progress as their peers. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards their individual targets, both for learning and behaviour.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are very enthusiastic about their new building and have very positive attitudes in lessons, especially when teaching is very good.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Most pupils are polite, helpful and friendly and behave well, both in lessons and in their free time.
Personal development and relationships	Satisfactory. Relationships between pupils and staff and between pupils themselves are good. However, there have been occasions when a few pupils have shown insensitivity towards others.
Attendance	Very good. The school is in the top 25 per cent of schools nationally for attendance.

Attitudes and behaviour are better than they were at the last inspection. Pupils are generally positive about school and about learning. Behaviour in lessons is usually very good, although some pupils do misbehave when teaching is not as good as it could be. Behaviour outside the classroom is generally good, particularly at lunchtime when it is good to see pupils freely allowed to use the building and computers. There are a few who do not respect the feelings or beliefs of others and make racist remarks, although pupils generally get on very well together. Attendance is very good, a big improvement on the last inspection. A small number of pupils still have poor attendance despite the best efforts of the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good, enabling pupils to make good progress. It has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Teaching, overall, in drama, business education and ICT is very good. Teaching in English, maths, science, art, modern foreign languages and physical education is good. In history and geography, teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, where it is nevertheless satisfactory. It is also satisfactory in religious education. Teaching in music is poor. All departments develop literacy skills in their teaching and do this well, apart from music, which does not. There is not quite the same clarity about how departments will develop numeracy skills. Some teachers still lack confidence about using ICT in their teaching. Good planning in nearly all lessons helps pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding based on what they have previously achieved. Teachers have high expectations that challenge pupils to produce very good work. Because teachers establish good relationships, pupils are well motivated and the quality of learning is good. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught and make good progress. Pupils identified as being particularly able are recognised and special arrangements made.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The school provides a curriculum that meets the particular needs of all its pupils, except in music and in some elements of religious education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The school provides a range of learning opportunities for pupils with special educational needs and ensures they participate fully in all that the school has to offer.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	No pupils are at the early stage of learning English. They have every opportunity that is available to their peers and participate enthusiastically in the school.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory: Provision for social development is very good and for moral development it is good. Opportunities for cultural development do not take account of the contribution from other cultures. Provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory because the school has not identified exactly how this might be done.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school continues to be a very caring community. Teachers willingly give of their time to help and support pupils.

The school continues to have an effective partnership with parents. Arrangements for GCSE music are unsatisfactory because there is not enough time on the timetable. Part of the agreed syllabus for religious education in Year 9 is incomplete and the time allocation for GCSE religious education is low for the Year 10 short course. There is very good attendance and behaviour because there are clear and well-thought-out procedures to encourage these and good work habits.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Inspirational leadership by the headteacher and very good management by senior staff has transformed the school over the last five years.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Their willingness to take responsibility for the building of a new school is a great credit to them. They can now play a greater role in critically evaluating data and plans for the curriculum.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. There is good monitoring and evaluation at a whole school level, but not enough work is done in departments, particularly in monitoring teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school has achieved so much and yet has never had an overspend.

Leadership and management are real strengths of the school and, although there is more to be done, what has been achieved since the previous inspection is exceptional. The school has sufficient well-qualified and experienced staff, although there is no specialist teacher for religious education. Accommodation is excellent, but there is not enough room in the dining room as many pupils and students take a school lunch. Resources are very good, including computers and technical equipment. The school applies best value principles very effectively.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • Pupils make good progress. • The school has high expectations. • The school is well managed and led. • Teachers' expectations are high. • The school is approachable if they have questions or problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework that is set. • The information they are given on their children's progress.

The response to the questionnaire was low at 17 per cent, 134 of those distributed, and only 28 parents attended the parents' meeting. The majority of parents are satisfied with the standards achieved and other aspects of the work of the school. The areas that parents had concerns about include homework and information about progress. Parents also indicated that they are worried about the use that the community could make of the new facilities because the letting charges to use the new school building are so high. The inspection team investigated parents' issues and found that, with the exception of religious education and music, homework in Years 10 and 11 was set which was relevant and of the appropriate amount. In Years 7 to 9 it is not always set in line with the homework timetable and the quality is inconsistent. There is not enough homework in some subjects, especially for higher attaining pupils. There are no secure procedures for making sure that pupils write down their homework and maintain their school diaries. The quality of information parents receive about the children's progress is not as good as it could be because reports do not contain enough detailed information.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

SIR GRAHAM BALFOUR SCHOOL

The sixth form of 67 students is small in comparison with other school sixth forms. Year 12 is particularly small because only a small proportion of pupils achieved the five or more A*-C grades in GCSE examinations required to study advanced courses. There are nearly twice as many female students as male. Two students have a Statement of Special Educational Need. The school is able to sustain a small sixth form and a wide range of courses because of the arrangement in Stafford where the six 11-18 schools work together to provide some courses in their own schools and some at the Chetwynd Centre. These include advanced and intermediate vocational courses. In 1998 and 1999, a high proportion of more able pupils in Year 11 chose to go to the local further education college because they had negative views of what the sixth form was like at the time. In 2000, students joining the sixth form were from the full range of ability.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Students do well in the sixth form and the arrangements made within the town of Stafford are very cost-effective. Teaching and assessment are very good. Very few students drop out of their courses and attendance to lessons is very good. Although results, overall, have been slightly below the national average, standards of work seen during the inspection were much better than this and very good overall.

Strengths

- Examination results in English, performing arts and geography are good.
- Teaching is very good.
- Students have very mature attitudes to their work.
- Subject teachers show concern for the progress of their students at both a class and an individual level.

What could be improved

- The range of opportunities provided outside taught courses is limited.
- There is no permanent head of the sixth form so the curriculum and arrangements in the sixth form are underdeveloped.
- There is little co-ordination of academic and personal support.
- Careers education and guidance is insufficient.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Standards in the current Year 13 are above the national average. Students achieve extremely well compared with their prior attainment. Teaching and assessment are very good.
Biology	Very Good. Students reach standards above the national average and achieve well. Teaching and learning are very good and frequently excellent. Leadership provides excellent educational direction.
Geography	Very Good. The excellent subject knowledge and very high quality teaching result in very well prepared students who are enthusiastic about their studies.
English	Very Good. Attainment in lessons is above the national average and results in 2001 were well above this. Teaching is very good.
Performing arts	Very Good. The new course introduced in 2000 provides excellent opportunities for students to develop their talents across dance, drama and music. Teaching challenges students to work at the highest level.

Work in a small number of other subjects taught by teachers was sampled during the week. In chemistry and physics, standards are in line with national average. Teaching and learning are often inspirational in chemistry and usually very good in physics. Teaching is very good in French and standards are above the national average.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Subject teachers provide very good support and guidance, but tutors have only recently started to provide support for students' academic and personal development. Careers education relies too heavily on the student to seek help and advice for future study or career opportunities. Although attendance in lessons is well recorded, overall recording of attendance is unsatisfactory
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good achievement and teaching have been maintained. While there are a wide range of good quality courses, too little attention has been given to what else could and should be provided. The temporary head of sixth form has shown initiative and commitment in trying to address some of these issues. The accommodation for the sixth form does not encourage students to study at school.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The choice of courses is good and information about them is clear and helpful. • The school helps students to settle in to the sixth form. • Very good teaching challenges students to do their best most of the time. • Students feel encouraged to study and work independently. • Work is well assessed and areas for improvement are indicated. • Students feel informed about their progress in subjects. • Teachers provide help and support when students have difficulties. • Students feel that they are treated as responsible young adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The advice they should be given. • Careers advice on opportunities when they leave school. • Some students feel that the school does not provide a good range of worthwhile activities. • The school does not always listen and respond to the views of its students.

Just over half of the students in the sixth form returned the questionnaire. Overall, students are positive and happy about most aspects of the sixth form. In the areas that students feel could be improved, inspectors agree that there are weaknesses in the personal support and guidance that students receive. However, when the issue about being listened to was investigated, the consensus of opinion of students was that their teachers were good listeners and that since the 'personal review' with form tutors has been recently introduced, there is another opportunity for staff to listen more and offer advice. The enrichment opportunities outside lessons are narrow and not all students participate in them. The effectiveness of careers education and guidance is satisfactory overall, but has weaknesses and students are correct to want this aspect improved.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

- 1 The attainment of pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 was broadly in line with the national average when they joined the school. In the past when pupils joined the school aged 11 their attainment has been below the national average. This means that the results achieved by Year 9 pupils in 2001, which were in line with the national average, represented good progress. GCSE results have been below the national average, but results have improved slowly but surely since 1996, despite a dip in 2001. In looking at the standards in the school and comparing them to the national average it is important to note that year groups are small and that three or four pupils can make the difference between being above or below the national average.

Test results at the end of Year 9

- 2 Over the last three years these have usually been in line with the national average, although they did dip below this in 1999 when English results were very low. Results in English in 2001 were again below the national average and have varied too much, year on year, over the last four years. Results in maths and science are in line with the national average and have steadily improved since 1997. Teacher assessments in art and music are below the national average. In all other subjects they are in line or above the national average. In 2001, girls did very slightly better than boys in English and maths and boys did better than girls in science. Although girls continue to do slightly better than boys, boys are doing relatively better than girls when their performance is compared with boys and girls nationally. This represents good achievement by boys. Lower ability and average ability pupils make satisfactory progress. Higher ability pupils and some average ability pupils make good progress in maths and science, but could do better in English. Results are below those in similar schools, but are better than in similar schools locally.

GCSE results

- 3 Standards at the end of Year 11 are below the national average. However, there has been an overall trend towards improvement over the last five years. The school's own analysis of results in 2001 indicate that progress from Key Stage 3 to GCSE was not quite as good as it could have been. Girls do much better than boys and always have done in recent years. Results in child development, drama, French, history, ICT, physical education and textiles are above the national average. Results in English, science, German and music are below the national average. Although it seems that too many pupils left with no qualifications in 2001, all of these pupils had experienced particular difficulties in their final year and their attendance had suffered. Results in 2001 were below similar schools and were also below what could be expected on the basis of the Key Stage 3 results in 1999. However, results are better than those in similar schools locally.

Progress from results and towards targets

- 4 Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 show that pupils make good progress in the three years from when they join the school. Because the school now has accurate information on pupils' achievements in their primary schools, they have set challenging targets for test results in 2002 and 2003 based on the fact that the

standards of these year groups when they joined the school were better than in previous years. The school set challenging targets for GCSE results in 2001 and just missed the bottom figure in the range they set. Thirty seven per cent of pupils gained five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C. When these pupils joined the school, results in a national test taken in Year 7 indicated that 22 per cent could expect to achieve these grades. This represents good progress across the five years they spent in the school.

Standards of work seen in lessons

- 5 The quality of work seen throughout the school is better than the test and examination results indicate, confirming that groups coming through the school are gradually improving. Although girls do better than boys in their GCSE examinations, there is little difference in all years in the work seen in lessons. In lessons in Years 7 to 9 if there was any poor behaviour it was boys who were involved. In Years 10 and 11, although boys work hard in lessons, they are not as committed to their learning as the girls. Also it is mainly boys who experience behavioural or other problems and do not fully complete their coursework. The standard of work seen and the progress made in lessons is very good in drama and ICT and is good in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and physical education. In all these lessons, progress is good for pupils across the ability range. Standards of work and progress in lessons in music is unsatisfactory. Pupils whose home language is not English make equally as good progress as their peers. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards their individual targets, both for learning and behaviour.

Standards achieved by pupils with special educational needs

- 6 At the age of 14 the standards pupils reach are in line with what would be expected on the basis of what they were able to do when they joined the school. However, there are many examples of pupils in Year 9 attaining results in mathematics, English and science that are in line with results nationally and these pupils make very good progress. In Years 10 and 11 they maintain their good progress and many achieve success in their GCSE examinations. Some pupils' progress is very good and they pass GCSE examinations in a broad range of subjects frequently at the higher B and C grades. The special educational needs department has carefully monitored attainment in reading of pupils who enter the school with poor reading skills and its records demonstrate the good progress made by the majority of such pupils.

Standards in literacy

- 7 Overall, standards of literacy are sufficient to support learning in different subjects. In Years 7 and 8, standards are good both as a result of increased levels of attainment on entry to the school and the impact of the national Key Stage 3 literacy strategy. In speaking and listening, pupils use relevant terminology in most subjects, ask questions to further learning and participate confidently in group discussions. In writing, most pupils have developed appropriate skills and control to write in the range of forms and styles required in different subjects. In religious education, pupils write in an increasingly complex variety of text types for different audiences as they progress through the school. In French and German, pupils adopt a widening range of styles throughout Years 7 to 9. In ICT, pupils write effective extended evaluations of their work, while in design technology pupils write successfully in appropriate forms such as Year 11 pupils writing formal letters to firms requesting materials to use in coursework. Pupils demonstrate a growing

ability to read for information and use a range of techniques to identify, highlight and extract essential content from longer texts. Pupils have a good understanding of subject-specific vocabulary and in history and geography they make frequent and relevant references to glossaries. In science, pupils isolate key sections of texts and make regular use of word-walls and other aids.

Standards of numeracy

- 8 Standards of numeracy are good because, although there is no whole school numeracy policy, there are good arrangements for teaching numeracy across the curriculum. In mathematics, lessons in Years 7 and 8 make very good use of resources, time and a variety of numeracy activities to enhance learning in all aspects of the subject. In history, geography, science and ICT, pupils can confidently handle any graph work that is needed. In design and technology, pupils measure lengths of wood and plastic accurately to help manufacture items. In geography they measure accurately and multiply by scale factors to convert map measurements into real distances. They are encouraged to estimate to check for reasonableness. In history, good provision is made to order chronologically and make use of data grids.

Standards in information and communication technology

- 9 Standards in ICT are good because the very good teaching in ICT lessons is complemented by the use of computers in other subjects. Most pupils can use computers appropriately for drawing, communicating, presenting, investigating, searching for information, creating and performing. They are particularly good at using computers in art, business education, mathematics, modern foreign languages, music and in the special educational needs department. The design and technology department has equipment for controlling, but pupils do not get to use it enough. The English department does not use pupils' ICT skills to enhance their work in the subject. Most departments are unaware of the ICT levels at which the pupils should be working.

Sixth form

- 10 The average points score for candidates entered for two or more A levels or AS equivalents was above the national average in 1999. It fell slightly below the national average in 2000 and further declined in 2001. One pupil followed the GNVQ advanced course and was successful. In 1999 female students did better than males and in 2000 it was the reverse. In 2001 female students did much better than males, particularly in chemistry. In the performing arts and English literature, where groups were all girls, results were good. Only girls achieved the higher grades in general studies. Students with a Statement of Special Educational Need continue to make good progress and gain commendable results. There are examples of students who had low reading ages when they joined the school now following an advanced vocational course, having achieved the intermediate standard in Year 12.

Standards in lessons and progress

- 11 The quality of work seen in the sixth form is much better than the examination results in 2001 would indicate. Students make good progress in lessons in English, maths, sciences, geography and very good progress in music and expressive arts. Work of a high standard was seen in French. Students with special educational needs achieve well in their chosen subjects. There are no differences in the work

seen between male and female students in all subjects.

Standards in key skills

- 12 Standards in literacy and numeracy are good. Standards in ICT are satisfactory, but students have not benefited from the very good teaching that now occurs in the main school. These key skills support students' work in other subjects.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

- 13 Attitudes and behaviour are better than they were at the last inspection. The new school building and all the new resources make pupils feel really good about their school and there is a renewed sense of pride, interest and enthusiasm for all that the school has to offer. Parents also expressed their delight with the new facilities and the very good impact they are having on learning and the quality of school life.

Attitudes to learning.

- 14 Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good especially when the teaching is very good. Attitudes are best in English, physical education, ICT, business studies, science and drama. Pupils are quick to question and discuss issues to clarify and deepen their knowledge. They respond to challenge and can concentrate for long periods clearly enjoying their work. This was seen in a Year 7 English lesson when pupils made very good use of inference and deduction to build up character portraits from the book *Skellig* they were analysing. They work best when they are given very clear instructions and know exactly what to do and have time limits for activities. There was also a sense of urgency in a Year 11 revision lesson as pupils realise the importance of preparation for their examinations and show mature and sensible attitudes. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils responded well to the opportunities for independent working as pupils completed their coursework. However, there are not enough of these opportunities for pupils to gain greater independence in learning by carrying out research, conducting investigations, gathering evidence and having greater freedom of choice in learning across the curriculum.

Behaviour

- 15 Behaviour is good and most pupils are polite, helpful and friendly. Behaviour in lessons is generally very good. When behaviour was not up to the normally high standards it can be traced back to weaknesses in teaching and behaviour management in a small number of lessons in Years 7 to 9. In these lessons there were high noise levels; pupils were not interested or involved in their work. A small number of boys call out and use inappropriate language and disrupt the flow of the lesson and think that it is 'cool' not to work. Behaviour outside the classroom is generally good. The majority of pupils enjoy their free time sitting in classrooms and the seating areas. They behave very responsibly when trusted to use the computers. Behaviour in the dining room is good in what are very crowded and cramped conditions because the facility is so popular with pupils and students. In the playground most pupils behave well. They play football in a good-natured way and enjoy being with their friends. Behaviour at break and lunch times was not as good on a wet day when a small number of younger pupils were squabbling and clearly irritating each other. Staff were quickly on hand to deal with incidents effectively. Some pupils of different ethnic heritage confirmed that they are occasionally subjected to racist remarks and bad language by a small number of immature boys who cause nuisance rather than upset.

- 16 Behaviour is improving and there has been a marked reduction in sanctions in the past year. Pupils told inspectors how all staff strictly enforced the behaviour policy. The level of bullying is very low and when it is reported, senior managers deal with it swiftly and effectively. Older pupils also play a useful role in effective peer mediation and look after younger, more vulnerable pupils. There has been a dramatic reduction in fixed term exclusions following the successful launch of the inclusion room. The present level of exclusion is well below similar schools.

Relationships

- 17 Relationships between pupils and staff are good and there is mutual respect and a shared commitment to succeed. Personal development is satisfactory, with strengths and weaknesses. Pupils said that there were a lot of things that they could do. For example, they can be part of the school parliament, write in Balfour news, lead assemblies, perform in showcases and take part in extra-curricular activities. These all help pupils to grow in maturity, confidence and develop greater responsibility. The work experience programme is particularly good as pupils make their own arrangements and end up in some exciting places, such as dancing in Cambridge or doing clerical work in the House of Lords. Personal development does have weaknesses as some pupils are not respectful of the feelings, values and beliefs of others and they do not understand the impact of their actions on others. The personal, social and moral education programme does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in their learning. This is because it is a commercial scheme and it is not sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of pupils at this particular school.

Attendance

- 18 Attendance is very good and is a big improvement on the last inspection. A small number of pupils have attendance problems and despite the best efforts of the school they still refuse to come to school. The rate of unauthorised absence is running at the national average level. Pupils are generally on time for school and are punctual for lessons.

Sixth Form

- 19 Students are generally very positive about the sixth form and the teaching and the support they receive from their subject teachers. Attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons are usually very good. Students are keen to learn, work hard and do their best. They enjoy the relaxed atmosphere and like being treated as young adults and being trusted to go home and study.
- 20 Attitudes are more negative about their student study base. The open area makes then highly visible with little privacy, so they cannot relax. Any noise students make travels to the library below, disturbing others working there. This puts constraints on students who prefer to go home to work. The small seating area in the dining room is cramped and open, again offering little space or privacy. The student survey showed that they did not think that the school listens to them, but when this issue was investigated further, the consensus of student opinion was that the school was in fact listening more now. This had improved recently with the introduction of tutor counselling and the action planning interview programme.

- 21 Personal development is satisfactory. Students have very good mature working relationships with their teachers. The opportunities for students to help younger pupils in lessons are considered by them to be one of the best options to extend their personal development. Most participants are happy to help. The opportunity to arrange their own leavers' ball is causing excitement and some democratic decision-making and effective division of labour to manage all the arrangements. Students enjoy charity work and try out some fun approaches like the 'slave for a day' campaign. The young enterprise scheme was largely successful for the girls who were involved in their profitable card company. Some students would prefer a better range of worthwhile activities outside lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 22 The quality of teaching is good, enabling pupils to learn well and make good progress. Well over half the lessons seen were at least good and this represents a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. There are still inconsistencies within and across subjects. The improvement has come as a result of the considerable time and effort which the school has invested in the monitoring of teaching by senior managers.
- 23 Teaching overall in drama, business education and ICT is very good. It is good in English, mathematics, science, art, modern foreign languages and physical education. In history and geography, teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, where it is nevertheless satisfactory. It is also satisfactory in religious education. Teaching in music is poor. During the inspection examples of excellent teaching were seen in mathematics, science, ICT, history, French, physical education and drama. Nearly all the lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory were lessons taught by teachers who will not be continuing in the school after the end of the summer term.
- 24 Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Enthusiasm is communicated to pupils, inspiring in them an eagerness to learn. In modern languages, teachers' fluency and apt choice of vocabulary give pupils a positive example to follow. In art, ICT, physical education and drama, teachers are very successful in inspiring pupils through demonstration, giving them a clear picture of what they are meant to do. This quality is lacking in music, where pupils show little enthusiasm.
- 25 The school has good strategies for the development of literacy. A whole-school training day focused on speaking and listening and spelling and took the appropriate view that much of the work undertaken on speaking and listening was actually about issues of teaching and learning. All departments produced initial audits on literacy in their curriculum areas and have since produced further progress reports. Literacy summer schools have been well attended and have involved good liaison with primary schools. The implementation of literacy progress units has been successful despite the attendant logistical difficulties of timetabling the sessions. Several departments have adopted elements of national guidance on literacy in schemes of work. Although the school does not have a numeracy policy, pupils have the necessary skills to cope with demands made of them in lessons.
- 26 Good planning means that pupils are able to develop their knowledge and understanding based on what they have previously achieved. This is particularly effective in art where an improvement in standards is being brought about through the systematic teaching of basic skills. Through meticulous planning of materials in

a Year 11 science lessons, pupils deepened their understanding of nuclear cell division.

- 27 Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. The very good teaching in drama has brisk pace and involves all pupils, challenging them to produce very good work. An excellent lesson with Year 9 explored tension between the chief characters in *Macbeth*, with pupils demonstrating their drama skills very effectively to create the atmosphere. Challenge is also at the heart of lessons in business education and pupils respond to the rigour and demanding nature of lessons. The high expectations in ICT have led to gifted and talented pupils in Year 9 being put on a special programme of extra work.
- 28 Because teachers establish good relationships, pupils are well motivated and the quality of learning is good. Pupils in an excellent Year 11 ICT lesson were alert and interested with a sense of urgency and keenness in their revision work. The encouraging manner of the teacher in a Year 8 French lesson helped less confident pupils to present their ideas to the rest of the class.
- 29 The effective use of assessment shows pupils how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve. In ICT and drama the very good checking of pupils' understanding means they have a very clear idea of how well they are working. This is also a strong feature of English teaching and a Year 10 class studying poems from different cultures were helped to raise their expectations by being helpfully reminded of what was needed to achieve a grade B. This is also a good feature of teaching in science, art and religious education in Years 7 to 9, and modern foreign languages. Work in mathematics for pupils who are below average is very well suited and, as a result, pupils are very much involved in their own learning. In religious education, music, history and geography, teachers do not pay enough attention to checking pupils' progress in lessons and, as a result, pupils are unclear about how well they have done. In design and technology, pupils are all expected to do the same work with insufficient attention given to what is more suited to their ability.
- 30 Parents expressed concern about the amount and regularity of homework being set. Inspectors found that with the exception of music and religious education in Years 10 and 11, an appropriate amount of relevant homework is set.
- 31 Pupils with special educational needs are well taught and they make good progress. Work in lessons is well-matched to their needs. There is a planned programme to withdraw pupils for English and mathematics and for those pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour. It is very successful because of the quality of liaison between class and link teachers, support staff and the special educational needs co-ordinator. Pupils' individual education plans contain targets of which pupils are aware that are used to measure progress, although short term targets are not sufficiently precise. When support staff, who know the pupils well, are present in lessons they keep notes on pupils which are shared with the co-ordinator and teachers. However, targets are not sufficiently practical for teachers to implement when support staff are not present. The practice of sharing these targets for learning with all pupils is inconsistent.
- 32 Pupils identified as being gifted and talented are taught very well. Their needs are recognised by departments and arrangements made for extra work and early entry to GCSE in mathematics, science, drama, music and astronomy. Of the pupils for whom English is an additional language, none is in the early stage of language acquisition and their learning matched that of their peers.

Sixth form

- 33 Teaching in the sixth form is very good. Of the 22 lessons observed, 91 per cent were judged good or better and six of them were excellent. There were excellent lessons in performing arts, science and geography and one each of satisfactory and unsatisfactory lessons in geography. Teachers are expert in their field and share enthusiasm with their students. Students have access to a very high degree of professionalism in performing arts across all the three disciplines of dance, drama and music, which helps them to develop their own expertise.
- 34 In mathematics lessons, teachers are very well prepared for their lessons. There is very good use of time and very good assessment. Their own knowledge of mathematics is very good and they are thus able to challenge students to a greater depth of thinking. English lessons are very well structured to include assessment objectives that are very effective in raising standards of work. A wide variety of activities allows students time to consider their own views before testing them out in small group and whole class debate. A lively pace is maintained as students move swiftly from one activity to the next.
- 35 The quality of teachers' assessment and the very productive use of time and resources are outstanding features in science and performing arts. Students were very enthusiastic about a Year 12 physics lesson introduced with a PowerPoint presentation. Performing arts lessons have the atmosphere of a professional theatre workshop with students taking the lead in developing themes and performance.
- 36 Teachers are very effective in their skilful questioning of students in support of their learning. Where this level of rigour and focus is missing, as it was in a Year 13 geography lesson, students do not play their part in the learning process.

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

- 37 The school provides a curriculum that meets the aptitudes and particular needs of its pupils, except for music and elements of religious education. The arrangements for GCSE music are unsatisfactory. Lessons take place after school and the time allocation is too low. Part of the agreed syllabus for religious education in Year 9 is incomplete and the time allocation for the GCSE course is low for the Year 10 short course. In Years 10 and 11, in addition to the National Curriculum subjects, there are other subjects including business studies, child development, drama and dance and some GNVQs. The curriculum is under regular review so that it continues to offer the widest possible choice for GCSE and the work related curriculum. In planning for GCSE courses in 2001/2002 the school pre-empted the legislation allowing greater flexibility in Years 10 and 11 from September 2002. An above average number of pupils are disapplied from modern foreign languages and design technology this year. This is not what was intended by the current guidance. There is also an equal opportunities issue in music because only pupils who play a musical instrument can take the GCSE course as there is not enough time available for others to do so.
- 38 The school has effective strategies in place for teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Pupils are able to use their computer skills in many subject areas. The work-related curriculum is developing, but currently is part of the school's provision for pupils who would not benefit from a full GCSE programme. This includes a GNVQ in leisure and tourism, child development and the Youth Award

scheme with accreditation for Certificates of Achievements in literacy and numeracy. The school is determined to get as many qualifications as possible for all its pupils and especially those who have learning and personal difficulties. This approach enables pupils to leave school with records of achievement that reflect and value all skills and talents. Some very personalised programmes are designed to meet the needs of individual older pupils. They benefit, therefore, from a specially designed curriculum that successfully combines work-related learning with links with the community and with local employers and effectively prepares pupils for the world of work.

- 39 There are special arrangements for gifted and talented pupils to enable them to take GCSEs like mathematics in Year 9 and pursue more challenging options. Pupils can also select all the three sciences or a statistics course from the current option choices. The school provides a good range of learning opportunities for pupils with special educational needs. The withdrawal programme for English, mathematics, behaviour and dyslexia support is well organised so that pupils have the same curriculum as other pupils, but it is taught at a level that meets their individual needs.
- 40 All the requirements for sex and drugs education are met by the personal, social and moral education. This course does have weaknesses. Because the once-weekly lesson happens at different time in the week it can reduce double lessons to single lessons for practical subjects like art, design technology and science. When this happens there is not enough time for practical work. The chosen scheme is highly structured and rigidly adhered to. There is too much prescriptive written work and too little active teaching and learning. Personal development is not always effectively extended because opportunities are not identified to address school specific issues nor to provide for moral and cultural development.
- 41 The range of extra-curricular activities is good and offers some interesting enrichment opportunities, such as the Wayfarer's club or the Egyptian Historical Society. Rock climbing using the new climbing wall is very popular. Provision for sports activities is good, but pupil participation in music is low.
- 42 There are very good constructive relationships with partner institutions, especially primary schools. There are especially good links for special educational needs and this helps to target support more effectively. There are good links with other local high schools, the Chetwynd Centre and Stafford College as part of the local consortium arrangement.
- 43 Links with the community are diminishing as letting charges charged through the Private Finance Initiative have risen dramatically. Concerns were expressed both at the parents' evening and elsewhere that community spirit is at risk as local groups pull out from using the facilities. The local summer play scheme has been relocated purely for cost reasons and there are fears that the good community relations built up over the years will disappear. The school takes an active part in the Staffordshire Business Partnership that helps to sponsor projects. The geography Stafford market survey was funded in this way and the young enterprise 'Card Company' in the sixth form has been largely successful. Links with local industry are not used sufficiently to enrich subjects like business studies and the Youth Award. Careers education and guidance is good and there is a good careers education programme which is well planned. There is a successful work experience programme for pupils in Year 10. Careers education is well supported by a very helpful and highly effective Careers Officer.

Spiritual, moral social and cultural education

- 44 The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall and has changed little since the last inspection. Two of the main aims are: 'to develop the social, physical, cultural, spiritual and moral potential of the individual' and 'to develop understanding of the interdependence of individuals, groups and nations'. Not enough emphasis is given to these aims in planning the curriculum.
- 45 The provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory and the school does not meet the statutory requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship. Some of the year group weekly assemblies seen, however, were of high quality, delivering strong messages that caused pupils to think and reflect about such things as loneliness or making snap judgements. Spiritual development tends to happen incidentally rather than being planned for. For instance, absolute joy occurred in a geography lesson when coastal photos were examined in detail for colour and beauty. This improved the quality of learning considerably. There are insufficient opportunities made in the main school for similar stimulating and invigorating learning to boost the spiritual dimension.
- 46 Moral development is good and there are very clear expectations for behaviour and dress code. This underpins the recent improvements in behaviour. Staff are good role models and remind pupils about what is right and wrong. Assemblies have strong moral messages and pupils confirmed that these provide good guidance and information on a number of moral issues like the environment, animal cruelty and good citizenship. Opportunities are taken when they arise in lessons. For instance, in an English lesson pupils explored contrasting arguments on abortion when evaluating a leaflet. The taught personal, social and moral education programme is too rigid and the teaching does not actively address real issues in school like racism, developing respect for values and other beliefs and the 'laddish' culture some boys have.
- 47 Social development is very good and there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to work together co-operatively and productively in subjects like drama, ICT, science and modern foreign languages. Other very good opportunities for extending social development include activity days with many trips out, community service, games and sports and a good range of extra-curricular activities including some unusual ones. The residential trip in Year 9 and work experience in Year 10 extend personal development outside school and help pupils cope with many new challenges. The school parliament, the opportunities for pupils to train in conflict resolution and mentoring and the charity fund-raising all provide some very good chances for pupils to increase their social awareness. The opportunities provided for the social development of pupils who are at risk of being excluded from school are outstanding through the use of the inclusion room.
- 48 Cultural development is satisfactory. There are theatre trips, French and German exchanges and good use of classical literature, composers and artists. The main weakness is that the school is not sufficiently helping to prepare pupils for living in a multi-cultural society. The cultural awareness element in the personal, social and moral education programme is too narrow and prescriptive and does not help to value other cultures as an opportunity for life enrichment. The missing aspects of the religious education curriculum include the study of the role of different religious leaders. There are too few multi-cultural texts used in English or available in the learning resource centre. The cultures of pupils of different ethnic heritage are supported, but are not celebrated. There are missed opportunities for further subject

enrichment in geography, music, ICT, dance and drama. In art it is developing. A recent project involving Aboriginal art excited and inspired some very good work.

Sixth form

- 49 Overall, curricular provision is satisfactory. The sixth form is open to any student who would benefit from participation in any courses offered. While the recruitment rate into the current Year 12 is low, it is reasonable given their GCSE results when they were in Year 11. Previous recruitment rates have been satisfactory and nearly all students complete their courses. The school does not normally recruit students from other schools because all local schools are part of a post-16 consortium arrangement and have good links with the local college.
- 50 There is a separate building, the Chetwynd Centre, where a number of courses are taught and students attend this centre and other schools if their chosen courses are based there. These arrangements allow students to choose from a wide range of courses well matched to their needs. In addition to A-level courses, vocational courses are provided at both intermediate and advanced level.
- 51 While there is good provision for taught courses, planned provision for enrichment activities such as personal and social education, careers guidance, key skills and extra-curricular activities is much less well developed. The personal, social and moral education course has only been structured since January, and while this has included arrangements for visiting speakers to talk to students, the nature of the accommodation used for talks has meant that they have been disturbed by younger pupils in the learning resource centre downstairs. Although students applying for university courses have been helped with application forms and taken on one visit to a local university, there has been no planned guidance from the careers adviser for any students or provision for work experience for those not on vocational courses. Youth enterprise has been organised for Year 12, but because the boys' enterprise folded, they now have a general studies lesson instead. All students, whether or not they have taught lessons, do have the opportunity to take an examination in general studies. Some students are involved in musical activities and there have been recent attempts to raise teams in football and netball, but lack of numbers result in limited opportunities.
- 52 A particular strength of the provision for personal and social development is the mentoring which students from Years 12 and 13 offer to younger pupils. They thoroughly enjoy this role as classroom assistants and the pupils being mentored claim they learn much from the students. Students also enhance their skills of communication and ICT in this role by giving PowerPoint presentations in ICT lessons in particular. There is no provision for a daily act of collective worship and statutory requirements for religious education are not met.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

- 53 The school continues to be a caring community where there are clear and well thought out procedures to provide good support for individuals. There is consistent practice to encourage very good attendance, good behaviour and good work habits and pupils' welfare is safeguarded.
- 54 The procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are outstanding. These have helped to increase attendance so that the school is in the top 25 per cent of schools for attendance nationally. This is a very impressive feat and reflects the

efficient following-up of absence from the first day and a hard working education welfare officer does all she can to encourage the small number of poor attenders back to school. During the inspection a full case conference was observed of a pupil who had some real difficulties coping with school life. In the last six months, with the help of external agencies and time and support in the inclusion room, the pupil has made remarkable progress and feels very positive about his future.

- 55 The procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are very good. The behaviour policy is consistently and rigorously enforced and all expectations are very clear. Incidents are carefully logged and sanctions are applied which are good deterrents for the majority of pupils. Persistent offenders are monitored closely. In more extreme cases, especially when pupils are at risk of being excluded, they are referred to staff in the inclusion room where they work under close supervision and regularly make good progress. Anger-management courses are readily available each week and there is clear evidence that pupils who have this support show big improvements in their attitudes and behaviour. These pupils are effectively saved from further disaffection and exclusion. They feel valued and their confidence and self-esteem are restored. When pupils arrive at school with a history of exclusion they are successfully re-integrated back into the main school and seldom re-offend.
- 56 The arrangements for child protection are satisfactory. The designated person operates very effectively and has had some recent training on changes in legislation and plans to attend further training shortly. This will enable her to replace the outdated policy and present all the new procedures to a whole staff training session. All pupils' medical conditions are known and well catered for. There are fewer than the recommended number of fully trained first aiders. The management of health and safety is good and all the regular routine checking systems are in place. Thorough risk assessments, using the Staffordshire guidance and the Private Finance Initiative safety management system, are carried out regularly to ensure that the school is a safe and secure place.
- 57 The procedures for monitoring pupils' personal development are good. Tutors keep personal tracking cards with weekly checks on attendance, punctuality, uniform smartness and use of homework diaries. These provide information for tutor reviews and records are kept as an overview throughout the year. However, tutors do not readily have access to academic information and are not able to advise and support pupils academically. Tutor time is also used inconsistently and tutors do not always use the time as planned. The school offers many different learning support opportunities: the before and after school homework clubs, booster clubs, revision clubs and holiday time classes and summer school. The pastoral support plans, the Year 10 and 11 mentoring and the mentoring of Year 7 by older pupils all help pupils to feel valued. Staff work hard and go out of their way to help pupils.
- 58 The arrangements for pupils with special educational needs are good and care and attention is given so that individual needs are met as fully as possible. The school effectively implements the national strategies for improving literacy and numeracy in the early years of secondary education. Individual education plans give a full picture of the pupil and set challenging but achievable targets. These are reviewed regularly with parents and new goals are set when progress has been made. The school complies with the Code of Practice and statements and reviews are up to date. The arrangements for annual reviews are very good and well supported by external agencies.

Assessment

- 59 The procedures for monitoring pupils' academic performance are satisfactory overall. The school makes good use of information from primary schools to assist in identifying the needs of pupils on entry. Gifted and talented pupils are put on a register and their individual needs are met especially well. For example, in Year 9, pupils are entered for GCSE examinations if they have reached the necessary standard. Further good use of testing when pupils arrive enables the school to put some effective catch-up arrangements in place so that by the end of Year 7 more than three-quarters of pupils achieve the nationally required levels of literacy. This achievement has significant benefits for learning in all subjects and is an important part of the school's drive to raise standards.
- 60 Assessment and monitoring procedures are generally good in Years 10 and 11, but are inconsistent in Years 7 to 9. A comprehensive range of results from national and standardised tests is used to set challenging targets for pupils and departments. Pupils' subject performance is recorded regularly and concerns raised if the performance deteriorates. This helps the school to identify easily where additional support is needed or where an extra level of challenge would boost the predicted grades higher still. This system has only recently been fully implemented, but is already starting to help improve standards and has become an essential tool for staff to track individual pupil's progress.
- 61 In Years 7 to 9 the manual system is too complex and only gives rough indications of how much progress is being made. The school's plan to remedy this by using the same technology as for older pupils is good and will be fully operational shortly. The best assessment procedures are in science, ICT and drama and at a meeting of middle management during the inspection the very good practice was shared to help other departments improve their practice.

Sixth form

Assessment

- 62 Assessment is very good. Although no member of the senior management team has overall responsibility for data analysis and line management arrangements do not give enough emphasis to analysing assessment in the sixth form, there is some very good practice in individual departments. Results from the GCSE examinations in the form of a tried and tested commercial package are used to set targets for students in all subjects. In mathematics and geography, in particular, the high quality individual monitoring and tutoring provides students with a very relevant and valuable individual curriculum.
- 63 Teachers use homework very effectively. They mark it well and most give specific guidance for improvement. Questions from past examination papers are used to give a clear indication of progress towards targets. Students are able to use information from their subject teachers when completing their very useful profile. This new initiative is done each half term in discussion with form tutors and builds up a meaningful picture of the students' progress towards their targets, providing a clear basis for a plan of action.

Advice, support and guidance

- 64 Educational and personal support and guidance for students are satisfactory. There are strengths in academic monitoring by teachers who have very good relationships with students and help them understand their own strengths and weaknesses and give good advice for improvement. Personal support and guidance have recently improved following a decision to use tutor time for student interviews to check and advise on overall progress and personal development. Students do not have formal mentoring arrangements and feel that this would be helpful. Tutor time is not effectively used and most students just chat until their first lesson starts. Students found the sixth form prospectus helpful with good information about the courses available.
- 65 Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are unsatisfactory. Registers do not record where students are at all times to ensure their attendance and safety. Despite this, students' attendance at lessons is monitored carefully both in school and at the Chetwynd Centre.
- 66 The effectiveness of careers education and guidance for future study or careers opportunities is satisfactory overall. Although there is no structured careers programme to follow, students use their own initiative and enlist the help of teachers and the Careers Officer to give them the help and advice they need to fulfil their ambitions. The trip to the Stafford University Open Day was very useful and gave students a taste of higher education and student life.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- 67 The school continues to have an effective partnership with parents. There is clear evidence that as the school continues to improve and grow in confidence, parents have become more supportive. The numbers of parents who want their children to come to the school is increasing. They see the benefits of improved standards and see the new building as the start of a new era for the school.
- 68 The response to the questionnaire was low and only 28 parents attended the parents' meeting. During the inspection, however, many parents of Year 9 pupils were spoken to at the parents' evening and were able to contribute their views in this way. The majority of parents are satisfied with the standards achieved and other aspects of the work of the school. The school's more extensive satisfaction survey confirmed this positive picture. The areas that parents had concerns about include behaviour, homework, information about progress and parents not working closely with the school. Parents also indicated that they are worried that the community may not use the new facilities because the letting charges to use the new school building are so high. They feel that this will stop the school being used as a community resource and are concerned about this.
- 69 The inspection team investigated parents' issues and found that most pupils are well behaved. Misbehaviour is restricted to a small number of individuals who can cause a nuisance and are well known and usually well managed. Homework arrangements are good in Years 10 and 11, but are inconsistent in Years 7 to 9. There is not enough homework in some subjects, especially for higher attaining pupils, and the tasks present little excitement or challenge and are not always an active part of current learning. There are no secure procedures for making sure that pupils write down their homework and maintain their school diaries. This restricts the contribution parents can make to learning at home.

- 70 The quality of information parents receive about the children's progress is unsatisfactory. Short reports only give a very rough snapshot of scores that relate to effort, attainment and behaviour across subjects. The longer annual reports do not report progress effectively and the information is not easy to understand and some of the targets are vague. The self-evaluation by pupils, however, is good. Parents think that the 'meet the tutor' and short report discussion open evenings for Years 7 and 8 in the autumn term are too brief. The new arrangements for full parents' evenings were thought to be a big improvement on the previous crowded hall. Most Year 9 parents felt that they had some very good and informative conversations with teachers and were able to share targets for improvement. The arrangements for involving parents of pupils with special educational needs are very good. When parents cannot come to school, the school goes out of its way to hold the annual reviews in pupils' homes. This is excellent practice and ensures that parents are fully involved in their children's learning.
- 71 The school often seeks parents' views to make sure they are happy with what is being provided. The detailed parent survey that the school has commissioned will pinpoint areas where the partnership with parents can be improved further. The school wants to work more closely with parents and is always trying to find new ways of getting more parents involved in their children's learning. This is commendable practice.
- 72 The quality of other information provided for parents is satisfactory overall. Although Balfour news is a good termly news magazine with a great deal of good information, it does not keep parents closely in touch with up-to-the-minute news and information. The website has useful homework information, but little else to keep parents well informed and up-to-date about school activities. The governors' annual report to parents contains all the required information, but the prospectus has many missing elements. There are many other evenings and opportunities to come to the school. The Year 9 options evening and booklet were commended as very useful and the attendance was high. Parents enjoy getting invitations to school trips, presentation evenings, showcases, art and drama events and sports events and come in large numbers when they are supporting their children.
- 73 The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school is satisfactory and has both strengths and weaknesses. The Parents' Association is a small but growing group who raise funds and provide the school with a busy social life. The school's ferret race is legendary locally! Money is used to provide all the rewards for incentives and competitions, subsidising school trips and for buying computer software. Staff can also bid for those additional resources in their departments like new music stands, art frames and reading resources for the summer school. No parents currently do any voluntary work in school and parents' skills are not widely known and used to benefit learning.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- 74 The leadership of the headteacher is inspirational, purposeful and energetic and totally focused on improving standards and the school becoming the best it possibly can. He has led the school from being one that was not doing very well to one that is now judged to be good. To do this at the same time as moving from the old site to a well-designed, purpose built school is no mean achievement. He is exceptionally well supported by his two deputies, who are very effective in their respective roles. All three understand what exemplary teaching is and demonstrate this in their own

lessons. Other members of the senior management group work hard and are very supportive of the work of the school.

- 75 In order to improve teaching and learning the headteacher, with the support of governors, introduced a process of departmental self-reviews. This involves a detailed analysis of test and examination results and observation of lessons by members of the leadership group. It also includes a review of department priorities and targets. Currently, the process relies heavily on the involvement of the leadership group and is not sufficiently focused on developing the skills of middle managers in taking responsibility for the quality of work in their area. There is excellent subject leadership in ICT and performing arts and very good leadership in special educational needs that is reflected in both the results and experiences offered in these subject areas. The systematic observation of teaching and learning by senior staff who are skilled teachers themselves has had a very positive impact on the quality of teaching. This along with the opportunity to appoint several new staff as the school grows means that the improvements already begun are set to continue.
- 76 The work of the governors is good. They have exercised judicious leadership in the management of the Private Finance Initiative, which has significantly shaped the future development of the school. They are largely aware of the strengths and areas for development in the school, but do not critically question enough the proposals that come from the senior team. For example, they do not play a large enough role in the current debate about the future curriculum for the school. Although they have questioned the pressure on pupils with the introduction of further opportunities for GCSE accreditation, they have not asked questions about the appropriateness of the sort of curriculum individual pupils might follow. Neither did they question the procedures for substantial disapplication from the National Curriculum last year in Year 10. Governors know that they do not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship, nor do they provide an appropriate religious education experience for students in the sixth form. The governors' annual report to parents meets statutory requirements, but the prospectus does not.
- 77 The school has identified its priorities for the next two years through a very thorough annual review process. This involves all staff and governors in reflecting on progress to date and identifying new priorities which then become the school's improvement plan. Department plans are then expected to align with these overall school priorities. This brief plan is supported by detailed action plans for each priority that are costed and training implications identified. These action plans have success criteria of variable quality and they do not always support the school in self-evaluation.
- 78 Financial planning and management are excellent and the school is proud that it has never had an overspend. Because of the very detailed and thorough procedures for financial management governors are regularly re-assured that they can meet their commitments incurred as part of the Private Finance Initiative. The school finance manager provides very detailed reports for governors that enable them to monitor actual expenditure against planned expenditure very carefully.

Staffing

- 79 The school has sufficient well qualified and experienced teachers to teach the curriculum. They are efficiently deployed to make the most of their expertise and experience. However, religious education is being taught by a non-specialist

teacher and this is having a negative impact on the experiences that pupils have and the standards they reach.

80 Teachers work hard, both in timetabled time and in the time they give to extra-curricular activities. A well-structured induction programme provides very good support to newly qualified teachers and newly appointed teachers, although the school, through heads of department, does not give enough support to supply teachers. Arrangements for the professional development of staff are effectively managed and systematically monitored. For example, training, funded through a national initiative, to support teachers in developing their skills in using ICT has been very successful. The quality of training received is rigorously evaluated and is appropriate. In July 2000 the school gained endorsement from the Investors in People organisation. This is a national organisation which awards institutions that are seeking to ensure that employees receive high quality professional development. The school is not part of a consortium to provide initial teacher training, but it certainly has the potential to do so.

81 The school is very well served by its support staff, who make an important contribution to the ethos of the school and its smooth running. The administrative staff are most efficient and helpful and make a very welcoming first impression on visitors and parents.

Accommodation

82 In September 2001 the school moved into a superb new building, following a period of prolonged disruption while the new accommodation was being built. The new building provides accommodation for all subjects and for all aspects of the school's life and is already having a very positive effect on the attainment of the pupils. Pupils take an obvious pride in their new building and are taking care of it. There is no evidence of graffiti or vandalism and there is very little litter. There is, however, some difficulty in accommodating all the pupils who want to have lunch in the school canteen.

Learning resources.

83 The provision of learning resources is very good. A large amount of money has been spent on a range of resources, including computers and technical equipment. The resource centre, which is appropriately located at the centre of the school, includes a library and a suite of computers. This is used in class time, breaks and after school. Pupils read for pleasure, complete their homework and develop skills in information and communications technology. At the moment the number of books in the library is below that recommended for the number of pupils in the school, but those that are in the library are of good quality and there are plans to increase the number. A resources' manager, who is available to give help and advice to pupils and staff, manages the learning resource centre efficiently, but there could be more use made of the centre during the school day.

Efficiency

84 The school applies best value principles very effectively. It consults with parents and pupils and has recently commissioned a very detailed parental survey from a national research company. It compares its performance both in terms of examination results and expenditure. Its involvement in a Private Finance Initiative is a very good example of where another organisation has been identified as better placed to provide accommodation and premises services and support. There is a

regular review of the curriculum and decisions taken about what subjects should be taught and about how the school day should be organised. Although unit costs are high, pupils make at least satisfactory and often good progress. Teaching is good and the school provides a curriculum that successfully meets the needs of pupils across the ability range. It sustains its own small sixth form through a very efficient consortium arrangement with other Stafford schools. Overall, it provides good value for money.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

- 85 Overall, leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The sixth form has functioned very effectively in terms of examination results until 2001 when results dipped. There have been changes in the leadership of the sixth form and the current post holder is temporary. This uncertainty has led to a lack of consistency in developing aspects of the sixth form in recent years. For example, target setting is at a very early stage of development and there is no clear rationale for the curriculum that is going to be offered to students beyond their academic courses. Data on the performance of sixth formers is not rigorously analysed.
- 86 Links with the Chetwynd Centre and Stafford College are strong. The headteacher is one of two headteachers out of the six in the consortium who is on the management committee. Headteachers and heads of sixth forms meet separately each half term. This ensures the smooth running, including co-ordinating timetables that is so essential in offering the wide and good quality taught curriculum that is the life-blood of the sixth form provision.
- 87 There has been a lack of priority given to making the sixth form more attractive to students. The decision to give them a small social area in the dining area does not provide them with a genuine private area of their own to relax in. The decision to use the upper storey of the open-plan learning resource centre as their combined registration and private study area has caused problems. It is scarcely large enough for them all and there are problems of noise carrying to and from this area with the main learning resource centre downstairs. Many students choose to go home to study and this detracts from the corporate identity of the sixth form.
- 88 The temporary head of sixth form has worked hard to overcome the lack of formal structures for support and guidance and enrichment generally. However, he currently has insufficient time to plan, monitor and evaluate the progress of the sixth form because of his prior commitment to a head of department post in the school. The sixth form generates more income than it costs. Students leave with examination results that usually represent very good achievement compared with GCSE results. The sixth form is very cost effective.

Resources

- 89 Resources in the sixth form are very good. Textbooks are up-to-date and all students are provided with individual copies of the books they have to use. Students may use the very good computing facilities, including access to the Internet, within their own study area from before the official start of the school day until after it ends. However, the school is still in the early stages of building up research material in the form of books and journals within the learning resource centre. This does limit the

opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills, particularly in geography and history.

- 90 Resources at the Chetwynd centre are excellent. There is a language laboratory, two ICT rooms, a specialist geology room and well-equipped workshops for design and technology. Art has outstanding provision with its own print room, spacious rooms for working and ample display areas.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 91 To build on the successful improvements that have taken place the governors and the headteacher need to:
- (1) ensure that support is provided to the new heads of department in English, science and music so that examination results and standards improve;
(paragraphs 92, 99, 121, 175, 176 and 178)
 - (2) improve the planning for and the teaching of personal, social and moral education lessons so that it better meets the needs of pupils;
(paragraphs 17, 40, 46, 48 and 51)
 - (3) ensure that all middle managers take responsibility for what happens in their subject areas;
(paragraphs 75, 100, 118, 141, 150, 152, 170, 174, 179, 188 and 193)
 - (4) provide more opportunities for pupils to understand and appreciate cultures other than their own.
(paragraphs 29, 40, 44, 48, 100, 133 and 179)

Sixth form

- (1) Establish permanent leadership for the sixth form that will ensure that:
 - there are a range of opportunities provided for students outside their taught courses;
 - the curriculum and support for students is improved;
 - there is more systematic support and guidance, including careers education and vocational guidance.
(paragraphs 51, 52, 64, 66, 85, 87 and 88)

In addition the governors and the headteacher need to:

identify how the school and subjects taught can contribute to pupils' spiritual development.
(paragraphs 45 and 133)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	139
	Sixth form	22
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		52

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	14	24	49	41	8	3	0
Percentage	10	17	35	30	6	2	0
Sixth form							
Number	6	12	2	1	1	0	0
Percentage	27	54	9	5	5	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	711	67
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	60	n/a

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	18	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	113	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	14

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	32
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	29

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.5
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.8
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	74	55	129

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	40	47	51
	Girls	27	36	32
	Total	67	83	83
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	53 (77)	65 (64)	64 (56)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	25 (32)	40 (37)	33 (16)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	35	56	40
	Girls	33	40	30
	Total	68	96	70
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	53 (83)	74 (64)	54 (68)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (50)	45 (38)	30 (32)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	52	52	104

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	14	41	47
	Girls	24	48	50
	Total	38	89	97
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	37 (36)	86 (82)	93 (92)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	33.6 (34.9)
	National	39 (38.4)

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

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	12	13	25

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	12	13	25
	Average point score per candidate	9.1 (19.3)	16.5 (15.4)	13.0 (17.9)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.1)	17.7 (18.6)	17.4 (18.2)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	12	13	25	1	n/a	1
	Average point score per candidate	8.1	16.5	12.5	12.0	n/a	12.0
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	n/a	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	5
Black – other	13
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	604
Any other minority ethnic group	3

Information on 148 pupils has not been provided by parents

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	1	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	26	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	46.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	268

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	22.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2,002,960
Total expenditure	1,978,460
Expenditure per pupil	2,699.13
Balance brought forward from previous year	55,640
Balance carried forward to next year	80,140

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	20.9

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

17.2%

Number of questionnaires sent out

778

Number of questionnaires returned

134

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	54	8	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	35	53	6	1	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	50	8	2	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	49	19	7	0
The teaching is good.	25	60	8	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	51	20	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	43	6	1	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	20	59	15	1	5
The school works closely with parents.	20	59	15	1	5
The school is well led and managed.	40	50	4	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	36	53	7	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	49	8	5	13

Other issues raised by parents

Twenty-eight parents attended the parents' meeting and the majority of comments were very supportive of the school. They were particularly pleased with the way the school had managed the building of the new school while maintaining all its normal activities. They were also pleased with the developments in ICT and the way the school is open for pupils and students to work at breaks and lunchtimes. Inconsistencies in the practice of setting homework were raised, but the inspection team found that pupils were not writing down the homework that was set and teachers did not always make sure that this was done. There was some concern raised at the meeting and in the questionnaire responses about the proposed changes to vertical tutor groups. The team found that the school has thought this change through and knows how it will benefit pupils and students.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching has improved.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour and relationships in lessons are good.
- The introduction of starter activities as part of the Key Stage 3 strategy is proving to be effective.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough challenging, good quality fiction available for pupils in Years 7 to 9.
- Marking does not provide consistent guidance on how pupils might improve their work.
- The department does not use pupils' ICT skills to enhance their work in the subject.

92 Overall, standards of attainment in English are below the national average. Results in tests taken at the end of Year 9 were below national averages in 2001 and much lower than the previous year's results at the school. Pupils' attainment was also below average when compared with results for schools in similar circumstances. Standards observed in lessons indicate that attainment in Years 7 and 8 is broadly in line with national expectations and reflects the fact that pupils' test results at the end of their last year in primary school are now in line with the national average. GCSE results in 2001 were well below national averages for both English and English literature. The greatest under-performance was in English literature where the attainment of all pupils was low compared with their attainment in other subjects. This was particularly marked in the case of the performance of boys. Girls performed well in English compared with their performance in other subjects. Overall, attainment by boys is much lower than that of girls, which reflects the national picture.

93 In speaking and listening by the end of Year 9, the highest attaining pupils talk confidently, use appropriate vocabulary, ask questions to develop ideas and make contributions that take account of the views of others. In a lesson where pupils were analysing newspaper lay-out, one group built upon their analysis in discussion and identified position, type face, density of colour, size and surrounding texts as being essential elements of effective layout. Lower attaining pupils are much less skilled in modifying their contributions in response to what others have said. In Year 11, the most successful pupils use tone, pace and gesture for effect and are able to use talk well to describe, narrate, explain, argue and persuade. Lower attaining pupils are far less competent in sustaining discussion.

94 In reading by the end of Year 9, higher attaining pupils identify key theories, events and characteristics and refer closely to the text when discussing them. Lower attaining pupils frequently lapse into merely re-telling the narrative. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils are able to identify meaning beyond the literal and comment on authors' intentions. They are also able to identify relevant information in non-fiction texts. Year 10 pupils used highlighter pens to mark the crucial sections of a long commentary on *An Inspector Calls* which was of great benefit when they prepared their essays on the play.

- 95 In writing, by the end of Year 9 the most successful pupils are able to vary sentence structure appropriately and write in a range of styles for different purposes and audiences. There were very good examples from one class studying Macbeth of newspaper reports on 'The Battle of Birnham Wood'. The greatest difference between higher and low attaining pupils at this stage is that weaker pupils use drafting less effectively. By Year 11, the highest attaining pupils are able to incorporate a range of literacy devices in their writing and comment on the way in which they have done this. Lowest attaining pupils still experience difficulty in varying styles according to the type of writing required.
- 96 Pupils make good progress within lessons in English, although progress over time is more erratic and this has been, at least in part, linked to staff absence. Progress in English by pupils with special educational needs is very good and they show clearly improved performance in all attainment targets. Their growing confidence in the subject is reflected in the improved quality of their reading, writing and oral work.
- 97 Attitudes in lessons are generally very good at both key stages. Pupils are well motivated and enthusiastic about the subject. They collaborate well and are good at organising themselves for group work. Relationships between pupils and staff are very good and it is a noticeable feature of lessons that pupils of all abilities are equally keen to contribute.
- 98 The quality of teaching is generally good. In the best teaching, lessons opened with both a clear explanation of objectives and an account of the intended structure of the lesson. As a result, pupils clearly understood the teacher's expectations for the lesson. An important feature of the most successful lessons was the very good use of both open and targeted questioning so that pupils were moved forward in their understanding of issues. In a Year 9 poetry lesson, careful and precise questions enabled pupils to work out that in the simile 'eyes as blue as iodine', the poet was suggesting that the boy's eyes had the effect of numbing the girl's thoughts. In many lessons there was a very good balance of activities. One of the reasons why pupils of all abilities felt confident about expressing opinions was the consistent use of praise by teachers. In the very best teaching, plenary sessions were used to review the learning that had taken place but also to relate it to future lessons so that pupils were fully able to understand the purpose of their work. The recent introduction of starter activities in lessons as part of the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy has been successful in that teachers have taken care to ensure that these relate closely to the main body of the lesson. In a Year 7 lesson, the starter consisted of a direct and concise revision of the constituent parts of instructional writing before pupils evaluated a 'Scoop the Poop' Department of the Environment pamphlet.
- 99 Where teaching was less successful there was frequently insufficient challenge for the highest attaining pupils. In some lessons in Years 7 to 9, where pupils were required to read aloud from the text being studied, the reading was not fluent enough for the purpose of the lesson and thus the enjoyment of other pupils suffered. Some aspects of marking, although generally detailed, are also inconsistent. The very best marking provides useful guidance on how pupils might improve the quality of their work, while in other cases teachers merely indicate which areas need to improve. Since the last inspection there has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching, as there has been in the attitudes and behaviour of pupils in English lessons.
- 100 Subject performance has been adversely effected by staff absence, including that of the head of department. High staff turnover for some classes has created a lack of

continuity in teaching and has been commented on by pupils. This has occurred at a difficult time for the department with many externally directed changes occurring to the English curriculum. The current teaching staff have worked very hard to minimise the impact of the difficulties encountered and the ensuing uncertainties about future leadership and management of the department. Their commitment to inclusion and the successful effort to ensure that all pupils feel equally valued in English lessons characterise the department. The fiction stock for Years 7, 8 and 9 is insufficiently challenging and does not build adequately on reading experiences in primary schools. Multi-cultural fiction is poorly represented. Not enough use is made of computers to enhance the work that pupils produce.

DRAMA

Strengths:

- Standards of attainment are good.
- Teaching in all years is very good.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very good.

Areas for improvement:

- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to perform in productions.
- Links with the English department are not close enough in Years 7 to 9.

- 101 Overall, attainment in drama is above national averages. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above the national expectations for speaking and listening. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C in GCSE drama is above the national average. Both boys and girls gain GCSE results above the respective national averages and all pupils attain much better results in drama at GCSE than their average in other subjects.
- 102 In Years 7 to 9, the highest attaining pupils demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding of the essential elements of role-play. In a Year 7 lesson where pupils were involved in improvised drama based on 'The Pied Piper' they stressed quite clearly that in improvisation you follow the lead from other performers even if you feel they have made mistakes. By Year 9, pupils are clearly able to use positioning, gesture and timing for maximum effect. In negotiating how to present a performance, pupils take full account of the views of others and discuss the implications of decisions before reaching a conclusion. There is growing confidence in the use of technical vocabulary so that in a lesson where Year 9 pupils were improvising a short scene from Macbeth they referred to 'passing focus', 'freeze framing' and 'Brechtian introvert and extrovert'. Pupils successfully evaluate their own performance and the performances of others. There is a relatively small difference in the range of performance between pupils of different abilities. Higher attaining pupils show slightly greater skill in sustaining the focus of their performance.
- 103 By Year 11, all pupils are able to recognise the importance of structured elements in performance and the highest attaining pupils are able to identify how the slightest change within a performance totally changes its impact. For example, a Year 11 group improvising a scene with the imprisonment of North American Indians in the 19th century demonstrated how the actions themselves might appear to be part of a comedy but the tone of a one-word command immediately defined the performance as something far more tragic. The only significant difference in attainment between different groups of pupils was that lower attaining pupils did not use the same precision of vocabulary when evaluating. The highest attaining pupils were

particularly skilled at identifying the potential for further dramatic development of the initial material on which they were working.

- 104 All pupils made very good progress across Years 7 to 11 and pupils with special educational needs are fully involved in all performance work. Progress was characterised with the increased familiarity both with the conventions of drama to be used in performance and the way in which performance is evaluated.
- 105 The attitude and behaviour of pupils are very good in all lessons. Pupils remain on task and are very enthusiastic and well motivated. Pupils state that drama is enjoyable because of how much they achieve in lessons. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good indeed and have a major impact on attitudes that pupils bring to lessons. Pupils who have been identified as having behavioural problems in other areas of the school are co-operative and fully involved in drama lessons because of the way teaching involves them in the work. The way in which pupils work together and realise the importance of taking account of the views of others is an important factor in their personal and social development.
- 106 Teaching is good or better in all lessons and in the majority of lessons it is very good or excellent. A major strength in the teaching is the unambiguous statement of objectives and expected outcomes at the start of each lesson. These objectives are revisited in whole group sessions where pupils are frequently asked to evaluate the extent to which they have been achieved. Teachers consistently use questioning to provoke further thought by pupils. When a pupil in a Year 9 lesson described a performance by others as 'good', he was asked three further questions until he said it was good 'because when each character came on slowly and there was a pause between each of them there was a lot of tension'. Teachers circulated effectively while pupils arranged and rehearsed so that they were able to talk to all the groups and ensure that they were very focused in their work. Pace was usually very good and was maintained by the setting of very precise time limits and constant reminders to pupils of how long they had left for individual tasks. In fact, in some lessons there is the slight possibility that pace could become too rapid.
- 107 Drama did not feature in the last inspection report so it is impossible to make judgements about improvements in provision. However, numbers of pupils opting for drama have increased rapidly over the last three years, which is indicative of the success of the subject.
- 108 Leadership and management are very good. There is a corporate approach to the teaching of the drama and, significantly, both pupils and teachers share the same familiarity with assessment objectives. The department has taken great care to monitor not just progress of individual pupils in terms of attainment but also in terms of attitudes and behaviour. The priorities for future courses and greater use of ICT are very appropriate. A tradition of very well supported school theatre visits has grown recently. The department is aware of the need to provide opportunities for pupils to participate in extra-curricular productions. The nature of the work is such that pupils would benefit if there were more links between the department and the English department on areas of the curriculum in Years 7 to 9.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Results at the end of Year 9 have been consistently in line with the national average over recent years.
- Standards throughout the school are rising.
- Thoughtful lesson planning helps pupils of all abilities achieve their potential.
- The implementation of the numeracy strategy is raising standards of attainment.
- The attitudes of pupils are usually good and are often very good or excellent.
- The department works well as a team.

Areas for improvement

- Recent results in GCSE examinations have been below the national average.
- Assessment methods are inconsistent and target setting is not sharp enough.
- Teaching quality is inconsistent.
- Behaviour is occasionally unsatisfactory.

109 Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were in line with the national average. Over recent years they have been broadly in line with the national average and well below those in schools with a similar proportion of pupils on free school meals. Results are in line with those in science and better than in English. Standards seen in lessons in Year 9 at least reflect these results with no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory by the end of Year 9.

110 Results over recent years in GCSE examinations have been below the national average for both the proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C and grades A*-G. In 2001, the results dipped to their lowest level in some years. This reflected unsatisfactory progress from Year 9. These pupils at the end of Year 11 also performed worse in mathematics than in most other subjects in the school. However, the proportion of pupils gaining grade A* is regularly in line with national expectations. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Standards of numeracy are at least satisfactory by the end of Year 11.

111 Currently, standards at the end of Year 9 are at least in line with the national average. Overall, these pupils entered the school in Year 7 with standards of attainment in line with the national average. This represents at least satisfactory achievement for all pupils and good achievement for some, including those with special educational needs and English as an additional language. The most able pupils are confident. They learn quickly and securely using well-structured activities to recognise the quadratic formulae associated with the graphs of parabolas in different positions on a co-ordinate grid. While this represents knowledge and skills in line with what could be expected for the best, a lack of open-ended questioning and investigative activities prevents most pupils from developing an even deeper understanding of the concepts involved. However, one identified gifted and talented pupil in the highest group in Year 9 is extremely well challenged with complicated work on powers of numbers and is to sit GCSE examinations in mathematics and statistics a year earlier than usual. This catering for individual pupils is a strong feature of work in mathematics and is almost always done well.

- 112 In an excellent lesson with a lower ability Year 9 group all pupils showed a good understanding of place value, motivated by the playing of a game of bingo, and pupils are clearly aware of what they were meant to understand. The sharing of learning objectives with pupils, the very good use of questions to prompt, including those of a learning support assistant, and the very high level of expectation promoted high quality learning and standards. This level of understanding of ideas and ability to apply multiplication techniques is more than could be reasonably expected for these pupils, almost all of whom have special educational needs, and represents good achievement from Year 7.
- 113 The implementation of the numeracy strategy has made a good impact on the quality of teaching, progress and standards of attainment in Years 7 and 8. The benefits have not yet fully been seen in Year 9. In Year 7, some of the highest attaining pupils, with the aid of bus timetables, used good strategies to plan the route taking the least time to travel through five towns. This was investigative work of very high quality for their age. The lowest attaining pupils in Year 7 were enthralled throughout an excellent lesson on symmetry. An entertaining and competitive starter activity using grids to test single digit by single digit multiplication resulted in a significant proportion of pupils correctly answering over 100 calculations in five minutes. The class then worked maturely in pairs, using mirrors sensibly to help, discussing strategies to construct symmetrical shapes and checking each other's work. They then used 'show me' boards, drawing shapes to answer questions rapidly to consolidate their very thorough understanding of and ability to apply the principles of reflective symmetry. This was well above what could be expected. The very good progress and enthusiasm of the pupils was because of a thoroughly prepared lesson, using a variety of resources to stimulate every pupil to learn to their potential. They were told clearly what the learning objectives were and their expectation was as high as the teachers. This was outstanding teaching and learning and was enjoyed by all the pupils.
- 114 The attitudes and enthusiasm of pupils in Years 7 to 9 are good. They are often very good or excellent and are always at least satisfactory. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are directly linked to the quality of teaching. Although teaching is good overall, it varies too much in quality. In the very best lessons, teachers share the learning objectives with pupils, plan for them to work together and use a variety of resources, and discuss with pupils whether or not their high expectations have been reached. The least successful lessons, while being satisfactory, lack pace and a real purpose that is meaningful to the pupils.
- 115 By the end of Year 11 pupils are attaining standards broadly in line with the national average. While the most able pupils in Year 11 understand graphs such as cumulative frequency distributions and distance- time representations, they find it difficult to discuss or describe their main features. They are good with techniques such as solving simultaneous equations in algebra and calculating volumes of prisms. While most of these able pupils are making good progress from Year 9, they lack real confidence and enthusiasm for mathematics. Pupils of average ability in Year 11 understand the concept of probability well. They are competent in knowing when to add or multiply the separate probabilities of two events together to calculate the chance of either or both events happening. This is good progress from Year 9. The lowest attaining pupils in Year 11, however, are working at levels below what is expected. They find difficulty calculating fractions of quantities other than the very simplest, such as a half and a quarter. These pupils lack interest and have made unsatisfactory progress since Year 9. Overall, standards of numeracy are satisfactory.

- 116 Pupils' attitudes in Years 10 and 11 are good. They are clearly linked to the quality of the teaching and most prominently to the teacher's level of expectation. The progress of pupils in Year 10 is better than in Year 11 because teaching is better in Year 10 than in Year 11. In an excellent lesson with the second highest class in Year 10, pupils responded positively throughout as they were introduced to a wide variety of learning techniques. The teacher showed how to check work using different methods, estimate answers and how best to use classmates to decide on answers. He made them think about their own learning and made them want to be more responsible for it. In an unsatisfactory lesson with the lowest attaining pupils in Year 11, the teacher introduced too many concepts, gave praise when it was not warranted and had difficulty managing pupils, most of whom had little interest in the lesson and a minority behaved unsatisfactorily because of the unsatisfactory teaching. Overall, teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good, although occasionally it is unsatisfactory. The high quality use of resources, time and paired work is less evident in Year 11 than in the rest of the school, even allowing for a current focus on revision for GCSE. Teaching is improving, but is too variable.
- 117 While teachers set homework regularly and mark it promptly, work is not consistently assessed. Target setting has been introduced, but teachers do not discuss regularly with all pupils the levels of current work and their progress towards targets.
- 118 The department works well as a team and overall good leadership and management of the department has brought about the successful implementation of the numeracy strategy, but has not addressed inconsistencies in teaching standards. The head of department has been ably and energetically supported by other teachers in trialling resources, writing schemes of work and organising the well attended weekly mathematics club and competitions. Staff are well deployed to classes, resources are very well used, including calculators and the department's own small suite of computers. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection is good.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 10 and 11 and are good in Years 7 to 9.
- Assessment procedures and analysis of pupils' performance are very well developed.
- Leadership and management of the department provide clear direction for the subject.
- Teachers are committed to improving standards.
- The accommodation is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Results at GCSE have been below average.
- Not enough 14-year-olds attain Level 5 or above in comparison with similar schools across the country.
- There are not enough opportunities to share good practice in the teaching and learning of pupils in Years 7 to 9.

- 119 Standards attained by 14-year-olds have been rising steadily since 1999. In 2001, the rise was significant. This moved pupils' attainment from the recent years' below average to the national average. Although these results were similar to other similar schools in Staffordshire, they were below average in comparison with similar schools across the country. While the number of pupils attaining Level 6 or above

was average, not enough pupils reached Level 5. The attainment of boys and girls was similar. Observations in lessons and analysis of pupils' work show that the current standards are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. The current standards are similar to those found in the previous inspection. Pupils' standards across different sciences and scientific enquiry are similar.

- 120 In Years 7 to 9 higher attaining pupils have a very good understanding of science. For example, they can explain different forms of energy and the importance of renewable and non-renewable resources. One visually impaired pupil is reaching standards similar to his peers. He makes excellent use of information and communication technology to produce lesson notes. Lower attaining pupils understand that some metals are more reactive than others. Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need receive good support, which helps them to make good progress. Pupils with English as an additional language make progress that compares well with other pupils. For example, one Year 8 pupil explained the difference between rocks and minerals. Another Year 7 higher attaining pupil investigated simple tests to estimate how much alkali or acid is present in a material. Science-related literacy support for lower attaining Year 7 pupils is enabling them to develop both their literacy skills and their science learning. For example, they learn to scan texts quickly through using science texts.
- 121 In 2001, GCSE results were below average. Pupils also did not do as well in science as they did in their other subjects. There is no clear trend as the results have fluctuated considerably over the past few years. In general, the girls do marginally better than the boys. The percentage of pupils who gained grades A* to C in 2001 was lower than at the time of the previous inspection. The percentage who gained grades A* to G were similar to the national picture and match those recorded at the last inspection. However, lesson observations, analysis of pupils' work and value-added data show that pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory on the basis of the standards they reached when they were in Year 9.
- 122 In Years 10 and 11 pupils' knowledge and understanding across different sciences and scientific enquiry are similar. For example, average-attaining pupils investigate the path of light rays using ray boxes, construct ray diagrams and understand ideas such as virtual and real images and images produced by convex and concave mirrors. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make similar progress as other pupils. For example, they explain ray diagrams as well as others in the class. Lower attaining pupils understand what happens to the body when it needs to cool or warm. Higher attaining pupils explain how temperature, concentration, surface area and catalysts affect the rate of chemical reactions.
- 123 Teaching and learning, overall, are very good, a significant improvement from the last inspection. In Years 7 to 9, lessons are well planned and structured and teachers expect pupils to learn well. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, the teacher shared learning objectives and explained specific learning targets clearly. These included 'you must be able to use a key to identify rock', 'you should know that weathering and erosion involves both physical and chemical processes', 'you could list the factors that affect features in the landscape'. Pupils were also given a printed copy of these targets and instructed to fix it in their exercise book. The lesson also included a comprehension sheet and pupils' own evaluation of how well they know and understand specific areas of the topic and what action they should take if they do not know and understand these well. As each stage of the lesson progressed, pupils made clear gains. Indeed, thorough planning is a very strong feature of teaching and learning in science in all year groups. In Years 7 to 9, where teaching and learning were not quite as good as they could be, there was insufficient

sharing of learning objectives and not enough pace of learning throughout the lesson. In addition, teachers did not emphasise enough the good routines for work in the laboratories and did not involve pupils enough in their learning. Nevertheless, the teaching and learning were not unsatisfactory because other strong features of teaching and learning made up for these weaknesses.

- 124 Teaching and learning observed in Years 10 and 11 were, in the main, very good or excellent. In one of these lessons, the teacher and the pupils were working equally hard and as a partnership. The pace could not have been more productive throughout the lesson. Pupils completed a highly challenging task that included interpretation of complex tables and graphs on UK energy consumption over many years. In another excellent lesson, meticulous planning and preparation, with all the details such as those described above in the example for Year 8, made sure that pupils investigated the inheritance of dominant and recessive features. The discussion that followed promoted deeper understanding of how genes are inherited and how they show themselves. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed the activity. Homework is set regularly. Marking and target setting are also strong features of science teaching at the school. The marking system consists of a printed self-adhesive label with marks for presentation, content and effort and targets such as improve diagrams, finish homework and maintain quality work. Teachers also correct work and correct pupils' misconceptions. The, overall, very good teaching and pupils' keen interest in the subject creates a very good atmosphere for learning. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to work with others in class and create inclusive and productive classrooms.
- 125 Leadership and management of science are very good. Clear direction and teachers' strong commitment to improvement have led to several initiatives, for example piloting the national scheme of work for Years 7 to 9. The analysis of Year 9 test results completed by the department has been included in the national training package. The department provides booster classes and revision workbooks to address weaknesses in pupils' learning in Year 9. This has impacted positively and improved results from below average to average. The department provides revision classes during Easter and on Saturdays for pupils taking GCSE examination.
- 126 Work on literacy is very good with displays of key words and word roots in all classrooms and other prominent places in the department. Teachers refer to these displays when they are teaching. Work on numeracy is good and supports, for example, the interpretation of graphs and calculations. The use of computers is satisfactory, for example the use of sensors. However, there are no computers in any laboratory for pupils to log data. The department has very good links with its feeder primary schools. The teachers work with primary science co-ordinators and Year 6 teachers to observe and teach lessons. Year 6 pupils also visit the department for taster lessons. The new accommodation provides a very good learning environment.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Good teaching gives good learning opportunities.
- Planning includes opportunities for a wide range of media and materials in two and three dimensions. The learning environment is very good.
- New schemes of work address all aspects of art and design.
- The department constantly reviews the quality of provision in art and design.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment does not provide pupils with enough information about their progress.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to study the arts and crafts of other cultures.
- There is no recognition of how art and design can contribute to pupils' spiritual development.

127 In the 2001 GCSE examinations, results were broadly in line with the national average, the same as at the time of the previous inspection and slightly lower than in 2000. In both years there were no A* grades. The number of entries was considerably lower in 2001, a drop of over 50 per cent. Standards at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were significantly lower than the national average. Standards at the time of the previous inspection were also below average.

128 The standards of work seen in Year 11 are satisfactory, but the quantity of work and range of work produced are small. There is little evidence of three-dimensional work; something the department is working to overcome. Standards of drawing skills are lower than expected, especially for the boys. Because the range of materials and media is narrow, there are gaps in knowledge, basic skills and processes. There is not enough independent work to show how well pupils can generate a range of ideas to produce a good range of support work in their sketchbooks. The recent unstable staffing situation has affected the amount of work produced, the continuity of pupils' learning, standards and progress. The new head of art and design is working hard to overcome these issues and to cover some of the basic skills, in particular to improve the levels of drawing skills and to include some three-dimensional work.

129 Standards of work seen are satisfactory, overall, by the end of Year 9. Pupils make good progress from their levels of attainment on entry, which are below average. However, the rate of progress and the range of experiences vary for each year group, as does the achievement. In Year 9, pupils can work with different media and materials to produce two and three-dimensional work. However, craft skills are weak. Investigation skills have not been developed sufficiently to extend pupils' knowledge of materials to improve control of tools and the development of techniques. Year 8 pupils are developing the concept of composition using line, shape and form across a range of techniques and media. Craft skills and drawing skills are higher than those achieved at the end of Year 7. Pupils in Year 7 have a good knowledge and use of colour. They are competent with a range of media and materials including leather. They can modify their designs and collect visual information to inform their designing. Standards of observational drawing and developmental work are satisfactory. Drawings show better understanding of proportion than seen in some of the Year 9 work.

- 130 Teaching is good in art because the weaknesses in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding, in all years, have been identified in the planning and are being addressed in the teaching. In the short time the teacher has been in post, it has been difficult to address all the missing areas in the work of older pupils. However, good progress has been made in broadening the styles of investigation and presentation of information and images and in developing the use of sketchbooks so that they are more personal. Pupils' work includes good standards of writing skills, the use of art vocabulary and the use of information and communications technology for recording and scanning images. The majority of work is two-dimensional, but references to artists include more recent examples of British artists.
- 131 Teaching in Year 9 recognises the gaps in pupils' learning, especially the low levels of observational drawing skills. The decision to include a taught element at the beginning of each lesson to cover the basics is beginning to improve standards. Craft skills are weak and investigation skills have not been used sufficiently to extend pupils' knowledge. Planning now focuses clearly on these areas. The range of media has been extended and pupils now have opportunities to work on three-dimensional projects. One project called 'War and Conflict' gives pupils the chance to handle metal and wire and old books in an art form and to gain skills in twisting, forming, beating and creasing. They make links with their work in history about the First World War and poets of that time for inspiration and ideas. Lessons are successful because they are well planned, standards are made clear and expectations are high and suitably challenging. Introductions clearly show the processes to be used and the standards the teacher expects of them. During the lessons, as the teacher monitors work in progress, extra resources are introduced to extend learning and questions prompt wider and deeper thinking about what they are doing. Pupils in Year 7, studying the finer points of some of Georgia O' Keefe's work, have the skills and confidence to work with ink, colour washes and to draw in a continuous line with increasing success because the skills have been clearly demonstrated and the techniques are understood. Sometimes, however, there is not enough support for pupils of below average ability and they make less progress. The teaching is at its best with pupils new to the school. They are benefiting from a well planned, progressive programme using lots of different materials, skills and processes in two and three dimensions. As a result, they enjoy art and the learning is good. The standard of teaching shows a significant improvement on the, overall, unsatisfactory standards at the last inspection when the teaching for younger pupils was described as poor.
- 132 Behaviour in art and design lessons responds well to good teaching that uses positive behaviour management techniques successfully. Small numbers of pupils in Years 7 and 9 can behave badly, but the teacher is very resourceful in keeping them focused. This is a significant improvement on the previous report when bad behaviour affected standards and the school's code of conduct was not consistently applied.
- 133 There has been a significant improvement recently. There are now opportunities for three-dimensional and craftwork and subject time has been increased. Good use is now being made of ICT. Aware of the need to raise boys' attainment in art, the department set up a male artist in residence. Links with the primary schools are strong. Art and design makes a positive contribution to pupils' moral and social education. They have respect for others' needs, interests and feelings and there is considerate awareness of each other in lessons. The provision for students' cultural and spiritual development is less well developed.

- 134 Assessment is being reviewed to include self-assessment, but is not yet being used enough to monitor pupils' progress. Resources are now good, although the screen printing equipment needs renewing. The new accommodation for art is very good.
- 135 Leadership and management are good. The head of art has been very well supported since her appointment, especially during her induction period. The head of art has made a significant improvement on the provision for art and design. The subject's profile has been raised significantly since the last report.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in textiles are consistently above the national average.
- Accommodation is very good.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in practical lessons are always positive.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of written work are not as good as standards in practical work.
- Assessment of pupils' work, particularly in Years 7 to 9, is not sufficiently based on the National Curriculum.
- There are not enough opportunities for computer-aided designing and making.

- 136 Teacher assessments in 2001 of pupils aged 14 showed attainment to be similar to that of pupils of the same age nationally. The observation of lessons and an examination of pupils work during the inspection indicate that most pupils attain standards in line with, or just below, the national expectation. Relatively few pupils achieve standards above this. However, given that on entry to the school, attainment is below the national average, this represents satisfactory progress. Pupils achieve similar standards in all aspects of design and technology. Food technology is no longer a weakness. Pupils achieve higher standards in their practical work than their written work, particularly in resistant materials and graphics. They make particularly good progress in developing skills and knowledge in electronics in Year 9. They develop a good understanding of the design process and can write detailed design specifications. Their drawing skills are limited, but are improving. Research skills are variable, but are a real strength in textiles.
- 137 In 2001, the GCSE results were close to the national average in design and technology. However, there were significant differences between the subjects. In textiles, results were well above the national average. In food technology, largely due to staff absence, they were well below. In resistant materials and graphics products, attainment was just below the national average. These results indicate that progress is satisfactory overall, as the attainment of these pupils was below the national average when they entered the school.
- 138 The scrutiny of pupils' work during the inspection shows clear improvements in food technology, with attainment likely to be close to the national average this year. Textile technology remains a real strength and attainment is above the national average. Coursework folders are of a particularly high standard in terms of depth and presentation. There is evidence of model-making of a particularly high standard in graphics products. Unfortunately, most of these pupils have put insufficient effort into their design folders and their final results will not represent the standards seen

in their practical work. For the same reason, results in resistant materials will be close to, rather than at the national average. Pupils show good use of computers in the presentation of their coursework. In food and textiles, they also use computers well to carry out research and to present their findings clearly using different types of graphs and pie charts.

- 139 Pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language receive extra teacher support in lessons and are able to make satisfactory progress. However, there are occasions when they are not given structured work or offered different approaches to help them to tackle their work and make progress. When learning support assistants are present, they are effective, improving the work of those they are supporting, as well as that of their friends.
- 140 Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. It is generally better in textiles than in the other aspects of the subject. This is because the schemes of work in textiles are more detailed, expectations of the amount and depth of work are higher, there is greater use of ICT to support coursework and marking is more informative, which means that pupils know how they can improve. However, all teachers have a secure understanding of their subjects and teach practical skills well. Their management of pupils is generally good. They all set relevant homework, which extends or reinforces pupils learning. The activities planned are generally interesting and this means that most pupils enjoy the lessons. However, not all teachers are firm enough about enforcing deadlines and this adversely affects GCSE results. In order to compensate, they give freely of their time after school and in the holidays to help pupils finish their coursework and improve their grades. Teachers are currently working hard to help pupils whose work has been adversely affected by staff absence and the use of a number of supply teachers. In food technology, very large teaching groups and the lack of a technician limit achievement in some lessons. Overall, the atmosphere in lessons is pleasant, but the pace is often too relaxed and teachers do not make the best use of the time available.
- 141 The head of department is effective. He has managed staffing difficulties and the move to the new building well. The department is now working together much more effectively and is well placed to improve. Monitoring has taken place and the head of department has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department. The development plan correctly identifies all the issues that need to be addressed and the accommodation and resources in the new building make it all possible. Improvement since the last inspection has been limited due to extenuating circumstances, but despite this standards have been maintained and the quality of teaching has improved. Electronics is now being taught and the need to teach more formal drawing skills in order to improve standards in graphics has been recognised. Schemes of work are being updated; there is a lack consistency across the department in terms of layout and content. Not all requirements of the new National Curriculum, including the use of computer aided design and manufacturing, are fully implemented in the most appropriate areas of the subject. The staff in the department know that marking is not sufficiently linked to National Curriculum levels and the examination board mark schemes.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Teaching in Key Stage 4 is challenging and very well planned. Good use is made of the local area and more distant locations to develop a range of fieldwork skills.
- New high-quality course materials have been successfully introduced in Years 7 and 8 and are helping to raise standards.
- The use of ICT is well developed and is confidently used by pupils.
- Pupils make progress throughout the school.

Areas for improvement

- Marking does not include clearly stated targets so that pupils know what skills they need to improve.
- Not all pupils in Years 7 and 8 have the same opportunities to use more challenging course materials.
- Monitoring of marking does not provide information on where there are significant variations in standards achieved between different groups of pupils.

142 GCSE results in 2001 were the same as the national average, with 59 per cent of pupils entered achieving grades A*-C. All pupils entered achieved grades A*- G and this was above the national average. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 suggested that standards achieved were just below those attained nationally. However, these pupils had entered the school with below average results at the end of Year 6 and so had made satisfactory progress.

143 There was a marked difference in the quality of work seen between particular classes in Year 7 and Year 8. The department is in the process of introducing a new scheme, 'Geography Matters'. This is a skills-based course with interesting textbooks that utilise the most successful modern approaches to teaching geography. Limited funds have meant that the new course materials have not been equally available across Years 7 and 8. Pupils who have had access to them have made good progress and their work is generally at or above national expectations.

144 Although they came into the school with level of attainment lower than the national average, the present Year 9 pupils have progressed well. The evidence seen suggests that standards by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are better than in previous years and that the overall trend of improvement is continuing. Pupils' books are generally very well presented with carefully drawn and labelled maps and diagrams and carefully written text. Year 8 pupils were able to refer back to these in their explanations of the complex relationships between changes in demand and supply and the effect on shopping profiles. A local survey mapped the fast food outlets in Stafford. This developed into an analysis of the growth of the McDonalds chain over a 30-year period. Information from websites was used to generate graphs and bar charts. Higher attaining pupils recorded and explained the growth in the number of outlets and used maps effectively to illustrate the distribution of stores nation-wide.

145 Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are making good progress and those following the higher level programme are producing work that matches their predicted A*-C grades. Many pupils working to foundation level are doing so with growing confidence and those who are developing skills in explanation are producing exam style answers at a GCSE grade C/D standard.

- 146 All pupils get the opportunity to produce more substantial work in the form of projects. Among the work seen were Year 7 studies of volcanoes that were strong in description and explanation, while tourism projects from Year 9 made good use of the Internet and included elements of persuasive writing. Practical skills in data collection are very apparent. They ranged from surveys of leisure facilities, using interviews and questionnaires, to detailed reports of well-structured fieldwork on streams and rivers. This practical work encourages deeper understanding and forms a sound basis for GCSE and post-16 work.
- 147 Good progress is made by pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need. The effectiveness of the school-based support programme means that they are able to play a full part in lessons. Pupils at all levels of attainment are encouraged to make valued and valuable contributions to lessons.
- 148 Teaching ranged from unsatisfactory to very good, but mostly it was satisfactory or better. It was most effective when lessons were clearly structured, with clearly stated learning objectives rather a list of activities. Good lessons were focused on resources that established and extended specific skills. The activities matched the progress needs of pupils of differing attainments. The best lessons seen were particularly well resourced, started promptly and engaged pupils' attention with a selection of time-limited but challenging tasks that encouraged all pupils to contribute.
- 149 The motivation of pupils, especially boys, was not always good and some immature behaviour, particularly in Year 7 and 8, diverted teachers from their intended focus. Where teachers managed pupils well, pupils paid attention and the pace of lessons was unaffected. In such a Year 9 lesson, pupils from a wide range of attainment successfully worked on a detailed analysis of the problems facing farmers in southern Italy. By the end of this part of the lesson, pupils had come to understand that GCSE questions were really quite straightforward. Pupils attempted foundation and higher level questions and spontaneously expressed surprise and pleasure that they could complete them.
- 150 The use of marking is generally good in Years 10 and 11 where work is clearly graded and pupils are given advice about how to improve their marks. This good practice is not so well developed in earlier years. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are not clear about the skills that are needed at each level of the National Curriculum.
- 151 Geography received a good report at the last inspection and has continued to develop, although the response to the 2000 version of the National Curriculum is only just becoming evident. The range of teaching styles has increased and there is a greater emphasis on skills-based work that reflects current understanding of the ways that pupils think and learn. The subject has successfully relocated into a bright and well-resourced teaching base in the new school. The day-to-day management of resources is good and the system for allocating computer time works well. It ensures that teachers and pupils clearly understand when they can use them and can plan their work accordingly.
- 152 The monitoring of teaching by members of the leadership group is developing well. The monitoring of teaching and pupils' work is less effectively carried out by the department team.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- There have been very good improvements in all the areas that were causes for concern at the time of the last inspection.
- Teaching uses a wide variety of approaches to meet the learning needs of pupils.
- Teachers are keen to try different teaching methods and materials and to evaluate their effectiveness.
- Good opportunities are provided to develop pupils' skills of analysis and explanation.
- The enjoyment of history by teachers and pupils alike is obvious and the numbers following the GCSE course are growing.

Areas for improvement

- There is no effective use of National Curriculum level descriptors in Years 7 to 9.
- The department does not recognise the needs of gifted and talented pupils.
- The quality of comments in marking is limited, especially in Years 7 to 9.

153 Standards in the subject are rising. The much improved GCSE results for 2001 were above the national average with 72 per cent of A*-C grades compared with the national figure of 61 per cent. All pupils achieved A*-G grades, which is better than the picture nationally. As the improvements in teaching take effect, standards are improving and the work seen in Year 10 and 11 strongly suggests that GCSE results will continue to improve. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 placed performance above the national average.

154 The standard of work seen in all years was good. The department has decided to use carefully selected units within which pupils acquire and develop skills. The result is that work concentrates on spotting the most valuable historical evidence and using it to develop greater understanding. Year 9 pupils analysed extracts from seven letters from a First World War infantryman. They noted evidence indicating changing attitudes and plotted on to a time profile that illustrated the change from excitement, through fear, anger, to despair. The higher attaining pupils were able to describe their insights into the many elements of emotion that affected troops on the Western Front.

155 Evidence of good historical understanding took many forms. One group of pupils had designed a snakes and ladders game that was based on the pleasures and pitfalls experienced by medieval pilgrims. All versions included the key elements and many displayed a deeper understanding by correctly assigning lesser or greater consequences to the differing experiences of pilgrims. In another example, a storyboard approach allowed pupils to decide on eight key moments in a historic episode. Lower attainers used this to divide the Battle of Hastings into a chain of key events. Higher attaining pupils had used the same technique to identify both a sequence of events and the short and longer-term consequences of the Great Fire of London. There were many other examples seen and through them all ran a focus on the understanding of events and their consequences.

156 Year 8 pupils, having analysed the spin-doctor element in a painting of Queen Elizabeth 1 at the time of the Armada, were extending these same skills to identify the intended messages behind two different pictures of both Hitler and Tony Blair. At a greater level of sophistication, a lunchtime tutorial group of Year 11 girls were identifying a range of anti-Semitic material in German posters and publications of the

1930's.

- 157 The strength of this skills-based approach is to provide pupils at all levels of attainment with the means to make sense of history. Several lessons ended with spontaneous expressions of disappointment that the lesson had finished. Pupils are actively engaged in their own learning and bring a growing sense of enthusiasm and self-confidence to the lessons. This is spreading through the school and the numbers wanting to study history at GCSE are growing rapidly. The very carefully planned higher and foundation tier tasks in Years 10 and 11 actually encourage lower attaining pupils to make accelerated progress as they attempt more work that is challenging.
- 158 The importance of explanations and drawing connections featured in every lesson. Even in lessons where pupils were tired or arrived less inclined to work, careful planning and the use of interesting resources meant that learning was always satisfactory and was usually good or excellent. Year 10 pupils found it hard to explain the quick surrender of the Plains Indians after their victory at Little Big Horn. Careful use of video, picture and text extracts revealed the plight of Indians off the reservations. By the end of the lesson, pupils could explain how the shock defeat of General Custer had accelerated the downfall of the Indian nations.
- 159 Although no ICT was used in lessons that were visited, its importance and widespread use was evident. Pupils' projects used research and displayed skilled use of desktop publishing techniques. Each study unit had its own selection of useful website addresses clearly displayed in the ICT area. While there was no field work taking place during the inspection, pupils' work drew on their regular visits to Ludlow, Warwick Castle and the Black Country Museum, for example. At least one teaching room had a display of artefacts relating to the study unit 'Hot War - Cold War'.
- 160 Teachers have very good relationships with the pupils, who come to lessons expecting to work hard. Pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11, feel able to ask for individual extra help and advice, which teachers willingly provide. There is a focus on making teaching ever more successful and teachers discuss new ideas that are then tried and evaluated systematically. Because the whole approach is skills-based, pupils are particularly well prepared for the demands of higher-level GCSE and post-16 work. The numbers of pupils electing to study history is rapidly increasing.
- 161 Good use is made of marking in Years 10 and 11 and labelled displays of pupils' work reinforce the skills and approach that earn marks in GCSE. This approach is less well developed in Years 7 to 9. The improvement in teaching and learning since the last inspection has been impressive and is testimony to the effectiveness of the subject management and the exceptional determination of the teachers to improve standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Strengths

- Leadership of the department is excellent and teachers have a shared commitment to the subject.
- The quality of teaching is very good and leads to very good quality learning and high standards.
- Pupils' behaviour is very good and they have very good attitudes to the subject.
- There is very good tracking of individual pupils' progress and effective target setting ensures that pupils reach their potential.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers in other departments are not fully aware of the ICT levels at which the pupils are working.
- Pupils who do not take ICT at GCSE are not appropriately accredited for their work.
- There are not enough display boards in the ICT rooms.

162 Standards in ICT are above average at the end of Year 9. These standards are attained because pupils start school with below average skills and knowledge but make very good progress during Years 7 to 9. This is because of the very good teaching coupled with pupils' very positive attitudes to the subject. In the most recent teachers' assessments, results were well above the national average, but fewer pupils than average gained Level 6 and no pupils gained Level 7.

163 Standards in ICT are well above average at the end of Year 11. These standards are attained because the teaching and learning are very good. Pupils build on to what they learn during the first three years in school and make very good gains in understanding in the subject. GCSE results at A* to C have risen from being just under the national average in 1999 to almost 30 per cent above it in 2001. All pupils who take ICT usually attain at least an F grade, which is also well above the national average. Pupils usually gain better results in ICT than in other subjects. In past years, girls have attained better results than the boys, but the gap is narrowing because boys are now working harder.

164 From Year 7, pupils learn the basics of logging on to the network and being responsible for calling up a wide variety of programs, accessing, saving and printing out their own work. They gradually build up knowledge of working with programs and how to present their work more professionally. They show above average skills in merging accessed information and graphics with their own creative writing, creating web sites, building questionnaires, analysing results, presenting findings as graphs, working out cost and profits, devising interesting menus and making animated presentations. Pupils have very good knowledge of how ICT can be used in businesses. There is no discernible difference in attainment between the girls and the boys, but boys are keen to get to the computers quickly and girls are more methodical in their approach, planning their work before committing it to the screens. Most pupils make very good progress, but some of the lower attaining pupils occasionally struggle with spelling, grammar and phrasing questions. Group work helps pupils with special educational needs as they gain confidence by working alongside others and have more straightforward starting points in order to achieve appropriately. The pupils designated as being gifted and talented have scope within the modules to show their more advanced skills.

- 165 Pupils make very good progress in Years 10 and 11 on new programs, operations and techniques, develop faster keyboard speed, greater control of the mouse and better understanding of the menus and facilities within programs. By the end of Year 11, pupils' work is well above average on word processing, desktop publishing, animation, use of spreadsheets and databases and presentation. Most pupils keep good records of how they arrived at solutions and write sensible evaluations of their projects. Most of them spot errors quickly. The higher attaining pupils are better at analysing problems and working out strategies to show sensible use of ICT. Pupils in Year 11, for example, have completed a module of work on arrangements for a wedding. They coped easily with invitations, guest numbers, letters, lists, menus and maps. The higher attaining pupils with good spatial awareness worked out seating arrangements quickly but others found it difficult to get all the tables in the space. Most pupils understand the moral and social implications of using ICT and how it impacts upon society. Pupils who take the non-examination course do not achieve as much as those on the GCSE course.
- 166 Pupils know that when they go to ICT lessons, they are expected to behave properly and work hard. They show very good attitudes to the subject, want to do well, are good listeners and watchers and settle to work quickly. Pupils try hard and persevere before asking for help, showing determination and independence. They appreciate help from teachers, classroom assistants and especially the sixth form students who sometimes assist with Year 7 to 9 classes. Most pupils are extremely polite, thank people for helping them and act upon advice willingly. A few pupils, mainly boys, show maturity by helping others and there is mutual co-operation on group work. One class of pupils in Year 11, originally taking a non-examination course, freely opted to take the GCSE short course and completed their studies well in advance of the target date, showing diligence and very good motivation. In lessons, many pupils, especially those in Years 7 to 9, were eager to have their work appraised, showing they were proud of their efforts. Many pupils in all years stay behind to do extra work, often unsupervised, showing trustworthiness.
- 167 Teaching is very good overall. It is best in Years 10 and 11 and brings about very good learning. Expectations are very high. Teachers set interesting but demanding work to make pupils think and stretch their creative talents. They use all the available equipment in formal teaching, showing very competent use of the interactive whiteboards, for example, and they create support sheets to move pupils on at an appropriate rate. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good and this generates very good attitudes to work. The teachers know all pupils and track their progress carefully. Individual help in lessons is effective in assessing pupils' progress and in identifying where they are encountering difficulties. It also gives confidence to the lower attaining pupils and speeds up their efforts.
- 168 Leadership of the department is excellent. The head of department is a particularly gifted teacher with extensive subject knowledge who inspires both pupils and staff. He supports the non-specialists who teach in the department by planning and preparing with them to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged and that the teachers are confident in what they are doing. The improvements since the last inspection are excellent. In the short time since his appointment, the head of the department has raised the status of the subject, to the extent that it is now one of the best in school. There are new policies, courses and schemes of work, literacy and numeracy are well addressed, teachers have had extensive training and standards are higher in all years. More pupils now wish to take GCSE. There is now an extensive web site for pupils and parents, which can be accessed for tests, revision, homework and information. Newly created record booklets help pupils to record their own progress and check their targets. The resources are very good and the

new accommodation only lacks display boards. A well-skilled technician has been appointed who gives very good support to teachers and pupils.

- 169 This is a very efficient department that is growing rapidly. The present level of staffing with only one specialist teacher and one technician will soon be inadequate to satisfy the growing demand for ICT, especially as the AS level course and a new system of electronic recording start in September.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- The most recent GCSE results in French were above the national average.
- Pupils learn well because the quality of teaching is good.
- Pupils' use of information and communication technology is very good.
- There is a good team spirit in the department.

Areas for improvement

- The most recent GCSE results in German were below the national average.
- Over-sized classes and temporary staffing are preventing improvement in German.
- A minority of pupils, particularly boys in Year 9, are poorly motivated and achieve little.
- Few pupils continue with a language in Years 10 and 11 so most leave school with no language qualification.

- 170 In 2001, GCSE results in French at grades A*-C were above the national average, and higher than in the previous year. Results at A*-G were above the national average with no grade lower than F. Girls attained much higher grades than boys and their grades were higher than in most other school subjects. In 2001, a small number of pupils entering for the GCSE in German gained results at A*-C that were lower than the national average and lower than in the previous year. In both years, all pupils gained grades at A*-G, the lowest being grade E.

- 171 By age 14, pupils' current attainment in French equates with national expectations, an improvement on teachers' most recent assessment. Pupils enter the school with little or no knowledge of French. Most pupils soon acquire good listening skills because of lessons taught wholly or mainly in French and the use of tape recordings of increasing length and complexity. A minority of lower attainers, including some pupils with special educational needs, require more repetition or translation to understand. The quality of speaking is satisfactory but varied. In Year 7, pupils confidently exchange greetings, courtesies and information about themselves. In Year 8, higher attaining pupils converse continuously in French with their teacher throughout the lesson. As late as Year 9 a few poorly motivated boys and girls express themselves only briefly or lapse into English when questioned. Most pupils develop their reading and writing from short captions and statements to longer descriptive passages and informal letters. They use infinitive constructions or past tenses to state their intentions or tell what they have done. A few are poorly motivated, producing scant or inaccurate work. Many higher attainers who also study German in Year 9 make satisfactory progress, although generally the level of attainment is low due to the late start, temporary staffing and disruption in oversized classes. In both languages, the use of number features regularly for times, dates and calculating the results of classroom surveys. Pupils frequently use computers to

very good effect, making posters, illustrated scripts or bright, animated presentations of tourist information.

- 172 Few pupils continue with languages in Years 10 and 11, although a few are sufficiently motivated to take both. Standards of work are currently above national expectations in French, but remain below in German. In French, where classes are taught using rapid, natural language, most pupils understand well and they all grasp the gist of their lessons. The slower pace and simpler style of German lessons enables all pupils to stay included, but talented linguists mark time. The wide variation in speaking skills ranges from coping with situations such as dining out, shopping or illness, to polished and fluent personal presentations. In both languages, most pupils extend the range and application of grammar, increasing the use of tenses and the range of opinions expressed. The French and German of a few lower attainers, including some pupils with special educational needs, remain limited, often hesitant, but usually adequate for basic communication. The quality of coursework is mostly good. Pupils of all abilities use computers to research and present their work, and adapt their written style to formal letters and persuasive writing. They deal well with topics such as healthy living requiring the interpretation of statistics and express their reactions to work experience placements.
- 173 Teaching is usually at least satisfactory and, overall, it is good. Teachers, including one native French speaker, are all fluent in their first European language and some teach a second adequately. They know the requirements of the revised National Curriculum and the GCSE examination well, so most pupils make steady logical progress towards agreed general and personal targets. Their high expectations of oral competence and grammatical awareness are evident in most pupils' satisfactory skills and knowledge. They include ethnic pupils and those with special educational needs, who learn well, although support by classroom assistants is uncommon. Most pupils enjoy novel and amusing interpretations of stock themes such as miming personal appearance or sampling real food. As in German, a minority of Year 9 pupils, particularly boys, are stubborn and cheeky, achieving little and spoiling the lesson for others. Teachers usually manage their classes well, providing such opportunities as group work on charts, or paired oral tests of grammar and idioms using miniature whiteboards. Where mundane lessons based on textbooks and worksheets lose the interest of a minority, teachers are firm and patient in handling the ensuing disruption. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work is continuous and thorough, achieved through judiciously pitched questions and supportive marking. Teachers' encouraging comments and pointers for improvement allow pupils to track their own progress and attainment. They set homework regularly, so newly introduced language is often linked with previous learning. Many pupils' attractive revision folders and GCSE coursework pieces reflect hours of patient and creative study, often using computers.
- 174 The department itself is adequately led and well managed through a strong team effort. The standards of teaching and learning have risen since the last inspection, but temporary teachers still struggle with over-sized classes. Pupils' experiences are extended through drama, travel and links with primary schools. Documentation is clear and helpful. It is subject to revision with the changing demands of new courses or school initiatives such as literacy and numeracy. Honest recognition and frank discussion of several areas for improvement are achieved through formal meetings or by monitoring teaching regularly. These problems include disaffection among some boys, the poor uptake of languages for GCSE and low results in German. The department has not identified the purpose of able linguists' brief study of German in Year 9 and the intended role of languages in the school's future curriculum.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Accommodation is very good.
- Provision for instrumental teaching is good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are unsatisfactory in lessons throughout the school.
- The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory.
- There is not enough time given on the timetable to teach GCSE music.
- The department does not make enough of a contribution to the spiritual and cultural development of pupils.

- 175 Teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 shows that standards are well below average. This is confirmed by standards observed in lessons. Pupils are not given the opportunity to explore and develop an understanding of concepts such as melody, timbre, the relationship of pulse and rhythm. They have very low basic skills such as in playing keyboards or playing in time and their lack of skill hinders their capacity to make music. Many have not mastered how to use all fingers so that they are not fluent enough to play with a backing rhythm. Work in folders is very sparse and does not show any systematic teaching and learning of the vocabulary of musical elements, although key words are displayed in class. Most pupils are able to use computers and keyboards competently and skills in technology in fact far outstrip musical ones. As pupils are not provided with the right opportunities to show what they can do, achievement is poor. Pupils who are more musically able, mostly girls, are sometimes given different things to do which involve them working in small groups in the practice rooms. They are left largely to their own devices, as a group of Year 7 girls were, working on gamelan music. Although they could play the individual parts well enough they were not able to play successfully together and did not appreciate the importance of relating to the same beat. Pupils with special educational needs are not given any particular attention and the targets in their education plans are not implemented.
- 176 Very few pupils continue music through to GCSE. This course is taught to a small number of pupils from Years 9, 10 and 11 after school. In 2001, three out of the four pupils achieved higher than a C grade. They did less well in comparison with their results in other subjects and with similar local schools. They did not reach levels expected of them based on previous assessment and this represents unsatisfactory achievement. All pupils have instrumental lessons so class lessons are devoted to composition and the listening paper. Work in folders consists mostly of questions from past papers; there is no structured system of learning about the characteristics of the range of music necessary for answering the questions. Pupils were not able to talk about these characteristics and had very little idea of how to find these things out. Although pupils are able to draw on experience of instrumental playing, there is very little evidence in their composition to show the development and application of compositional techniques. Most of the present Year 11 pupils can use the composing software on the computer to record and develop their work.
- 177 Although behaviour is mostly satisfactory, pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 do not show very much enthusiasm for music. They enjoy playing the keyboard and using computers, but do not put a great amount of effort into their work in order to reach higher standards. There are very few opportunities for pupils to know how well they

are achieving or what they need to do to improve. Opportunities to work together are valued and instruments are shared fairly. Only about 15 pupils attend choir, including students from the sixth form, although those who do are very committed. About 80 pupils have instrumental lessons and a small proportion of them form the wind band and orchestra who meet weekly.

- 178 Teaching is poor. Lessons are not planned to give pupils the best opportunity to develop their creative and intellectual capacity and, as a result, gains in learning are limited. Behaviour is managed well, but this is more through a stern manner than interesting activities. Lesson objectives are shared with pupils at the start of lessons, but they are not used at the end of the lesson to identify the learning that has taken place. GCSE pupils do not follow a structured course that allows them to acquire the knowledge they need to do well in the exam. They do not know how well they are doing because their work is not rigorously assessed against grades. Pupils are not taught from Year 7 about the elements of music or encouraged to gain the basic skills that will help them to perform and compose music to the level expected for their age. This was particularly evident when a Year 9 class were trying to play 'Summer Nights' as part of a series of lessons on musicals. Information about the prior attainment of all pupils is not used to plan work which is suitable for their needs. As a result, the more musically able are not challenged.
- 179 Music is part of the expressive arts faculty. Although the teaching has been systematically monitored and the departmental review has taken place, the ensuing action to improve teaching has not had the desired effect. The unsatisfactory provision for GCSE music, taking place after school, does not give equal access to all pupils. Because of the shortened time available, pupils must also have extra instrumental lessons in order to complete all the components. Although the department is well-resourced with technology, there is a shortage of acoustic instruments, especially for playing the wide range of music from around the world that the National Curriculum requires. The arrangements for assessing work is poor as it does not track the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills and understanding which relate to the National Curriculum levels. There are limited opportunities for making music together. Arrangements are already in place to offer music as part of the options for Year 10 in 2002. There are planned changes in staffing for September which are designed to address the teaching issues. Progress since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. Although the accommodation is greatly improved since moving to the new building, standards in music have declined.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are well above average and have improved significantly.
- On-site accommodation is excellent.
- Teaching is good.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement

- National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades are not used as part of the assessment procedures.
- Pupils are not involved enough in the planning and evaluation of their work.

180 In September 1997 the school began offering its pupils the opportunity to take a GCSE in physical education. The first group took the examination in July 2000 and the percentage of pupils gaining the highest A*-C grades was well below the national average. However, the group taking the examination a year later, in July 2001, made a significant improvement and they achieved A*-C grade passes that were well above the national average. Although there were more boys than girls taking the examination, there was no significant difference in their attainment levels.

181 Pupils arrive at the school from their primary school bringing with them a range of physical education skills, some of which are below those expected. Pupils respond very enthusiastically to the good teaching and superb facilities, make good progress and by the time they are 14 years old the majority are attaining levels that are at least in line with national expectations, with some doing even better. This judgement is in line with the teachers' own assessments. By the end of Year 9, the majority of pupils are able to apply techniques, skills and competition rules to several aspects of the physical education curriculum, most notably in soccer, netball, rugby, volleyball and basketball. Basic skills are well developed and provide a sound platform for future developments. Pupils arrive at the school with very limited experience of dance, but quickly become involved in the activity and by the end of Year 9 most pupils are beginning to take responsibility for developing a story line, choreographing it and then performing it. Pupils are able to make basic evaluations about their own and others' performance, but these skills are not sufficiently developed.

182 Pupils continue to make good progress during Years 10 and 11 and by the time they are 16 years old their attainment levels are at least in line with national expectations, with many, particularly those in the examination groups, attaining standards that are higher than those nationally. In health-related fitness lessons they understand the effects of exercise on the body and how to prepare themselves properly for their activities. Many pupils confidently lead their class in effective warm up routines. They are developing good skills in a range of sporting activities and are able to apply the skills they have practised into full game situations. They are able to undertake a range of roles, including performing, officiating and coaching. Pupils in the GCSE group are developing understanding and competence in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the course. Some of them are producing high quality course folders, using the technical language of the subject to very good effect. However, some course folders are untidy with some work unfinished. Pupils with special education needs are fully involved in lessons and are given much support by both teachers and fellow pupils to reach very commendable levels of attainment.

Talented pupils are encouraged to extend their skills both in school and with out of school clubs.

- 183 School teams take part in many inter-school matches and in spite of being a relatively small school gain much success. Pupils have represented Staffordshire in rugby, basketball, swimming and gymnastics. A pupil in Year 8 is a member of the Midlands hockey team.
- 184 In spite of there being a big change of staff, the good quality teaching reported at the last inspection has been maintained. All lessons observed were judged to be at least satisfactory with the majority being judged to be good or very good. A secure knowledge of the subject is regularly conveyed to pupils through both effective demonstrations and good teacher-directed question and answer sessions. Thorough planning, with a careful sequence of activities, is a feature of most lessons. Required skills are broken down and explained when necessary. In a Year 10 volleyball lesson this was done very effectively when one particular technique was being taught. Pupils react very positively to their teachers' expertise and enthusiastic approach to the subject. Most pupils behave very well, work hard and co-operate with each other and their teachers. Pupils' enjoyment of their lessons is very evident. Although day-to-day assessment of performance in lessons is regularly used to enhance teaching and learning, recording of assessment is not yet being consistently used to inform progression or course planning or to help set individual pupil targets.
- 185 The curriculum allows pupils to take part in a wide range of activities and is meeting statutory requirements. Although some of the sixth form students use the very well equipped fitness room and take part in some physical activities, there is no time allocated on their timetable for physical education.
- 186 Staff, including non-specialists, give very freely of their time to provide many extra-curricular activities, including a popular climbing club which uses the school's climbing wall. These activities are well supported by enthusiastic groups of pupils. Pupils also have the opportunity to join skiing trips to Italy and to join a Year 9 residential outdoor activities trip.
- 187 The excellent on-site facilities are being very well used by pupils and staff. The department is well resourced and this is having a very positive effect on the pupils' attainment. Good quality departmental displays effectively stimulate pupils' interest in the subject.
- 188 The present head of department was appointed in September 2001. In the relatively short time that he has been in post he has made a good start to reorganising the work of department and in raising the profile of the subject within the school. However, schemes of work are not sufficiently detailed to support teaching. The staff who teach physical education work well together, support each other and show strong commitment to the improvement of the department.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Girls do well in the GCSE short course in religious studies.
- Good assessment strategies are used in Years 7 to 9.
- There is some good use of a variety of teaching resources.

Areas for improvement

- Boys' underachievement in Years 10 and 11.
- Current schemes of work do not reflect adequate coverage of the locally agreed syllabus.
- The school does not have any teachers with a qualification in religious education.

189 At the end of Year 9, standards in work seen are average in relation to the expectations of the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Standards have improved since the last inspection and are now less variable.

190 Standards at the end of Year 11 are average. Compared with national expectations, results in the GCSE short course in religious studies are average. The pass rate at grades A*-C has been fairly consistent over the last three years and is very slightly below the average for Staffordshire schools. However, this masks a significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. GCSE results for girls have improved steadily over the last three years and are now above average. Attainment of boys increased from 1999 to 2000 but in 2001 there was a sharp decline, with only a quarter of boys obtaining a pass at grades A*-C; this is below the expected standard. There is no evidence of any under-performance of any other groups of pupils, such as those from ethnic minorities, in any year group.

191 Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Pupils make good progress in Year 7 because they enjoy the lessons. Well-structured end of module assessments provide opportunities for reflection on learning and target setting. Imaginative teaching, such as creation of a tribal identity followed by conflicts between tribes, allows pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. Important features of community identity, such as symbols, festival, traditions and beliefs, emerge naturally from this work. Learning in one Year 8 lesson was stimulated by an imaginative range of sounds and visual resources. Design of a T-shirt about an amazing feature of the earth allows pupils with special educational needs to make satisfactory progress. Teachers' planning for Years 7 to 9, using word lists or frames, supports these pupils well, but the tasks are too easy for more able pupils. Learning is no better than satisfactory in Year 9, and in some Year 8 lessons, because teachers do not have secure subject knowledge, they have insufficient understanding of agreed syllabus requirements and do not always explain tasks thoroughly. On occasions this leads to problems in maintaining an atmosphere conducive to learning. Year 9 assessment strategies are not yet fully developed. Thus, the good progress in Year 7 is not maintained.

192 In Years 10 and 11 achievement is satisfactory. A major reason why it is no better than this is the pupil groupings. Timetabling results in a wide ability range in classes and some groups where there are far more boys than girls. In groups where there are a large number of boys, there is less learning because boys tend to be inattentive. This is because teachers do not have the experience to plan for the wide ability range. Their subject knowledge is sometimes insecure and lessons use

mainly text-based resources, which do not always stimulate pupil interest. Careful revision strategies have been devised and Year 11 test results suggest that boys' performance is improving. In a Year 11 class with a gender balance, pupils co-operated well in revision of marriage and divorce; a brisk pace and variety of activities led to good learning, but more able pupils were not challenged to consider difficulties in reconciling some of the Bible references used.

- 193 Five non-specialist teachers, of whom two are responsible for most of the teaching, teach religious education. The work of the acting head of department in writing new schemes of work and assessments has led to good improvement since the last inspection. Although overall teaching and learning are satisfactory, learning in some Year 7 and 8 classes is good because teachers use a variety of activities, including confident use of ICT and projects, for example designing a poster on a feature of Islam. There is not enough time given to staff development on the content, delivery and management of religious education. Schemes of work for Year 7 and 9 are incomplete. Without work on the roles of religious leaders and the importance to believers of worship the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus cannot be fully met.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	1	0	52	0	2	0	0.79

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	9	44	87	0	43	1.1	5.8
Chemistry	6	90	100	43	17	3.3	5.9
Biology	2	88	100	34	50	6.0	5.3
Physics	3	33	88	0	40	0.7	5.7
Economics	4	75	89	0	36	2.5	5.5
Business Post 16 VQ	1	n/a	52	n/a	2	12.0	10.5
Computer studies	4	25	86	0	23	1.0	4.6
Art and design	1	100	46	100	96	8.0	6.6
Performing arts	5	100	93	80	31	8.0	5.53
Geography	9	100	92	0	38	5.3	5.7
History	6	67	88	0	35	3.0	5.5
Sociology	2	100	86	50	35	6.0	5.3
Psychology	1	0	87	0	34	n/a	5.3
English literature	6	100	95	100	37	9.0	5.9

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Standards of attainment in Year 13 are above the national average and are rising rapidly in Year 12.
- Teaching and assessment are very good. Teachers work very hard for their students at both a class and an individual level.
- Attitudes and confidence levels of the students are high, particularly in Year 13.
- Students achieve very well in terms of prior attainment.
- Relationships amongst students and between teachers and students are very good.
- Leadership and management are good.

Areas for improvement

- Students are not encouraged enough to study independently.

194 In 2001, A level results were well below the national average with the highest grade being a D. In both 1999 and 2000, however, there was one grade A attained. In 2001, at AS level, 11 students obtained grades A-E, six of these being higher grades A/B. This represented good achievement in terms of prior attainment at GCSE.

195 Standards seen in Year 13 lessons are above the national average. Students are achieving very well in relation to their GCSE results, particularly the female students who are the majority of the class. Students usually show confidence in all aspects of the work. Not only do all students use statistical tables accurately to calculate probabilities, but most are able to estimate the reasonableness of their answers. Students made very good progress when introduced to differential equations in pure mathematics. They quickly adapt to new processes and recall and incorporate prior learning. The work is demanding with questions of different types and students discuss their work with enthusiasm and all develop sound skills. The very best students show a deep understanding and persevere confidently with more difficult problems.

196 Overall, students in Year 12 are working at just above national expectations. They are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results and are improving rapidly, particularly the male students who are in the majority. In a very good lesson on vectors in mechanics, all students learned how to calculate the resultant of two vectors accurately. The male students built on the teacher's excellent demonstration by using the same dynamic geometry computer software to experiment and check the results of pencil and paper scale drawing methods. The female students, while less confident, persevered well, learning sound techniques and building up confidence. Students demonstrated a real understanding of the concepts involved in calculating finite areas between curves. With very good guidance from the teacher, they used helpful sketches to enable them to apply basic integration techniques successfully. Good understanding of earlier learning was shown.

197 Teaching is very good overall and students make very good progress as a result. All lessons seen were very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, know

their students' potential attainment very well and plan lessons accordingly. In the lesson on statistics, the teacher began by returning homework to the class that had been done very well by all but two students. After the introduction to the new work in the lesson, the teacher took these two students aside to go over the few difficulties that had arisen in the homework. Another strong feature of this lesson was at the end when the teacher engaged the class in meaningful discussion about how best to proceed with the forthcoming work. All teachers relate very well to their students. Teachers use homework very effectively for all and identify areas for improvement for individual students. Time is used very well for a mix of exposition, discussion and consolidation.

- 198 Students work very well together either through informal discussion or by sensitively helping individuals who are invited to demonstrate solutions on the board. They are very attentive and persevere well. Most importantly, students see themselves as real partners in their learning. They appreciate that while teachers know their needs and provide work for them, they as individuals take ultimate responsibility for their own learning. In this respect, teachers do not encourage enough wider reading and research in order to develop even more enthusiasm for mathematics amongst the students.
- 199 Teachers are very well matched to the classes they teach and accommodation and resources are very good. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection and the work of current students is much better than the most recent results.

Sciences

- 200 Biology was the main focus of inspection. In addition, chemistry and physics were sampled. Standards seen in chemistry are above average and students achieve well. Although the standards attained in 2001 at A-level were well below the national average, they were better during the previous two years. AS level results in 2001 were above the national average. The teaching observed was excellent and inspirational. Consequently, the students made substantial gains in their knowledge and understanding. Standards seen in physics are average. In 2001, A-level results were well below average; AS level results were above the national average. The quality of teaching is very good and deepens students' understanding of the principles of physics.
- 201 As the number of students taking A-level physics, chemistry and biology is often very small, it is important to bear in mind that significant variations in the performance of individual students cause significant fluctuations in the overall results of each of these subjects.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Results are above average and students make good progress.
- Teaching and, consequently, learning are very good.
- Assessment is very good and students know how well they are doing.
- Students have excellent attitudes to the subject.
- Accommodation is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Sixth form laboratories do not have computers for processing results of investigations.

- 202 Results of the 2001 GCE A-level examination were above average. One student gained grade A and the other student gained grade E. In relation to their GCSE results, their achievement is close to what was expected. The results have been above average since 1998. Because of the small size of the sample, it is not possible to judge the relative performance of male and female students. In 1999, when the sample size was reasonable, female students performed significantly better than male students. Students did marginally better in biology than they did in other subjects.
- 203 The standards of work of Year 13 students are above average. They are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In the lessons seen, students investigated the water quality of a local stream. They were highly motivated and worked very well in groups, carrying out tests accurately. Students develop a good understanding of biology, for example of types of plant and animal nutrition, energy production at cell level and characteristics of population growth.
- 204 Year 12 students are making satisfactory progress. In the lesson seen, they investigated tidal volume and vital capacity and the effect of exercise on pulse rate. They keenly observed a video and made significant gains in understanding the effect of exercise on heart rate and lung capacity.
- 205 Teaching is very good. The lessons are very well prepared and structured. They have clear short term and long term objectives so that students know what needs to be done within a given time scale. The provision of equipment and use of resources are excellent. The demonstrations, discussions and expositions reflect strong expertise and are very effective in sustaining motivation and enhancing students' knowledge, understanding and skills. There is a very good focus on independent learning and investigation skills. Students are given written assignments that are challenging. Marking is good and students are guided on how to improve their work. Assessment of knowledge and understanding was superbly demonstrated in a word game in a Year 12 lesson. The class was divided into two groups, students were asked to choose a letter on the board. The question was then read for the student to respond quickly, for example what 'CE' in the airways is shaped like columns. The students are very keen to learn, work hard and respond very well to the wide range of opportunities provided.
- 206 The subject is very well organised with very good support from technical staff. Assessment arrangements are very good and used effectively to inform students how well they are doing. Teachers provide appropriate support according to students' need. While the accommodation is very good and resources are good, the sixth form

laboratory does not have its own computers to help students process results of their investigations and for accessing information for reference.

BUSINESS

207 Only six Year 12 students are following an AS course or an AVCE course. One Year 13 student is following an A-level course and two have progressed from an intermediate GNVQ last year to an AVCE course this year. These courses are based at the Chetwynd Centre and taught by teachers from other schools. They were not inspected.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

208 Only seven Year 12 students are following an AS course and one Year 13 student is following an A level course. These courses are based at the Chetwynd Centre and taught by teachers from other schools. They were not inspected.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

209 Only two Year 12 students and three Year 13 students follow advanced vocational courses in this subject area. These courses are based at the Chetwynd Centre and taught by teachers from other schools. They were not inspected.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

210 In addition to the seven students taking A-level performing arts in Year 13, one student is taking A-level music at another school in the consortium. There are no students taking music in Year 12 and there is no performing arts course running in Year 12.

Performing Arts

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

Strengths

- Excellent teaching and leadership.
- Standards which are well above average with excellent achievement.
- Excellent attitudes of students.

Areas for improvement

- There are no areas identified for improvement.

211 Results of the 2001 AS-level examination were well above average. Students performed better in performing arts than in their other subjects, indeed one student gained his only pass in this subject. All students continued from AS-level to the second year leading to A level accreditation. Students are very able in their specialist area and easily transfer skills to the other disciplines as well as teaching each other. One dancer has recently taken up an orchestral instrument in order to strengthen her understanding of music. Students have a very firm grasp of the characteristics of different theatrical genres and write about these in a lively and perceptive style.

- 212 Very ably led by three excellent practitioners in their respective fields, the students have tackled this brand new course with enthusiasm and inventiveness. Whether researching the life of Sheridan for the community piece, performing George Gershwin songs, or exploring characters for an 'office collage', the students are wholly committed to achieving the best possible standards. They are highly critical of each other's performance, but always manage to do this with sensitivity and tact.
- 213 Teaching is excellent with students given opportunities to drive the pace of lessons. A well-chosen question or challenge from teachers about what students want to achieve is often all that is needed to maintain the pace and energy. Planning is of necessity collaborative as the teachers respond to progress made by students in and between lessons. Nearing the end of the two year course, students know exactly what they have achieved so far and what grade they must aim for in the final module. When choreographing movement based on their monologue character, students were helped in their development of gesture into dance by the teacher's experience of attending an internationally known choreography workshop based on a similar technique.
- 214 These high standards are brought about by the excellent leadership of the head of faculty, greatly assisted by the first-class accommodation and resources available in the purpose-built studio. Assessment of work is thorough and rigorous and results in students and teachers knowing precisely how well things are going. The team has been guided skilfully through the interpretation of the new examination orders, resulting in students being well on target to exceed their estimated grades. The course makes rigorous intellectual demands on students and as a replacement for theatre studies meets the needs of students. The faculty has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

HUMANITIES

- 215 The focus of the inspection was on geography, but history was also sampled. Students are well prepared for their examinations and both the popularity of the subject and the results achieved are improving year on year. Work files are well organised, with a wide selection of notes and material taken from lessons, wider reading and websites. A key feature of both lessons observed was the confidence and commitment of the students. This allowed them to become deeply involved in rigorous discussions, sharing and testing their hypotheses and evaluations with each other and their teachers.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Teaching shows very good subject knowledge, careful planning and enthusiasm.
- There are excellent selections of course materials drawn from a wide range of sources.
- Teachers have an extremely good understanding of the individual needs of their students.
- The approachability of staff and the high quality tutorial advice are warmly praised by the students.
- Very well planned fieldwork is responsive to local problems.

Areas for improvement

- The range of academic reading matter is not wide enough.
- Students do not recognise that the expertise of visiting speakers and/or short-term staff can enrich their learning.

216 Although there was a slight dip in the quality of A Level grades in 2001, the trend since 1999 has been upwards and performance has generally exceeded the national average. The AS results for 2001, the first year that this course was assessed were encouraging. All students obtained A-E grades and with 64 per cent attaining A/B grades; the results were well above the national average.

217 The work seen indicates that current students are likely to achieve similar success. Year 12 students are building on their previous good learning experiences. A fieldwork week in Yorkshire took place early in their course. In spite of access restrictions caused by foot and mouth disease, students undertook settlement studies that used data from previous year groups as a base from which to assess the impact of foot and mouth disease on land uses, tourism and the local economy. All students showed a high degree of competence at completing data grids, presenting and analysing the statistical validity of quantitative data and representing their findings in map, diagram and prose formats. A specialist study of footpaths made good use of cross sections and vegetation profiling to link with issues of eco-tourism. By the time of the inspection, these students had progress to researching factors relating to sustainability, a concept summarised by one Year 12 student as 'The process of giving people what they want now, without preventing people in the future from having the same opportunities'. Good use was being made of ICT to visit web sites containing information on central government and local authority environmental policies.

218 Year 13 students have made good progress beyond their AS course. Their files are a particularly effective learning resource. They are well structured and personalised with helpful highlighting, annotation and cross-references. They contain evidence of hard work, careful thought and an ability to make thoughtful connections between events and social contexts. Work in lessons mirrors these strengths. In one lesson, intensive work on features of Chesil Beach combined students' detailed recall with sharp explanations of the impact of differing directions and strengths of wave patterns on this coastline. Discussion was animated, with students using a wide range advanced technical terminology with confidence.

219 No AS or A2 course would be effective without a continuing focus on the external assessment procedures. Files contained many examples of formally structured work based on past papers. Progress was evident in the way that the quality of

these answers improved as the course developed. Lower attaining students developed a more balanced coverage of content and greater selectivity in the choice of examples. Higher attaining students showed increasing prowess at identifying interrelated factors and analysing wider implications.

- 220 The school carefully analyses performance data based on students' GCSE grades and post-16 students meet or exceed their performance predictions. The higher attaining pupils are destined for university and some in Year 13 already have their provisional places. The gender balance between Year 12 and Year 13 changes, but there is no pattern over time and male and female students are equally involved in lessons.
- 221 Teaching seen ranged from unsatisfactory to excellent. The one example of an unsatisfactory lesson occurred in Year 13. Some students failed to recognise the opportunities to benefit from the very good subject knowledge of what was a temporary teacher. A widespread failure of students to undertake preparation work meant that the lesson could not go ahead as planned. However, scrutiny of files, past exam performance and discussions with students provided clear evidence that teaching from the permanent staff is generally very good or better. In the other lessons seen, the quality of homework preparation was very high and allowed teaching to stretch the students' breadth and depth of understanding.
- 222 The subject knowledge of the teachers is profound. They are very familiar with the new exam syllabus and assessment processes. This allows them to ask searching questions that monitor and stretch students understanding. 'So what?', 'And?', 'Because?' are immediately recognised as firm invitations to move from illustration to explanation. Where the teaching is excellent, the resourcing and structure of lessons make them extremely rich in learning opportunities. In one, the combination of a short video extract, selected pictures, detailed diagrams and statistical data provided students with great breadth of material from which they had to select carefully to meet specific purposes. The best lessons are conducted at a purposeful rate. Tasks are timed and students meet these challenges with good humour and a sense of purpose, enjoying their success. All students completed a complex and accurate analysis of a set of meteorological data in a most challenging time scale. Because progress is good, there are opportunities within these lessons for reflection and discussion, with the teacher encouraging recall and recognition of earlier, often much earlier, learning. Year 10 work on depositional coastlines was successfully drawn on by Year 13 students in order to enrich their exam-style responses to four photographs of contrasting coastal features
- 223 Teachers know their students well and use their knowledge to draw the best from them. Students admire the commitment of their tutors and recognise the quality of the individual support they provide. Teachers are accessible and nothing is too much trouble for them in terms of preparation and additional advice. Because of the small groups and the high quality of interpersonal relationships, course work does not always display detailed written tutorial comments, although assessment judgements are clearly indicated and students know how well they are progressing.
- 224 Very good use of ICT by students and teachers provides high quality advice about the best web sites available. The present success of the subject is very dependent on the expertise of existing staff and the positive relationship they have with the small groups of students. This has worked well so far and the department has successfully taught larger groups in the past. Recent changes in post-16 courses, together with the likely increase in the popularity of the school, will put a strain on the present reading/study resources. The department has not yet planned for this

expansion in terms of the availability and access to a range and number of challenging texts.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

225 In addition to English a small number of A level French lessons were sampled. A small number of students from various schools in the consortium thrive in well structured, expertly taught lessons. The team is well co-ordinated and students benefit from time spent with one teacher who is a French speaker. They also benefit from the opportunity to live and work in France during their time in the sixth form. Students are confident, articulate and produce written work of consistently high quality. In AS level French, students build rapidly on the language learnt for GCSE, then progress from exploring domestic and teenage concerns such as healthy living to wider social and moral issues, including transport, racism and the redistribution of wealth.

English

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

Strengths

- The most recent results at 'A' level are very good.
- Teaching encourages an independent critical response to texts studied.
- The progress made by students in the more demanding 'A' level work is very good.

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough supplementary texts and resources.

226 A level results in English in 2001 were well above the national average and although the small number of students makes comparisons difficult, the results were very good. AS level results were lower than expected and were adversely effected by long-term staff absence. The standards observed during the inspection indicate that attainment this year is above the national average.

227 By Year 13, students are skilled at arguing their opinions or interpretations of a text and illustrating them with concise, relevant quotations. One student commenting on 'Peace' by Rupert Brooks wrote that the poem, 'explores the idea that people who do not go to war are incomplete, 'and half men''.

228 By the end of Year 12, students display good knowledge of the context in which literature texts are written and the impact this has on our understanding. One student studying *The Rivals* wrote that via his portrayal of Mrs Malaprop, Sheridan was mocking the idea that women had any power because 'the only power that Mrs Malaprop had was over Lydia's marriage'. Students are able to structure their essays well and marshal their evidence effectively so that their arguments gain force from the way in which they are presented. Their evaluation of literary texts recognises the importance of imagery and symbolism and the significance of short passages in the context of the whole work.

229 The achievement of students is good so that during Years 12 and 13 they show a marked development in their understanding of literary criticism and are able to comment on the way in which a more independent approach is required from that needed at GCSE. They become more confident in using the terminology of literary criticism.

- 230 Students are clearly enthusiastic about the subject. They discuss well in pairs and groups and when they are given opportunities to question each other they listen carefully to the answers and give due consideration to each other's points of view. These positive attitudes to English literature were aptly illustrated in a Year 13 lesson on the literature of the First World War. The teacher arranged a situation where pupils questioned one another and they were able to sustain a very engaged debate with only occasional intervention from the teacher.
- 231 The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers consistently make assessment objectives clear to students and relate individual assignments to the overall course. They use very effective activities within lessons both to interest the students and to ensure their attention is focused on the essential issues. At the start of a Year 12 lesson where students were studying an eighteenth century play, the teacher gave each student a card which named a theme or character from the play and the students had one minute to talk about the subject on the card. Each talk was followed by a supplementary question that required the students to give full consideration to the main issues while they remained well motivated by the activity. The consistent use of very carefully worded questions created situations which enabled students to show perceptive insight into the subject. A Year 13 student in a class which had watched a video extract from 'The Trench' was prompted to state that the portrayal of war could not be totally effective when there was no actual danger for the participants. He thought that our response to Sassoon's poetry was shaped by the knowledge he had served at the front line. The balance between questions that are difficult enough to make real demands on students but still accessible enough to allow for productive discussion is a key feature of the success of the teaching. Lessons are characterised by very good conclusions where the work completed is related back to the objectives of the lesson and the future demands of the course.
- 232 Marking and assessment of students' work are very good. Teachers recognise achievement, identify areas for improvement and give useful guidance to students on how to make such improvements. Overall, assessment of students' work is accurate and teachers have detailed knowledge of their progress. Feedback on written work and in lessons is at all times constructive and is an important factor in the very good relationships between teachers and students.
- 233 It is a reflection of the effort of the teachers concerned that last year's 'A' level results were so good despite internal difficulties within the department. The subject is managed in such a way as to encourage students to think independently and to take a wider view of English literature than that which falls within the confines of the syllabus. The range of supplementary texts and resources to support the subject is not wide enough.