

INSPECTION REPORT

MARICOURT CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Liverpool

LEA area: Sefton

Unique reference number: 104960

Headteacher: Sister Mary Teresa

Reporting inspector: Mark Woodward
11049

Dates of inspection: 31 March - 4 April 2003

Inspection number: 249596

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:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Sister Mary Magdalen
Date of previous inspection:	10/03/1997

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11041	Marvyn Moore	Lay inspector		<p>How high are standards?</p> <p>The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
24326	Moira Fitzpatrick	Team inspector		<p>How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?</p>
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11793	James Ivor	Team inspector	Art Design and technology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Maricourt Catholic High School is an above average-sized comprehensive school serving 1482 girls and boys aged 11-19. The school is situated on two sites that are about five minutes' walk apart. The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times is well below average compared with schools nationally. Around two-thirds of the pupils live in relatively prosperous areas in the vicinity of the school but just over a third come from disadvantaged areas of Sefton, Liverpool and Knowsley. Eight per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with only one pupil having a language other than English as first language. Eight per cent of the pupils are on the register for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), which is below the national average, and less than one per cent of pupils has a SEN statement, which is well below average. The pupils with SEN have diverse learning or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The standards achieved by the pupils when they enter the school are above average. The school was awarded technology college status in 1996 but its application for third phase funding was refused; it is currently preparing to apply again.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Maricourt is an effective school in which pupils achieve well particularly in Years 7 to 11 and have good opportunities for personal growth. This is mostly as a result of good teaching together with pupils' very positive attitudes and the good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Leadership and management are satisfactory, with strengths being balanced by weaknesses; the school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils perform well in tests and examinations.
- The school provides well for English, information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education and this enables pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils behave very well both in classrooms and around the school.
- Pupils' personal growth and self-esteem are enhanced by the good provision for spiritual, moral and social development.
- Levels of attendance are above average.
- The school collects and makes available good information about pupils' performance in examinations and tests.
- Pupils and parents have very positive attitudes to the school.

What could be improved

- Monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure that senior staff have a complete understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The training of staff in identifying child protection issues; the quality of risk assessments; and the arrangements for administering medicines.
- The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 so that it meets statutory requirements.
- The use made of assessment information and data analysis by senior and middle managers.
- The accommodation for drama, modern foreign languages, history, geography and music.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1997; since then it has made satisfactory progress. National Curriculum test results, GCSE results and attendance have all risen and satisfactory progress has been made in tackling the key issues. Further improvement is necessary in some areas, for example, monitoring and evaluation procedures, child protection training and personal and social education. The learning environment has been significantly improved but five subjects still have unsatisfactory accommodation.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	D	Not available	

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

Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average and pupils make good progress during Years 7 to 9. Standards are well above average in English, science and ICT; they are below average in art and drama. Pupils perform well in the National Curriculum tests; the trend in test results over the past five years is above the national trend. The 2002 results were well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Compared with similar schools (based upon the proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals), the results in each of the past three years were within the range of the top five per cent of schools nationally. The pupils who took the National Curriculum tests in 2002 made very good progress compared with their results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6. In recognition of performance in the 2002 National Curriculum tests and at GCSE, the school received a national 'School Achievement Award'.

Pupils make good progress during Years 10 and 11. GCSE results rose substantially in 2002, while the trend in results over the past five years is broadly in line with the national trend. The proportion of A* or A GCSE grades is a little below average. The achievement of pupils in English and mathematics during Years 10 and 11 is good; it is satisfactory in science. Over the past two years GCSE results in English, ICT and physical education were well above the national average and the standards of work seen in these subjects confirm their high level of performance. The school met its GCSE targets in 2002 but did not reach them in 2001. Students entered for A-level, AS-level, or advanced vocational courses in 2001 achieved results that were below average. National results for 2002 have yet to be finally confirmed. Overall, the achievement of students in the sixth form is satisfactory.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and this helps them to take advantage of good quality teaching. They are supportive of the school and appreciate the educational opportunities on offer.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Learning is enhanced by the very orderly atmosphere of lessons. Pupils behave very well as they move around the school and they report very little bullying. There is very little evidence of litter or vandalism.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Students and staff show each other respect, which helps to build positive working relationships. The good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development promotes pupils' personal development well.
Attendance	Above average. Attendance has risen since the last inspection when it was also above average. Unauthorised absence is lower than the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The great majority of lessons seen during the inspection were satisfactory or better, but a lower than average proportion (based on inspections across the country) was very good or excellent. In almost all subjects the quality of teaching and learning is good overall and this is reflected in the standards and achievement of the pupils. Pupils learn particularly well in response to very good teaching; for example, in physical education. This is reflected in standards both in lessons and in examinations. In 2002, nearly half the GCSE candidates in physical education gained A* or A grades. In some of the weaker lessons, teachers do not use a wide enough range of methods to stimulate pupils' learning and motivation; the development of accelerated learning strategies is therefore a very appropriate focus of the school's improvement plan. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in art during Years 7 to 9, as pupils do not have the opportunity to experience and meet the full range of National Curriculum learning objectives. The teaching of English, mathematics, science, literacy and numeracy is good. Good support is given to students with SEN and more able pupils are also taught well. The quality of sixth form teaching and learning is satisfactory (in most schools nationally it is judged to be good or better). This largely explains the satisfactory achievement of the students compared with their good levels of achievement in Years 7 to 11. Teaching is very good in English, French, physical education and drama. The teaching of psychology and general studies is unsatisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The great majority of pupils succeed in gaining a broad range of GCSE qualifications. Statutory curriculum requirements are not met in art in Years 7 to 9 and for the use of ICT in a number of subjects. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils with SEN are supported well and this is reflected in their GCSE performance; in 2002, for example, the majority exceeded their predicted results. There is a high level of challenge in the English and mathematics lessons taught by specialist staff while SEN assistants give good support in the majority of lessons. Arrangements to support gifted and talented pupils are satisfactory.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The school has only one pupil whose first language is not English. The pupil concerned has full access to the curriculum and is well supported. Parents were fully involved in discussions about curricular arrangements.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision is firmly based on the school's commitment to Gospel values. Pupils are strongly supported in developing personal responsibility and social skills. Opportunities to experience and appreciate cultural diversity are more limited, which was also the case at the time of the previous inspection.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Unsatisfactory. Teachers and managers have a high level of commitment to the pupils and give them good support and guidance. The culture of the school successfully promotes good behaviour and personal development. Nevertheless, there are concerns about child protection and health and safety practices, all of which the school is planning to resolve.

Parents have a positive view of the school and there is a high level of demand for places. Links with parents are satisfactory. Strengths include the annual report from governors, which is very informative, but parents only receive one report on pupils' progress, which, as parents indicated, is provided too late in the year if any remedial action is needed.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. The headteacher and senior staff have the support of governors and parents and preside over a school in which pupils achieve well and develop their personal skills successfully. The strengths of the leadership and management of the school are balanced by weaknesses that are identified in other areas of the report.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors are very supportive of the school and are committed to their work. They bring a range of valuable expertise to the school and improve their understanding of educational issues by regularly attending courses; however, they have not ensured that statutory requirements are fully met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Examination and test results are analysed carefully; however, the links between senior managers and subjects are not strong enough and this means that assessment and other performance information is not used to its full potential.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Financial planning is appropriately linked to improvement planning and the governors monitor the progress of the budget termly. Best value practices are applied to purchasing but need strengthening in other areas, for example, comparing spending patterns with similar schools.

The school is appropriately staffed and resources are adequate in both quantity and quality to support the curriculum. Although the accommodation has been improved significantly since the last inspection it remains unsatisfactory, since for drama, music, modern foreign languages, geography and history it is unsatisfactory.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are expected to work hard and achieve well. • Pupils are well taught and make good progress. • The school helps pupils to become more mature and responsible. • The school is approachable when parents have a question or a problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partnership of the school with parents. • The information they receive about pupils' progress. • The quantity of homework.

Parents' views of the school are mostly very positive, as reflected by the responses to the questionnaire from 27 per cent of the parents and the comments of 25 parents at the pre-inspection meeting. Inspectors agree with parents about all of their comments except with regard to homework, which is satisfactory.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than average, serving 241 students; currently, girls slightly outnumber boys. Around half the students from Year 11 continue into the sixth form while the great majority of students in Year 12 continue their studies into Year 13. The sixth form is similar to its size at the time of the last inspection. A wide range of A-level and AS-level courses is offered. Advanced and intermediate vocational courses are offered in business studies, while 15 students take a vocational ICT course in Year 14. A number of other schools and colleges offer post-16 provision in the nearby area and the school is beginning to explore partnerships with them. Students enter the sixth form with above average GCSE results.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form offers satisfactory educational provision. Students make satisfactory progress and achieve examination results that are broadly in line with national averages. Standards seen in lessons are average as they were when the school was last inspected. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but there are wider variations in the quality of teaching than seen in other years. The range of sixth form courses is too narrow to meet the learning needs of the pupils who enrol in the school. The sixth form is subsidised slightly by the budget allocated to pupils in Years 7 to 11 but offers satisfactory value for money.

Strengths

- The high proportion of students who pass examinations.
- Students' achievement in English, physical education, French and ICT.
- The support and guidance offered to students.
- The management of the sixth form.

What could be improved

- Levels of achievement and the quality of teaching, to match the levels and quality achieved in Years 7 to 11.
- Students' achievement in psychology and general studies.
- The breadth and organisation of the curriculum so that courses match the abilities and aspirations of all the students.
- The library provision to enable students to study independently at a high level.

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	Good. Results are above average and standards high. Students make satisfactory progress as a result of good teaching. This, coupled with their very positive attitudes, ensures good quality learning. Good leadership and management support standards.
Biology	Good. Standards are rising and are now average although A-level results in 2002 were below average. The quality of teaching, learning, leadership and management is good.
Chemistry	Good. Standards are improving and are now above average although A-level results in 2002 were average and students did not achieve as well as their GCSE results indicated they should have. Teaching, learning and

	leadership are good.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Product design	Satisfactory. The sixth form provides a worthwhile and enjoyable experience for students. Standards are average and while achievement is satisfactory overall, some students do not achieve as well as they should. A-level results over the past four years have been below average. Teaching, learning, leadership and management are satisfactory.
Business studies	Satisfactory. New courses have been successfully introduced and established, offering a good range of opportunities. Standards in work seen are average for GNVQ and below average for AVCE. Teaching and learning, and students' achievement are satisfactory. The provision is well managed but the long-term instability in staffing is a significant constraint.
Information and communication technology	Good. AS-level tests indicate that standards are currently above average. Examination results have been consistently in line with the national average over recent years. Teaching and learning are good. The subject is well managed.
Physical education	Very good. Standards are above average and students achieve very well. AS-level results were average in 2002 and well above average in 2001. Standards reflect very good teaching and learning which is promoted by high quality leadership and management.
Theatre studies	Very good. Students are currently achieving well in drama and standards are above average. Results in the 2002 A-level examination were below average and students did not achieve as well as they should have; this was as a result of weaknesses in course work which have been addressed. Teaching, learning, leadership and management are very good.
Geography	Good. Examination results have risen in the last year and module results indicate that results will remain at or above expectations. Teaching, learning, leadership and management are good.
History	Satisfactory. Recent results are below average but improving and the achievement of the students is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but students could be given more responsibility for their own learning. The subject is well led.
Psychology	Unsatisfactory. Results are well below national averages. Further performance reviews of curriculum, assessment, leadership and teaching and learning are needed to meet the diverse learning needs of students and to address issues of underachievement.
English literature	Good. Teaching and learning are very good and standards in Year 13 are above average, suggesting that A-level results will be higher than in 2002 when results were in line with national standards. English literature results in recent years have generally been above average. This is a popular course with 37 students in Year13, and 44 in Year 12, (AS), most of whom will complete the A-level course.
French	Good. Small numbers of students have taken the subject in recent years. Standards are above average as were A-level results in 2002. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and this explains the above average standards. Leadership and management are good.

Some other subjects were sampled during the inspection: physics, Spanish, art, general studies, sociology, law and economics. Overall, standards of work in these lessons were average (compared with national standards), while the quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory. Some very good teaching was seen in physics and economics lessons. In the economics lesson on European Union convergence criteria, the teacher's very good subject knowledge and teaching skills drew considered responses from the students, which enabled them to learn very well. The provision for general studies is unsatisfactory. Too little time is allocated to the preparation of students for the AS and A-level examinations. Some students achieve good results in the AS-level examination because they are very well motivated and hardworking; others fail to complete the course and to gain a grade. Standards overall are below the national average. They are also below the average standards gained in other A-level subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The sixth form is organised and managed well. The head of sixth form has developed an effective system for monitoring students' progress and providing individual guidance and support. Students are well prepared for university entrance and receive good careers guidance. Relationships between teachers and students are good and this enables guidance to take place in an atmosphere of trust and respect. Assessment and monitoring of progress is good.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form does not meet the objectives of the government's Curriculum 2000 initiative. Vocational provision is limited and the general studies course is unsatisfactory. Provision for advanced level courses has developed well. This meets the needs of around half the students who enter the school and the remainder leave to attend colleges (and occasionally other schools) or to seek employment. Those pupils who leave after Year 11 effectively lose the opportunity to study at a school whose ethos and Catholic values attracted them and their parents in the first place. In addition, as the sixth form is slightly subsidised by the rest of the school, a significant proportion of staffing resources intended for all the pupils are enjoyed only by those who choose to stay after Year 11; this is inequitable. The school does not apply systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of subjects' work.

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 help and support offered by teachers. • The quality of teaching and teachers' expectations that they will achieve well. • The arrangements for settling them into the sixth form. • The printed information provided about sixth form courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of extra-curricular activities and enrichment courses. • The degree to which they are treated as adults. • The quality of careers advice. • The advice about which courses they should take in the sixth form. • The information about how much progress they are making.

Inspectors agree with students that teachers are supportive but judge that the quality of teaching could be higher. They also agree with students about the induction arrangements and the usefulness of the sixth form prospectus. The range of extra-curricular activities is good but the general studies course is unsatisfactory. Students are mostly treated as adults; for example, in the way they are encouraged to become Eucharistic ministers. Students are given good advice on university entrance and careers but access to careers resources is limited. Some students are inappropriately recruited to courses in the sixth form; for example, psychology. The information given to students about their progress is generally good.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement "outstanding" in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to "very weak".

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Since the last inspection standards have risen and this is reflected in examination and test results. The trend in National Curriculum tests results is above the national trend over the past five years while the trend in GCSE results is broadly in line with the national trend.
2. The standards achieved by pupils on entry to the school are above average, based on a range of measures including National Curriculum tests and commercial testing schemes. In 2002, for example, 88 per cent of Year 7 students arrived having gained Level 4 in English in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 (the expected level for students to have reached by this age). This compares with 75 per cent of students reaching this level nationally. Fewer than average pupils achieve standards on entry that are either very high or very low.
3. On entry, boys and girls achieve similar standards. Examination and test results indicate that boys slightly outperform girls at the end of Years 9 and 11 compared with the results of boys and girls nationally.
4. Pupils' strong performance in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 reflects the good quality work of the English, mathematics and science departments. The English department achieves particularly high results following the implementation of a range of successful strategies. These include a strong focus on developing writing skills, additional support for those pupils who arrive at the school with weak literacy skills and the organisation of pupils into ability groups in Years 8 and 9. English teachers plan lessons very well and take great care when marking to identify how pupils can improve the quality of their work.
5. In mathematics and science, good teaching, which makes effective use of aspects of the national Key Stage 3 strategy, is the main reason for the good achievement of the pupils. The use of information technology to promote learning is also a key factor. Commercial computer software packages are used to reinforce pupils' understanding; for example, pupils in Year 9 science lessons use an animated programme to help them prepare for the National Curriculum tests. In mathematics the department has trained pupils in evaluating their own progress against National Curriculum level criteria. This motivates them well and is one of the main reasons why a higher proportion of pupils gained Level 7 in the 2002 National Curriculum tests than in the other two subjects.
6. The achievement of all pupils is good but boys achieve relatively higher National Curriculum test results than girls in all three subjects compared with the results of boys and girls nationally. The reasons for this are not clear from the inspection evidence.
7. The achievement of pupils in art during Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory because learning has been disrupted owing to teacher absence, the quality of some of the teaching is unsatisfactory and the curriculum does not enable pupils to cover the full range of National Curriculum learning objectives.
8. GCSE results in 2002 were higher than in any of the previous five years. Nearly three-quarters of boys achieved five A*-C grades and two-thirds of girls. This improvement in GCSE results, particularly among boys, is partly explained by the boys' higher performance on entry than previous year groups and their relatively higher performance than girls both on entry and in the 2000 National Curriculum tests.

9. Comparing pupils' total GCSE points scores with their Year 9 National Curriculum test results, the pupils who took GCSE in 2002 made well above average progress but pupils who took GCSE in 2001 made above average progress. The proportion of pupils gaining five A*-C grades as predicted by their National Curriculum test performance was relatively lower; it was broadly average in 2002 and below average in 2001. GCSE targets were met in 2002 but not met in 2001. The targets for 2003 appear to be appropriately challenging.

10. Some subjects are very successful in enabling pupils to gain A* or A GCSE grades. In 2002, for example, almost half the pupils gained A* or A grades in physical education compared with a national average of 15 per cent. In English, 17 per cent of the grades achieved were A* or A grades compared with the national average of 11 per cent. All the pupils take English and therefore this is a good barometer of pupils' capabilities. The average for A* or A grades across all the subjects over the past three years is below the national average and this indicates that in some subjects, such as French and geography, pupils do not gain as many top grades as they could do.
11. Evidence in a range of subjects and together with examination results suggests that while their progress is satisfactory, more able pupils do not make as much progress as other pupils in Years 10 and 11.
12. In 2002, compared with their results in all subjects, pupils did relatively better at GCSE in physical education, history, English and mathematics while they did relatively worse in art, drama, French and science. Boys performed relatively worse in design and technology, largely due to the low results of one particular class in resistant materials.
13. Pupils with SEN make good progress, and this has been sustained since the last inspection. Pupils with SEN taking GCSE in 2002 performed well with a majority exceeding their predicted scores. The majority of pupils with SEN in the current Year 11 made gains in National Curriculum test scores between Year 6 and Year 9, with around three-quarters improving by at least one level in English, mathematics and science. In the current Year 10 over half of pupils improved by at least one level in mathematics and science and three-quarters of pupils in English. In Year 11 ten per cent of pupils made very good progress in mathematics with an improvement of three levels. Similarly in Year 10, 12 per cent improved by three levels in English and six per cent in mathematics.
14. In individual subjects, pupils with SEN in Years 7 to 11 make very good progress in physical education and good progress in English, mathematics, geography, music and ICT. In science, history and design technology they make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. They make satisfactory progress in art and in modern foreign languages.
15. The high level of performance of pupils in physical education reflects the very good teaching which the department displays in all years. Since the last inspection, schemes of work have been completely re-written; they now enable pupils to enjoy a wider range of activities and a more systematic approach to learning. For example in athletics, challenging targets are agreed with all pupils, which enable them to succeed and to appreciate their success. Pupils are given responsibility for monitoring their progress towards their targets and this motivates them to try hard; rising standards are the outcome for pupils of all abilities.
16. Pupils arrive at the school with above average reading and writing skills. Boys and girls achieve similar standards of writing, speaking and reading. The quality of expression and accuracy in writing improves markedly through the first three years in the school. Literacy is well promoted in both English and other subjects. In physical education, for example, teachers reinforce the importance of communicating effectively by engaging pupils in discussions about their work and by expecting pupils to use specialist vocabulary accurately. Year 7 pupils who have lower standards of literacy skills are given extra support during tutorial time.
17. Pupils' numeracy skills are above average. The numeracy skills acquired in mathematics support pupils' progress in other subjects. Pupils show a good recall of basic number facts and are able to use calculators efficiently. There is no evidence that levels of numeracy skills impede progress in any subjects of the curriculum. Pupils in all year groups have the opportunity to apply some numeracy skills. By Year 9 pupils in science interpret graphs, use formulae and read instrument scales to measure time, volume and temperature. In Year 10 and Year 11 science, pupils of all levels of attainment interpret and use a wide variety of graphs and formulae. In modern foreign languages pupils use numbers in a variety of situations such as dates, ages and prices. Graphical and measurement skills are practised in design and technology, for example the measurement of ingredients in food technology. In geography numerous statistical graphs are drawn and interpreted. Algebraic techniques are successfully applied in information technology when constructing spreadsheets.

Sixth form

18. Standards in the sixth form are average and the achievement of pupils is broadly satisfactory, although there is evidence of underachievement in examinations, particularly among girls. Standards of attainment seen in students' work during the inspection were average compared with national standards. In the 13 subjects providing the main focus of the inspection, standards were: above average in English, mathematics, chemistry, ICT, French, geography and physical education; average in biology, product design, history and drama; below average in business studies; and well below average in psychology.
19. Students' achievement and progress vary by subject. In the 13 subjects providing the main focus of the inspection, the achievement of students is: very good in physical education; good in English, ICT, French and drama; satisfactory in mathematics, biology, chemistry, product design, history, geography and business studies; and unsatisfactory in psychology.
20. The 2002 examination results were a major improvement on those achieved by the students in 2001 and approached the results that students achieved in 2000. National results for 2002 have not yet been fully confirmed but first publications show that the school's results were broadly in line with national averages. At the time of the last inspection, examination results were also broadly in line with national averages. In both 2002 and 2001, girls performed less well than boys. The reasons for the lower performance of girls than boys in the sixth form are unclear from the inspection evidence; this is an area that the school needs to research in detail.
21. Based on the local education authority's analysis of sixth form examination performance, the school's 2002 results placed it fourth out of all the schools in Sefton. Other analysis of performance using a commercial scheme to monitor students' progress from GCSE to post-16 examinations indicates that students made slightly below average progress. Overall, examination and test evidence suggests that students make less progress in the sixth form than they do in Years 7 to 11.
22. In 2001, examination results were below average and students did not achieve as well as they should have done based upon their GCSE results. The school was concerned about the results and described them as 'well below the standards our students normally achieve.' Senior managers concluded that the main reasons for underperformance were: not enough progress monitoring; students working long hours at part-time jobs while also trying to study; relationship problems; and students' poor use of study time. Action to improve the tracking of students' progress was taken and regular individual tutorial sessions have significantly improved the opportunities for students to receive guidance and support. Pastoral provision overall has improved.

Completion of courses

%	2001-02	2000-2001
A/AS level	80	84
AVCE	77	77
GNVQ Intermediate	77	75

No national statistics are available to compare course completion rates.

Pass rates

%	2000 - 01	2001 - 02
A-level/AVCE/AGNVQ	80	94
AS-level	95	99

23. The proportion of A-level examinations that resulted in A or B grades in 2002 was 23 per cent. There was a sharp difference in the performance of girls and boys; boys gained twice as many A or B grades. In 2001 the proportion of A or B grades was 13 per cent when the national average was 38 per cent.

24. AS-level pass rates were above average in 2001. Almost all the students passed the examinations in 2002 with a quarter gaining A or B grades. Students who took these examinations did so over a two-year period because they were of lower ability; their results are therefore not readily comparable with national results which include those of students with a broader ability profile. They took the courses over a two year period. All students entered for Advanced vocational courses passed the examinations in 2002 but with only five per cent gaining A or B grades which is below average.
25. Pass rates in GNVQ intermediate examinations were above average in 2001; the proportion of students gaining merit grades was also above average. In 2002 the pass rate was average while the proportion of merit grades was above average. The intermediate GNVQ course in business studies has been successful in enabling small numbers of students to progress to the advanced vocational business studies course.
26. The achievement of students in physical education is very good because of the very good quality of the teaching. Teachers' subject knowledge is very high and they use a wide range of effective teaching methods to stimulate and motivate the students. The teaching of key skills is well integrated into lesson planning and this helps students to become more involved in their learning and to meet the demands of the examination.
27. As in physical education, students make good progress in theatre studies in both the practical and written aspects of the course because of very good teaching. The teacher provides an excellent role model for students in their practical work. He encourages the students to think for themselves and to have confidence in their ideas. Schemes of work are very well planned and students are given very good guidance on how to improve the quality of their work; their individual learning needs are met very well.
28. Standards in psychology are well below average for a range of reasons. Students are accepted on to the course even if they have lower GCSE results than other subjects would accept. Relatively large numbers of students are enrolled, which results in mixed ability teaching groups containing students with the potential for the highest grades together with those for whom the demands of the course are too high. The mixing of these students results in underachievement because the teaching does not take enough account of their different learning needs. A high proportion of the lower ability students fail to gain AS-level passes.
29. In work seen the one sixth former with special needs was making good progress, for example in participating well in group work and displaying effective social skills.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

30. Pupils have very good attitudes to the school in all years and this is one of the reasons why they make good progress. Pupils spoken to informally during the inspection week confirm that they enjoy coming to school and that staff support them well. Parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed with these views. In the great majority of lessons pupils work with enthusiasm and interest and enjoy their learning. They stay on task, are keen to answer questions and comply well with instructions. For example, in a very good science lesson, pupils displayed enthusiasm and maturity when discussing the meaning of an electric current and worked well in groups to test the efficiency of an ammeter.
31. Pupils have a very good respect for the feelings and values of others. Lunchtimes are pleasant social occasions and at both lunchtime and breaks older pupils were observed relating well to each other and to younger pupils. Relationships among pupils are good.
32. Pupils' behaviour is very good in all years. Classrooms are very orderly and this enables learning to take place effectively. The great majority of pupils behave very well as they move around the site. Pupils, teachers and non-teaching staff display good levels of co-operation and work well together.
33. The positive atmosphere in the school provides pupils with a good model of the benefits of an orderly society and is therefore good preparation for citizenship.

34. The school aim: *“To develop the whole person so that at the end of their school careers, students should be well equipped intellectually, spiritually, physically and morally for their adult life”* is understood by most pupils and it is reflected well in their behaviour and attitudes. The school expects a high standard of both respect and behaviour and this is a key element of the positive steps the school takes to ensure that all pupils have equal access to the school's educational provision. Although most corridors and stairways are cramped, pupils use them safely and without jostling.
35. Pupils treat their own property, school property and other pupils' property with respect. The school shows little evidence of vandalism, graffiti or litter which reflects the school's good provision for moral and social education. All pupils have individual lockers and are able to store their personal possessions and learning resources with confidence.
36. Incidents of bullying at the school are rare and pupils confirm that when it does occur, staff deal with it immediately and appropriately. The school has a relatively low level of exclusion; 20 fixed-term and two permanent exclusions in the previous year. The reasons for exclusion are appropriate and correct procedures are followed.
37. The school promotes pupils' personal development well. Pupils confirmed that the school is a friendly, caring community and they feel well cared for and supported by staff. Pupils are given some responsibilities and when this occurs they are eager to accept them. The recently created school council contributes well to pupils' knowledge of citizenship and democracy. Two form captains from each year group are elected to the council and during a council meeting observed during the inspection week, pupils demonstrated good debating skills and maturity when discussing what the school could do further to improve a litter problem. Each form tutor group elects two form captains at the start of the academic year. They have responsibility for informing their form tutor if there are any problems in the form and also represent the form on special occasions. Pupils in Year 8 are responsible for organising a class team for the fun day in July. Pupils are given responsibility for the collation of the rewards for pupils in their forms and pupils undertake various duties in the school including litter duty, giving out hymn books for assembly and helping with displays in their classrooms.
38. Pupils are very involved in charitable work and Year 12 pupils act as escorts on visits to Lourdes to help, under supervision, both with administration and with patients.
39. Employers generally have a very high opinion of pupils in Year 10 sent to them for work experience.
40. Attendance at 93 per cent is above the national average. The school uses an electronic system of registration. Registers are marked neatly and fully comply with legislation. The school does not monitor absence on the first day of absence basis, which is a weakness, particularly with regard to child protection. The vast majority of lessons start on time.
41. Links with parents of pupils with SEN are good. Apart from sustaining informal links on a daily basis the school keeps parents and prospective parents informed about its provision through parents' evenings that are attended by the co-ordinator for pupils with SEN.

Sixth Form

42. Students interviewed have positive views about the sixth form. In particular they feel that they receive a good level of support from all sixth form staff and are well taught. Most of their criticisms were not confirmed by inspection evidence except for some concerns about the quality of advice they receive about sixth form courses as some students are enrolled on courses for which they are ill-prepared.
43. The Connexions service offers good support and students receive helpful advice regarding higher education opportunities and careers from both Connexions staff and sixth form tutors. Further information is provided in a variety of locations in the sixth form areas and in particular in the library. This is stocked with pamphlets and has internet access but because it is small and often in use by other students, access is not immediately available to all sixth formers when they require it. A minority of students feel that they do not receive enough support about careers options; inspection findings do not confirm these views.

44. Sixth form students display very good attitudes to the school. They feel staff go to lengths to offer them good levels of pastoral care and support and assist them. They value the work of the sixth form mentor and feel that the advice offered by the school for their future academic needs is of quality and use to them.
45. Students in the sixth form provide good role models for other students and set a good example. They work hard in their lessons, arrive punctually and are anxious to achieve well. Because of their positive experience in the lower school and the level of support offered to them, many Year 12 students are keen to join the sixth form but in some cases enrol on courses that are unsuitable.
46. All pupils in the sixth form behave well and there have been no exclusions in the past year.
47. The good support offered by all sixth form staff is much appreciated by the students. Staff take time to meet pupils regularly, track their progress and help them work towards the grade they need for further or higher education. Staff take a very pro-active approach with students' UCAS applications for university places. They offer a high level of support to student in compiling their applications, checking them and liaise well with universities and higher education establishments to ensure that students receive a very good chance of acceptance for higher education courses.
48. Students know they can rely on the school for sensitive and professional help if they experience personal problems. In turn, sixth form students help the lower school with supervision of pupils at lunchtime and mentoring younger pupils. They also make a good contribution to the organisation and supervision of the annual retreat.
49. The great majority of students have good independent learning skills. They use the facilities in the sixth form centre well for private study and meet deadlines for the completion of work.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

50. Pupils are well taught in Years 7 to 11 and this is one of the key reasons for their good achievement in tests and examinations. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.
51. In the 127 lessons seen in Years 7 to 11, the quality of teaching was: satisfactory or better in 97 per cent; good or better in 69 per cent; and very good or excellent in 23 per cent. These proportions are broadly average compared with the results of inspections nationally although the proportion of very good or excellent lessons is slightly below average.
52. The quality of teaching and learning is: very good in physical education; good in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, ICT, modern foreign languages, history, music and drama; satisfactory in geography; and unsatisfactory in art.
53. Throughout the year groups the proportion of very good or excellent teaching was similar but there was a significantly higher proportion of lessons graded good or better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. This is largely because Years 7 and 8 are often taught in rooms that are not specialised. The impact of this is that teachers have to take all their resources with them for each lesson and therefore have more limited means of bringing the subject to life and stimulating pupils' learning.
54. Teaching and learning are appropriately the main focus of the current improvement plan. Methods promoted by a commercial scheme are being introduced throughout the school following a training day for all teachers during the current academic year. These include revising the structure of lessons and encouraging teachers to use white boards. In addition, two members of staff have been given management responsibilities for promoting the programme in all subjects. Some teachers, such as the co-ordinator for pupils with SEN and the physical education department, have moved rapidly to adjust their teaching to incorporate these new methods while others have yet to respond. The lack of regular formal contact between senior managers and subject leaders inhibits the rapid and cohesive implementations of such whole-school strategies.

55. The great majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and apply this to good effect. In most subjects, heads of department manage teaching responsibilities well to ensure that pupils of all ages and abilities learn effectively. The management of pupils is also good; teachers develop good working relationships with the pupils and this helps to create a productive working atmosphere in the classroom.
56. Pupils of all abilities learn very well in physical education as a result of very good teaching. In Year 10, for example, the pupils show very good understanding of energy systems, physiology and how to maximise performance through effective training. This is an outcome of the excellent work of the department in promoting health-related fitness. Physical education teachers have also developed a wide range of high quality resources to support pupils' learning, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
57. Staff absence has had a significant impact on pupils' learning in a number of subjects and in particular, art, business studies, English and design and technology. In art, for example, the intermittent but regular absences of one teacher puts considerable strains on the quality of teaching and learning that the department can offer and this is one of the reasons why standards are not as high as they could be.
58. Issues concerning the performance of a small number of teachers were evident from either direct lesson observation or through the analysis of pupils' work and examination results. In art, for example, weaknesses in teaching from both permanent and temporary staff result in some pupils achieving at a lower level than they could do, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Most of the work in design and technology was of good standard and revealed pupils gaining good opportunities to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills; issues reflecting weaker teaching were evident in some of the work in resistant materials and textiles. A small proportion of science teaching was unsatisfactory because explanations were not given in a way that the pupils could understand.
59. The teaching of personal and social education and citizenship is variable in quality. The programmes are taught by form tutors with contributions, particularly in the case of citizenship, from other subjects. Year tutors organise and manage curriculum planning. Some year tutors ensure that teachers are well prepared for each lesson while others often provide materials at the last minute. The lack of a systematic process for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision means that weaknesses are not identified and tackled effectively.
60. More able pupils learn at a satisfactory rate in Years 9 to 11 but could be pushed harder. In some subjects, such as physical education, all pupils work towards challenging personal targets and this ensures that they make good progress. The impact of this can be seen in the full range of the department's work including GCSE results and performances in school teams. In some other subjects, such as geography, work is not planned well enough to stretch more able pupils and this is reflected in the relatively lower proportion of pupils that gain A*/A GCSE grades compared with results in other subjects.
61. Specialist SEN teaching is good overall and some is very good. There is a high level of challenge in the mathematics and English lessons taught by specialist staff. The learning environment supports individuals well although occasionally some individuals need more encouragement to boost their confidence. Year 8 pupils read a shortened version of Romeo and Juliet. Class discussion was used well throughout the lesson with pupils constantly challenged both to explain the meaning of lines of text and to comment on the plot as it developed. One student with complex needs was supported well by the learning support assistant and took a full part in the lesson. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson ICT was used very well to enhance learning. Pupils made good progress in reading a series of 5, 6, 7, and 8 digit numbers that were displayed on an interactive whiteboard. The use of the whiteboard enabled the teacher to sustain a challenging pace by quickly displaying progressively more difficult numbers. ICT was again used very productively later in the lesson to display the "unfolding" of three-dimensional shapes in preparation for a task involving the construction of a tetrahedron. Pupils were challenged well in discussion to use the correct mathematical terminology in describing the shape.
62. Learning support assistants give good support in the great majority of lessons. They build a good rapport with individuals and establish good relationships. In a Year 7 science lesson the support given was not intrusive but allowed the student to work at an appropriate pace. In a Year 8 music

lesson the support assistant ensured that a student with low self-esteem participated fully in a melody composition activity. Planning for the student's needs was enhanced by subject targets. In a Year 8 history lesson liaison between teacher and support assistant was very good. The support assistant was able to prepare well in advance and create additional resources for a student who participated fully in whole class and group work activities. Support staff are less well used when pupils are being re-integrated into mainstream lessons after placement in the learning support unit because of the lack of contact with individual pupils prior to their re-integration.

63. Evidence from the inspection is that the quality of class teaching in supporting pupils with special needs is good. In a Year 10 English lesson the teacher's own reading (of war poetry) was exceptionally strong. The example set had a very positive impact and encouraged pupils with special needs to read to the class with little hesitation. In a Year 7 ICT lesson the teacher had good awareness of a student's special needs and involved him fully in lesson activities. The student displayed good ICT skills in altering the size and location of images. In a Year 9 ICT lesson the good attitudes of pupils were an important part of support given to pupils with special needs, with pupils helping each other. In a Year 7 design and technology lesson planning for pupils' special needs was good. Subject targets were incorporated well into planning and pupils consequently made good progress in their understanding of how food ingredients influence the manufacture of food products. In a Year 10 life skills lesson pupils were given the task of preparing an ICT presentation on a career of their choice. The clarity of the lesson introduction gave them the ICT skills and motivation to carry out the activity.
64. Literacy is promoted well both within English and in other subjects. In English, the reading, comprehension and writing skills of both boys and girls have improved substantially mainly because of teachers' effective lesson planning. Some other subjects make a very good contribution to pupils' development of literacy skills; for example, in physical education, whiteboards are used to introduce key vocabulary prior to or after practical lessons.
65. The planned provision for numeracy and the teaching of numeracy skills within subjects themselves is still developing according to the school's numeracy action plan. Some, but not all subjects, have reference to key objectives for the consolidation, application or development of numeracy in their schemes of work. Any lack of planning means that pupils' experiences are left to chance. The school has completed an audit of the numeracy opportunities and needs in subjects. It is planned to use these data to produce a more coherent approach to numeracy across the curriculum, including the production of a numeracy handbook. This will, amongst other things, help to ensure a common approach across subjects to various mathematical conventions and use of vocabulary.

Sixth form

66. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is satisfactory and this leads to satisfactory learning and achievement.
67. In the 13 subjects chosen as the focus of the inspection, the quality of teaching is: very good in English, French, physical education and drama; good in mathematics, biology, chemistry, geography and ICT; satisfactory in design and technology, history and business; and unsatisfactory in psychology.
68. Sixty-four lessons were observed; the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 94 per cent, good or better in 69 per cent and very good or excellent in 25 per cent. This is a slightly lower than average profile for a sixth form inspection, particularly the proportion of very good or excellent lessons.
69. Teaching is not as strong as it is in Years 7 to 11 in a number of subjects, mainly because teaching styles do not promote learning as effectively. In business studies the quality of teaching is variable. In some lessons, students are taught well, the teacher giving a range of opportunities for students to consolidate their learning through discussions and reviewing sessions. In contrast, some lessons are dominated by teacher talk which uses time inefficiently and does not allow enough opportunity for students to think.

70. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are well equipped to teach successfully in the sixth form. Relationships in the classroom between teachers and students are good and this is beneficial to the learning process. Students respond well when given opportunities to take control of their learning.

71. Students' positive attitudes enhance the learning process. They are interested in their subjects and concentrate well, particularly when given challenging work. In physical education teachers integrate theoretical and practical work very successfully. For example, in a Year 12 lesson looking at how athletes develop their skills within coaching programmes, students' learning was excellent because the teacher used a range of effective approaches, including the use of a computer-based demonstration. The lesson drew together strands such as physiological and psychological factors in skill development and this enabled students to consolidate their learning very well.

72. In history, the department has produced high quality booklets to cover the course requirements. They provide a wealth of relevant and valuable information but, when used exclusively, this removes responsibility for the students to develop and use core historical skills such as researching and analysing information from source materials.
73. The teaching of theatre studies is very good. The teacher plans the teaching of both practical and theoretical aspects very effectively so that students of all abilities are stretched. He manages practical sessions very well by showing students ways of tackling situations while always expecting them to think for themselves and find creative solutions. Students are enthusiastic and committed because they are inspired to learn.
74. Teachers of French are high quality linguists and provide students with very good role models, particularly for speaking. Lessons are planned very well and use a range of imaginative resources, many of which are from the French media. Learning is enhanced by teachers creating a classroom atmosphere that has the language at its heart. Technical aspects of grammar are taught as they emerge out of topics; this makes learning much more interesting and relevant.
75. Owing to staff absence, the current Year 13 business studies students have had three supply teachers since the beginning of March 2003, during the time when they have been preparing for final examinations. Arrangements to ensure that this has not been detrimental to their learning are unsatisfactory. No timetable adjustments have been made and during the inspection week they were taught by a new supply teacher at a time when a business studies teacher had non-contact time; this arrangement was defended by the headteacher.
76. Students taking psychology do not make enough progress. Tasks do not reflect the range of abilities within the psychology groups and this impedes the progress of all students. Curriculum arrangements such as combining A-level students and those students re-sitting the AS-level examination in the same lesson are also detrimental to learning and compound the problems of teachers in meeting individual learning needs. The courses are popular, but the arrangements to teach the students are unsatisfactory and this explains why examination results are not as high as they should be.
77. The teaching of general studies is unsatisfactory. It is a challenging course but students do not receive any teaching in Year 12 and therefore enter both the AS-level examination and A-level examination in Year 13 with limited preparation. The AS-level examination is prepared for in the autumn term of Year 13 by five teachers; this schedule is too challenging for most students. In the four lessons seen, students had negative attitudes in two of them, which is quite out of character with attitudes in the sixth form as a whole. Teachers struggle to engage the students; for example in a lesson about literature, students failed to respond to an extract from *The Canterbury Tales* with interest or understanding.
78. All students are taught key skills in Year 12 and many are entered for examinations as part of the school's response to the government's curriculum changes in 2000. Students are entered for ICT key skills examinations but in January 2003 all the assignments from 71 students that were submitted were failed because the assignment was deemed not to have met the examination criteria; the school is appealing. An audit of provision has taken place with subjects also making contributions to key skills development through, for example, the provision of writing frames to improve students' essay-writing skills.
79. The one sixth former with SEN is supported well in the sixth form and is making good progress.

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

80. The school offers a satisfactory range of learning opportunities for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and there is adequate teaching time in all years. However, the provision for modern foreign languages is unsatisfactory because too little time has been allocated to a second language in Years 8 and 9 so that few pupils are in a position to take up more than one language in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9, the art curriculum does not meet National Curriculum requirements and in history and geography there is no planned use of ICT. The low time allocation to drama, mentioned in the

previous inspection report, has not been altered, so that the well-planned curriculum cannot be fully taught in the time and overall provision is unsatisfactory. In English, science, design and technology and ICT curriculum provision is good for Years 7 to 11. In physical education, the provision is very good, with very thorough planning and the opportunity for pupils to extend their special talents in sport and games.

81. The school's provision for vocational education is satisfactory. Some improvements have been made over the past two years, notably the introduction of vocational courses in ICT but the school recognises the need to develop provision further. There are plans to develop links with a local further education college from September 2003.
82. The school has implemented aspects of the Key Stage 3 Strategy successfully, especially in English and mathematics. There is provision for booster classes in English to support pupils who joined the school with low scores in their national test results when they were in primary school. Both departments are using assessment data to track pupils' progress and intervene if they deem it is not enough. Teachers generally, are sharing lesson objectives with pupils and many are using a three-part format to their lessons. The school has some way to go before it fully meets the spirit of the strategy to provide a seamless progression from learning in the primary school through the secondary school.
83. Citizenship has been introduced into the curriculum in line with statutory requirements but the quality of provision is unsatisfactory. There is no overall scheme of work and the work of subjects and heads of years is not co-ordinated effectively. The quality of teaching and the coverage of the curriculum are not monitored or evaluated. The good quality of moral and social provision prepares pupils well for citizenship.
84. The special educational needs co-ordinator has made a very positive contribution to further develop the school's provision to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils. She is actively looking at the school site and the issue of disability access. This includes looking at other schools' facilities and inviting wheel-chair users to visit the school and advise on access issues. Another important initiative addresses very effectively individual barriers to learning. A new version of Individual Education Plans contains information on pupils' preferred learning styles; this development includes the introduction of test materials to identify learning styles.
85. An important part of the school's ethos is that "the individual matters." There is good support for individual pupils to ensure that they are appropriately challenged, although the impact of this on more able pupils is lower. A visually impaired student is currently making good progress in a high achieving mathematics group. A student whose mother tongue is not English has full access to the curriculum and has the benefit of access to a member of staff fluent in her language.
86. Setting arrangements are effective in enabling pupils to learn at an appropriate pace. Setting enables pupils with SEN to benefit from being taught in small groups. Learning support assistants support identified pupils in different parts of the curriculum. They offer effective support to pupils with a wide range of needs.
87. The school has made a sound start in identifying gifted and talented pupils. The original method for identifying pupils from the highest 10 per cent of attainers in each year group is about to be altered to allow departments to identify pupils whom they see as being gifted or talented in their subject. The co-ordinator recognises that this is involving departments more directly and the consequence is they are more involved in the planning of provision for these pupils. In the current year links with local schools have allowed gifted and talented pupils to join in a number of special events which have challenged their thinking and given them the opportunity to meet others with similar talents. There are satisfactory arrangements for monitoring the progress of these pupils, through heads of department and heads of year but examination evidence indicates that the proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades is lower than it could be.
88. There is good provision for gifted and talented pupils in some curriculum areas; for example, gifted and talented linguists visit Spain and there are extension groups in mathematics in Years 10 and 11. There is good practice in design and technology with, for example Year 10 pupils working to build a racing car engine in a linked activity with Rolls Royce.

89. ICT is used very well in design and technology; the equipment available is very good. Good use is made of ICT in business studies which also has its own suite of computers. Mathematics uses specific mathematical software well. The use of ICT to develop numeracy skills is also used effectively by pupils with special educational needs.
90. Unsatisfactory provision for the use of ICT is found in English, modern foreign languages, geography, history, music and drama. Most of these departments are unable to gain access to computer rooms on a planned basis. The school does not have a clear overview of the opportunities for departments to gain access to ICT equipment.
91. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities. These are outstanding in physical education where numerous events enjoy the support of many teachers and pupils. Many clubs contribute to the range of activities, including the drama club which stages several productions each year. The choir and music ensembles also provide opportunities for pupils to experience performance work. There are art, ICT, philosophy and clubs which allow pupils to pursue individual interests. Teachers in many departments offer additional activities or support to help pupils prepare for examinations or sort out problems with class-work. The curriculum is enriched by visits in many subjects and occasional visiting experts to the school. All of this provision makes a very good contribution to enhancing the quality of pupils' learning.
92. The provision for pupils with SEN is good. The use of setting throughout the age range gives good support to pupils, with smaller groups created and planning focused to meet the needs of particular groups. Specialist staff are well used in teaching mathematics and English to groups where needs are greatest. Good use is made of local authority staffing that is bought in to provide regular 1:1 literacy support for identified pupils. ICT is an effective part of the school's provision. "Successmaker" is well established in mathematics and forms an important part of the provision for some pupils throughout Years 7 to 11, including those with SEN; it is now being extended to English. A life skills course has been introduced for some pupils in Years 10 and 11. Evidence from the inspection showed pupils well motivated by activities that included good use of ICT.
93. Learning support assistants are mostly well used and are assigned to support individuals and groups in classrooms. They support pupils with a wide range of needs including some with complex needs and some with a specific need such as visual impairment. They are, additionally, used to support pupils in the learning support unit, including their reintegration into mainstream classes. Their deployment to assist re-integration is not always effective because staff are assigned to pupils with whom they have no regular contact. Learning mentors provide another layer of support for individual pupils some of whom have special needs. They provide valuable additional support by organising lunchtime activities that provide, for example, very good opportunities for pupils to develop social skills. Learning support assistants also provide some additional support outside lessons including a daily exercise programme that supports pupils experiencing difficulties with co-ordination.
94. The provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is unsatisfactory. Requirements are met for health and sex education and raising awareness about drugs. Topics are dealt with at appropriate stages and include study skills and coping with difficult situations, including bullying. Use is made of visitors to the school. Responsibility toward others is fostered. Some teachers take their duties in teaching PSHE seriously, others less so. The programme suffers because of this. Teaching materials are provided by heads of years. There is variation in the quality of these materials and the timing of their provision to teachers. Where good, teachers are provided with a full year's teaching materials in booklet form for each pupil, with a teachers' guide to accompany this. At the other extreme, teachers were seen to receive materials for lessons at the end of the preceding day. This uneven provision, combined with the lack of a system for the formal monitoring of the teaching of this programme, makes the programme unsatisfactory.
95. The school provides well for the pupils' personal development although opportunities for them to appreciate the cultural diversity represented in modern British society are limited, which was also the case at the time of the previous inspection. Concern for the development of all aspects of pupils' personal development is very evident through the school's mission statement and aims, which are firmly rooted in Gospel values.
96. Religious education and the liturgical life of the school provide the foundation for pupils' spiritual development, and the development of a sense of self worth in pupils is seen as a key

responsibility of the whole staff. Assemblies are well planned and opportunities are provided in religious education lessons for pupils to prepare and lead some of these occasions themselves. In addition to formal collective worship, assemblies also provide good opportunities for pupils to reflect on serious issues. For example, in a Year 7 assembly, pupils prayed and sang with reverence and were encouraged to reflect on the impact of the current war in Iraq on the lives of the people involved. In addition, success in recent sporting competition was celebrated, invoking a warm spontaneous response from the pupils. The assembly provided a positive start to the school day. Many lessons begin and sometimes end with a prayer although on some occasions pupils are not provided with an additional focus for their reflection. Pupils in Year 9 take part in a residential "retreat" experience and the school is looking for ways of providing this valuable opportunity for pupils to reflect on their beliefs, values and relationships, into other years. The contribution made to pupils' spiritual development through other subjects is more inconsistent although some good opportunities are provided. For example, in drama, Year 10 pupils responded well to an opportunity to reflect on the causes and effects of loneliness. Year 7 pupils investigate the impact of change on peoples' lives in their geography lessons and in music, participation in performance contributes well to the development of self-esteem and self-awareness. The work of the chaplaincy makes a good contribution to the spiritual life of the school and its work also supports pupils' moral and social development.

97. The school's provision for pupils' moral development is also good. Pupils are expected to take responsibility for their own behaviour, exemplified, for example, in the way in which they are allowed to have relatively free access to their form bases outside lesson times. This expectation is also reinforced in the way that the behaviour policy encourages the use of sanctions, which emphasise individual responsibility to the school and form community, for example by tidying their form room or being responsible for collecting litter. Moral issues are thoroughly dealt with in religious education lessons. The personal and social education and citizenship programmes also contribute well to pupils moral development in dealing with issues such as the citizen's responsibilities as well as rights, drugs education and sex education, which is taught from a Catholic moral standpoint. Most other subjects also contribute to moral education through their programmes of study. Moral dilemmas are dealt with through the texts used in English and the history curriculum is rich in opportunities to consider moral issues. For example, pupils in Year 8 investigate attitudes towards child labour in the nineteenth century and make comparisons with the present day. In geography pupils investigate the impact of economic activities on the quality of life, and in physical education lessons a sense of fair play and respect for rules is encouraged. Fundraising for charities such as CAFOD or the "Good Shepherd Fund", also encourages pupils to consider underlying moral issues as well as contributing also to their social development through involvement in the activities themselves.
98. Provision for pupils' social development is also good the school emphasises the worth of each individual member of the community recognising, as the preamble to its policy for pupils with SEN states, in quoting St Paul, that "there is a variety of gifts but always the same spirit". Pupils are expected to take increasing responsibility for themselves as they move through the school and older pupils have opportunities to exercise responsibility on behalf of others, for example as head boy and head girl or through acting as mentors to younger pupils. Members of the recently introduced school council represent the views of fellow pupils. Most subjects provide a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to work together in a variety of settings including, for example, pair and group work, and boys and girls work well alongside each other. A good range of sporting activities, both competitive and social, together with holiday visits and field trips also contributes to pupils' social development. Boys and girls from Year 12 take part in and help to run annual community sporting competitions organised by the local schools' link police officer who greatly appreciates and relies on their contribution to its success.
99. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory. There is a good range of opportunities to perform in and experience a variety of drama and musical experiences. A good number of pupils perform in the choir and a variety of musical ensembles. In addition to music and sport, extra-curricular opportunities exist to participate in a model aircraft club as well as a number of other more subject related activities such as homework clubs and booster lessons, which are appreciated by the pupils concerned. However, opportunities to raise pupils' awareness and appreciation of the culturally diverse nature of modern British society are more limited, which was also the case at the time of the previous inspection. Opportunities do occur in religious education where the programme for Years 7 to 9 includes some experience of major world faiths other than

Christianity, and in geography pupils learn something of the cultural diversity represented in the north west of England. In general, however, provision through the subjects is patchy.

Sixth form

100. Overall, the curriculum provision in the sixth form is unsatisfactory because although a substantial number of advanced level courses are on offer, there are few vocational courses and very little for students who are not ready for, or not capable of, advanced level study. A key element of the government's revision of sixth form curriculum arrangements in 2000 was the broadening of students' opportunities to gain vocational qualifications; the school has not made this a priority. Around half the pupils in Year 11 continue their studies in the sixth form while around a further third choose to study elsewhere. One of the main reasons why these pupils leave is because the school does not offer a broad enough curriculum in the sixth form. The school does not have formal partnerships with any other institutions offering post-16 provision.
101. The sixth form curriculum offers a wide range of A-level and AS-level courses which have been extended since the last inspection. The breadth of this provision gives good opportunities to those students who wish to apply to university. Some courses, such as law, have been recently introduced to meet the needs of students' broadening interests.
102. Vocational provision in the sixth form is unsatisfactory as it does not meet the aspirations of all students, nor are the courses on offer academically accessible to all students. There has been an increase in the opportunity for vocational courses in ICT, which now includes after school provision and a link with adult learners. The limited provision for English courses has not been expanded and no students are currently following a foundation level course in business studies.
103. All students currently in the sixth form are required to follow a course in general studies and another in key skills. The general studies course is not planned effectively, as too much onus is placed on students for self-supported study; the whole course is squeezed into Year 13. Examination results in general studies are worse than in other subjects. The school responded positively to the government's plan in 2000 for all students to study a substantial key skills programme in the sixth form. Both the key skills and general studies courses are held in low regard by a significant proportion of students.
104. The school is diligent in promoting equality of opportunity; for example, a sixth former with SEN is taking a full programme of AS-level courses.
105. Students' personal development is provided for well and they, in turn, respond well to the opportunities which arise, for example by organising their own voluntary work placements. There is also a good emphasis on their self-reliance in organising their own social activities. In addition, students involve themselves in a wide range of activities, which benefit others in the school community, and beyond. These include providing support as peer helpers throughout the school and assisting with the annual Year 9 retreat. They are actively involved in charitable activity; for example in supporting the elderly, and through their commitment to a charity, which takes handicapped children on pilgrimage to Lourdes. They are also involved in voluntary work at a local hospital and with a drugs support group.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

106. While the school's pastoral provision is good, the procedures to promote pupils' welfare and safety are unsatisfactory because of particular weaknesses in relation to health and safety and the training for staff in child protection issues. This represents a deterioration since the last inspection when welfare arrangements were described as very good.
107. The school does not have a child protection policy of its own but has adopted the policy of the Sefton Child Protection Committee. The two named persons with responsibility for child protection are the head of lower school, who has received training from the local education authority, and the headteacher, who has received no training. In addition, no training has been organised for staff about child protection issues since the last inspection when the report identified this as a concern. The school states that it does not have any pupils at present on the "At Risk" register or any "Looked After" pupils and has had no incidents in the last four years.

108. While the handbook gives staff advice on procedures to follow if they suspect that a pupil is the victim of abuse, it does not outline the signs to look out for. Even if it did, this is something that cannot be communicated effectively in written form. The legal position is that staff do not have to be trained but they have to be aware of the signs of abuse; this requirement is not fulfilled. Following the inspection, plans have been drawn up to train all staff at the start of the next academic year.
109. The school has an adequate number of first aiders, all of whom have appropriate qualifications, but details of accidents are not fully recorded and the school does not have a dedicated first aid room.
110. The school does not keep comprehensive records of the administration of medicines; procedures need to be improved.
111. The premises manager carries out regular health and safety checks and has arranged for PAT (portable appliance) tests on all portable electrical equipment. The fire alarm is tested regularly but records are not kept; regular fire drills are held. Risk assessments are appropriately carried out in departments but the school does not carry out adequate risk assessment for visits involving potential hazardous activities or residential visits; this breaches statutory requirements.
112. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are satisfactory. The school uses an electronic system of registration with OMR which is managed well. Following the inspection improvements were made to procedures so that the whereabouts of all absent pupils are known every day.
113. All the issues concerning health and safety and child protection were reported to the headteacher and chairperson of the governing body and assurances were given that they would be rectified.
114. The school has good procedures for the monitoring and promotion of good behaviour and the monitoring and elimination of oppressive behaviour. The behaviour policy is detailed and concise and is based on both rewards and sanctions; it is applied well.
115. Pupils requiring additional support for behaviour or academic development are referred, after consultation with senior staff and parents, to the "Matrix Centre" where they receive targeted guidance and support for a five week period before being reintegrated back into mainstream school. Pupils displaying low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons attend the "Withdrawal Centre" for a maximum of five periods where they work in isolation under the close supervision of a teacher. These procedures work well and although recently initiated, have significantly reduced exclusions. Pupils attending these centres are given appropriate work, which means that their opportunities to succeed in examinations are not significantly compromised.
116. The pastoral system works well. Form tutors meet regularly with heads of year to discuss pupils' academic and pastoral progress. Because the school has a caring and supportive ethos, pupils feel secure and gain in confidence. Staff at the school know pupils well and work hard to meet their individual needs. Pupils interviewed during the inspection week confirmed that they felt safe in school and that any incidents of poor behaviour or bullying; were immediately dealt with by staff.
117. Links with feeder schools regarding pupils' special needs are good. Information provided by feeder schools together with testing on entry are used well to assist in the identification of pupils with special needs, with re-testing also used well to check pupils' progress. Individual Education Plans have been established since the last inspection when this was a key issue and their quality has been enhanced by the addition of subject targets. Recently, pupils and parents have been appropriately involved in the development of a revised version of pupils' Individual Education Plans. The new plan is enhanced by an emphasis on pupils' preferred learning styles although targets are not sufficiently precise to be of use when progress is being reviewed. So far the new plan has been introduced into Year 7 with a planned introduction for other year groups. The annual review procedures for pupils with statements meet requirements.
118. The school's lay chaplain provides a valuable extra dimension in supporting individuals. There is a co-ordinator for "looked after" children although there are none currently present in the school.

The learning support unit supports pupils at risk of exclusion with a four-week programme in the "Matrix" followed by two weeks of monitored re-integration. Close contact is maintained with the families of sick children.

119. Learning mentors provide valuable support for individuals through an effective referral system that includes the opportunity for self-referral. They provide good additional support through extra-curricular activities that help individuals to develop, for example, their self-esteem and social skills. The mentoring system caters for a very wide range of needs in addition to academic support including illness, refusal to attend school, bereavement and family breakdown.
120. The school has a well-structured careers education programme which is taught through personal health and social education and citizenship. Lessons are fully supported by a very detailed scheme of work which draws on a good range of resources. A careers portfolio is compiled by each pupil in Years 10 and 11 and comprises evidence of careers work and personal experience. It is moderated internally and externally and accredited by Liverpool University.
121. All Year 10 pupils are able to go on work experience and safety checks on premises are carried out by the Sefton Education Business Partnership. Work experience is closely supervised by school staff who visit each pupil.
122. Each pupil in Year 11 receives a mock careers interview by external agencies and a half-yearly bulletin is produced by the head of careers giving information and jobs available for pupils in Years 10 to 13. All Year 10 pupils receive an interview by the Connexions Service who allocate two and a half days a week to work in school and some pupils receive a second interview.
123. The school has arranged for an annual careers convention for Year 11 pupils to be held at the local town hall where exhibitors include not only potential employers but also colleges of further education, universities and representatives of further and higher education. A large majority of pupils at the school attend. The school is being assessed for a Recognition of Quality Award for careers guidance and special arrangements have been made for identifying disaffected pupils at the school to receive additional guidance and advice from specialised Connexions youth workers.
124. Although because of difficulties with accommodation, accessibility of written information for pupils on careers advice is limited, overall the provision that the school makes for careers education for its pupils is good.
125. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory; planned developments point to improvement in the future. The school has set up a computerised system that uses commercial, national and school assessment data. It holds detailed information on the attainment of pupils when they arrive at the school and as they progress through it. At present the system will not easily show an individual pupil's attainment across all subjects or, for example, how particular groups of pupils are performing. Such facilities would allow a greater depth of analysis which might bring any problems to the fore sooner. It would allow teachers to answer questions such as "are the highest attaining boys making satisfactory progress in your subject?" Although teachers and managers have received some training in the use and interpretation of assessment data in the past, none has been available recently. This is one of the reasons why the information is not used to its full potential.
126. Parents are informed of pupils' progress by an annual report and a parents' evening. An internal interim grade card is circulated to teachers before the parents' evening, but is not seen by parents. Although the school policy is detailed in advising teachers on appropriate ways to assess pupils and gives guidance on marking, it is left to individual departments to decide how to apply the policy. This means that pupils and teachers cannot easily compare pupils' progress in different subjects. Pupils' attainment is compared to others in the teaching group rather than to national standards. Parents and pupils are informed of the system used by the school, but one instance was observed of a pupil confusing their attainment relative to the group with their possible GCSE grade. The school plans to report attainment in terms of National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades in the future.
127. All subjects set targets for pupils' attainment. These are based on information received at the time of transfer and the results of national and commercial tests, together with teachers'

professional judgement. It is up to each department whether or not they inform the pupils of their targets. The totals of these individual targets form departmental targets. Progress on

these is reviewed annually by the headteacher. Tutors and heads of years monitor the progress of individual pupils in all subjects. They offer advice and support and inform parents when pupils are under-achieving.

128. Analysis of pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations is thorough. The school studies the performance of other local schools so that they can compare the results at an early stage. Assessment and monitoring procedures, and their use to improve standards, are good in English, mathematics, ICT, design and technology, physical education and business studies; they are unsatisfactory in art.

Sixth Form

129. The sixth form has a well-structured pastoral support programme, which gives students good guidance and advice and offers help to them if they have personal or other problems. The school has recently appointed a learning mentor who interacts very well with the students, monitors their attendance and acts as an advisor and counsellor. Her work well supports the work of the pastoral team and is much appreciated by students and staff.
130. Students are given good advice about careers from both the Connexions service and their tutors. Students have access to a satisfactory range of resources such as the Kudos computer program, pamphlets and periodicals in a number of locations in the sixth form study area. The school library, which hosts resources for careers and higher education is small and is often used by other year groups in the school when sixth formers require access. Students interviewed confirm that all sixth form staff are very caring and supportive and they are readily available for advice and guidance.
131. Attendance at 93 per cent in the sixth form is good and it is tracked well. Appropriate action is taken when students' attendance becomes a concern; this has a positive impact on students' commitment and is appreciated by parents.
132. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and the monitoring of progress are good overall; in business studies, physical education and theatre studies they are very good and they are good in English, mathematics, ICT and French. Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory in psychology.
133. The school has developed a good system for assessing and monitoring students' progress. Recently a commercial package has been used to provide predictions of A-level grades based upon GCSE results. These are used to set targets for individual students. Students are very much aware, however, that this package tends to give targets that are on the low side. These are not the ones submitted on their University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) forms. The package also gives information about students' perceptions of their subjects.
134. Students are actively involved in monitoring their own progress and attainment and are clear about the grades that they can expect to attain. This contributes to their positive attitude to subjects and to learning. Reports are sent to parents annually at the end of the Easter term. In both Year 12 and Year 13, students receive at least two progress review interviews with their form tutors. These ensure that any problems can be identified and addressed before they become major obstacles to progress.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

135. Parents have positive views of the school and this is demonstrated by the fact that the school is oversubscribed. A typical proportion of parents (27 per cent) responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and 25 attended the pre-inspection meeting. The great majority of these parents have positive views of the school and inspectors agree with most of their judgements.

136. The school makes efforts to build a strong and positive relationship with parents and encourages them to take an active part in their children's education. Information provided by the school is satisfactory overall. The prospectus is very good. It is professionally prepared, parent friendly and contains all information that parents need to know regarding the school's ethos, policies and subjects taught. In addition, several brochures of very good quality are provided for sixth form students giving very good details of courses and careers available.
137. The annual report from governors to parents is very detailed. It contains all statutory information except for a report on progress in meeting the action points from the last inspection and has an extensive range of additional information; the reports on subjects are particularly useful to parents.
138. The school sends out annual reports of pupils' progress of varying quality. Some teachers provide good information on what pupils have studied, their progress or grades; others do not. Annual reports are sent out at the very end of term which concerns parents because they feel it is too late in the year for them to take action about any issues raised.
139. Parents' evenings are held at varying times throughout the year with two additional evenings for the parents of Year 11 for parents and pupils to receive advice, guidance and support for GCSE options and sixth form options. An additional parents' evening for parents of Year 13 pupils is arranged to advise parents of funding for higher education. Various evenings are held for parents of Year 6 in primary schools to advise them about procedures for welcoming them to the school. After they have joined school, further evenings are arranged to inform parents of how their children have settled in and of the progress they are making. The school is very welcoming to parents; parents can contact the school at any time by appointment if they have any cause for concern regarding their children's progress or development.
140. Procedures for settling new pupils into the school are good and work well. The school has a large number of feeder primary schools (22) but the head of lower school visits most of them and all Year 6 pupils are interviewed prior to their arrival. The school has arranged for a "taster day" to take place where all Year 6 pupils come into school to see the building, attend some lessons and meet staff. Year 7 pupils indicated that they felt their transfer into school went smoothly because they received good information prior to their starting secondary school and they were able to make a confident start in Year 7.
141. The newly appointed co-ordinator for pupils with SEN is ensuring that procedures for involving parents in Individual Education Plans and target setting are fully implemented and all parents attend annual reviews. These procedures are firmly in place for parents of Year 7 pupils and are being extended to other year groups.
142. "The Friends of Maricourt School", to which every parent belongs, has a nucleus of approximately 20 parents who arrange social events such as: quiz evenings, fashion shows and bingo evenings and raise a significant amount for school funds. Their work is much appreciated by the school.
143. Very few parents come into school to help in other practical ways. Approximately 95 per cent of lower school parents and 50 per cent of parents in the upper school, signed the school organiser. All parents sign the home school contract and support their children's learning by regular dialogue with the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

144. The headteacher enjoys the support of the governors, parents and the local education authority. Through her hard work and commitment to the pupils she has ensured the fulfilment of the school's mission statement which is; 'to provide and sustain a living Catholic community which is rooted in Christian values and where growth and knowledge, respect, love and fellowship are shared by all.'
145. Since the last inspection, satisfactory progress has been made. Examination and test results have risen in Years 9 and 11 and the school has continued to enjoy the confidence of the community. The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils continue to be very good; this is a result of

the good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the good pastoral provision.

146. Governors bring a wide range of valuable skills to the school and are highly committed to its work and ethos. Their attendance at meetings is high and many have taken part in training sessions organised by the local education authority, for example, on the implementation of national performance management procedures.
147. As the responsible body, the governors have not ensured that the school has conformed with every statutory requirement.
148. The senior management team comprises two deputy headteachers and four assistant headteachers. They are all highly committed to the school and perform many of their responsibilities effectively, such as ensuring that the school is an orderly place for pupils to learn and develop. The job descriptions of senior managers do not always reflect the jobs that they do or the full extent of senior management responsibilities. For example, the headteacher's job description is mostly concerned with pastoral responsibilities. It contains little about leadership, academic standards and school improvement. Apart from the job title, the job description of the assistant headteacher responsible for teaching and learning throughout the school contains nothing about this key role that forms the major thrust of the improvement plan.
149. One of the deputy headteachers is responsible for collating and analysing examination and test results. The information is detailed and could be very valuable in helping middle and senior managers to analyse subjects' effectiveness. While some managers use the information effectively to aid improvement planning, most are not using it to its full potential.
150. The leadership and management of most subjects is good. In almost all subjects, heads of departments have organised schemes of work well and this has helped teachers to teach effectively. Some heads of department, such as the head of physical education, have very effectively led the implementation of whole school strategies.
151. The monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching by heads of departments is satisfactory. National requirements for the assessment of teachers' performance are followed. Heads of subjects appropriately perform the reviews on the staff in their departments and senior managers conduct reviews of middle managers. Reviews of performance are evaluative and include references to the progress pupils make. Lesson observations are conducted using a tick sheet to evaluate the quality of particular elements of the teacher's performance such as preparation, communication, discipline and organisation. The grading of these aspects of lessons is either satisfactory or in need of development.
152. The support, monitoring and evaluation of most subjects' work by senior managers is satisfactory. All subjects have a senior member of staff linked to them with most of the dialogue occurring through informal contacts. The lack of regular formal contact between senior managers and subject leaders inhibits the rapid and cohesive implementation of whole-school strategies.
153. In some cases, for example, in business studies, strategies to support the acting head of department have been effective in helping to fill the leadership vacuum caused by the long-term absence of the head of department. However, the management role of the head of business studies also includes the management of other subjects such as psychology where there are issues in need of resolution.
154. Senior managers do not always have a complete understanding of how well subjects are performing. Prior to the inspection the school had the opportunity to identify its strengths and areas for improvement. No mention was made of physical education despite it being one of the strongest subjects in the school while modern foreign languages was identified as a weak area (a judgement subsequently endorsed by the link adviser from the local education authority). Modern foreign languages has clearly had problems in the past but most of the teaching is now of at least a good standard and some of it is very good particularly in the sixth form.
155. Although requirements for evaluating teachers' performance are followed, some issues that have been evident for many years concerning the underperformance of a small number of teachers have

not been tackled decisively. In the case of one teacher, underperformance was recorded through lesson observations, reviews of pupils' work and the analysis of poor examination results. This was followed up with a letter from a senior manager in April 2001 inviting the teacher for explanations. No further records are available, indicating that the issues raised have not been formally followed up despite evidence that underperformance has continued.

156. The school's improvement plan is headed by an appropriate focus on teaching and learning. Other issues in the plan are relevant and achievable. Costings are included which is good practice but performance indicators are often concerned with completing processes rather than measuring impact; for example, 'implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy'. Some of the issues raised by the inspection do not appear in the plan, which illustrates the need for the school to tighten its monitoring and evaluation procedures.
157. The school was awarded technology college status in 1996 but its application for third phase funding was refused owing to targets not having been fully met. Following discussions with the Department for Education and Skills, it was agreed that the school should be allowed to apply again in the Autumn of 2003.
158. The school supports the one pupil with English as an additional language well and is committed to the promotion of racial harmony. The opportunities for pupils to explore and appreciate cultural diversity are more limited, particularly in subjects.
159. The school is involved in a number of partnerships with other schools and commercial organisations. Some of these are at a very early stage of development such as the Creative Partnership initiative while others such as Excellence in Cities, have already had a beneficial impact in particular through the development of mentoring and widening opportunity for gifted and talented pupils.
160. The governors' annual report to parents is a very substantial and useful document that provides parents with a wealth of information about the school. It goes far beyond statutory requirements, for example, by including reports on each subject area.
161. The staff handbook is a valuable document that gives staff good guidance on policies, procedures and staff responsibilities. Very clear guidance is given on the aims and values of the school and there is a consistently strong message about the importance of maintaining good standards of pupils' behaviour.
162. The SEN department's links with governors are very strong because the link governor is closely involved with the school and visits on a regular basis. Links with senior management are equally strong because the line manager for the SEN co-ordinator is a member of the special needs department. The SEN co-ordinator meets regularly with key pastoral and academic staff. Staff are kept fully informed of students' needs, with each department receiving copies of the special needs register and Individual Education Plans.
163. The SEN co-ordinator, appointed at the start of the year, has identified appropriate priorities for development and has made a good impact; for example, in taking a leading role in examining disability and access issues and in emphasising pupils' preferred learning styles in information provided to staff. Although ICT is well used in teaching pupils with SEN, its use in administration is limited. Learning support staff are not able to easily extract relevant data concerning pupils with special needs. The roles of learning support assistants and learning mentors have so far developed separately. Both give valuable support to pupils, including those with special needs. Staff have, on their own initiative, provided "added value" for pupils by running a variety of extra-curricular activities. Whole school planning has not addressed the overlapping and complementary roles of these two groups. Currently the deployment of learning support assistants to support pupils from the learning support unit who are reintegrating into mainstream classes is not always effective. Such support, unlike regular classroom support, does not provide the student with a "familiar" figure and is less successful for that reason.
164. The qualifications and experience of teaching and non-teaching staff are appropriately matched to the needs of the curriculum. Professional development of staff is appropriately linked to performance management strategies and staff who attend external courses are expected to share

the outcomes of their training with others. The school has recently attempted to increase the funding to allow for further in-service training but the percentage of the budget spent on staff development is well below the national figures for similar schools.

165. The school has good procedures in place for supporting newly qualified staff and those new to the school. Mentoring and induction procedures are a good feature of these arrangements. Links with local teacher training institutions are well established and the school has continued the good level of support for trainees identified in the last inspection.

166. There have been major improvements in accommodation since the last inspection, and some high quality new teaching space has been provided. The major impact has been on English in the Newman Hall, which is new, purpose built and suited, providing a very good learning environment and the facilities for food technology are all either new or refurbished. A new music suite is a major improvement on the prefabricated building that had preceded it. Two new science laboratories have been added, together with a computer room for science. The physical education spaces, including a dedicated classroom, are of good quality. Many of the improvements in the accommodation have been funded at great cost by the trustees of the school.
167. In Arnold Hall, pupils are taught for many of their lessons in form rooms. The school feels that this is beneficial in helping them to settle into new surroundings. The problem of this arrangement, as also observed during the last inspection, is that teachers have to carry all their resources to the rooms which limits the learning opportunities that they can offer the pupils. The lack of display relevant to individual subjects in the rooms also lowers the quality of the learning environment. The recent new music spaces are overcrowded and inflexible, with no practice rooms or ensemble space. The learning environment for modern foreign languages is inadequate and it is poor for drama. There is no specialist drama space, and the school halls used for drama are regularly used for examination purposes; this was an issue at the last inspection.
168. Overall, resources provided for pupils' learning are satisfactory. Very good resources are available in modern foreign languages; new textbooks, the use of video cameras and satellite television are used effectively. Good resources are available in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, ICT, business studies and physical education. Those departments that have access to their own suites of computers are particularly well favoured. However those that do not are unable to gain access to these resources. This inhibits the development of pupils' learning. The book resources in the library are well below average. They are particularly poor in science. Resources available to music, geography and drama are unsatisfactory. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 do not have access to specialist resources for several subjects as they are mostly taught on the lower school site in general purpose classrooms; this has a direct impact on the quality of learning. The procedure for the allocation of resources is satisfactory.
169. The governors' finance committee takes advice and proposals from the senior management team in setting and monitoring the budget. This usually takes the form of a proposed roll-forward budget, which governors adopt subject to their own discussions about the affordability of the proposed model and their considerations of the school's priorities in the improvement plan. The committee meets each term before the full governors' meeting, to consider monitoring reports and to prepare a report for the governors' meeting. The committee does not have delegated powers.
170. The school had a surplus of about £350,000 at the beginning of the last financial year. The intention was that this money should be used to support capital projects and to keep a contingency fund. Following the loss of technology college status, it was necessary to support additional staffing appointments made with technology college funding. At the end of 2002/3, the surplus has reduced to about £240,000. Future planning needs to ensure that the staffing budget is under control particularly, if technology college status is not restored.
171. The bursar is developing good monitoring systems and manages contracts and premises costs. She processes invoices for financial allocations to subject departments and provides administrative support to the manager of standards fund. She is able to provide monitoring reports to spending officers but could do so on a more regular and frequent basis. Monitoring is in place to ensure that specific grant is appropriately spent.
172. The annual audit of the condition, suitability and sufficiency of the school's accommodation (asset management plan) has appropriately taken place. The school intends to conduct some immediate repairs and maintenance and has planned and costed an extension to the sports hall. Overall planning, however, needs to be more closely enough linked to the priorities identified by the asset management plan.
173. To further enhance the opportunities for pupils to attend the school, an audit has been conducted of the school's accessibility for pupils with disabilities. Appropriate short, medium and long-term targets have been set with timescales for completion. No costings have been identified.

174. The recommendations of the 2000 audit report have either been overtaken by changes in the system or have been addressed by management action. Although the inventory of ICT equipment has been set up, it is not yet complete.
175. Governors have adopted Sefton's best value policy. Although the most senior people in the school understand and follow the principles of this policy, understanding of all the elements of best value is not embedded. Appropriate tendering arrangements ensure that good value is achieved from purchases. More analysis of spending patterns and the impact of spending on standards and educational provision would strengthen best value practices further.
176. Expenditure per pupil across the whole school is broadly in line with national averages. The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory and it provides satisfactory value for money.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

177. The sixth form serves the needs of students who are capable of studying advanced level courses. A wide range of AS-level and A-level courses are offered which creates appropriate opportunities for students to gain entry to university; these are taken by around two thirds of those who leave at the end of Year 13.
178. The sixth form recruits around half the students from Year 11, which is lower than might be expected given the quality of the GCSE results and pupils' positive attitudes to learning. The great majority of students, around 85 per cent, continue in further education and so around 35 per cent leave to study elsewhere. One of the reasons for this is that the school has a very limited programme of vocational courses.
179. When the government introduced its Curriculum 2000 innovations, one of the key objectives was to increase the proportions of students taking vocational courses. The school only offers vocational courses in business studies during Years 12 and 13, an ICT course in Year 14.
180. The only courses offered at a level below advanced level is the intermediate GNVQ in business studies and key skills. This lack of curriculum breadth substantially restricts opportunities for those students who have not reached an appropriate standard for entry on to advanced level courses. Other schools and colleges in the near vicinity offer more vocational options but the school does not have a strategic partnership with any of them to ensure that pupils are appropriately guided onto courses that match their abilities, needs and interests.
181. The sixth form is well managed. The head of sixth form has developed strong systems to support students and to monitor their progress. These were overhauled after the underachievement of students in the 2001 examinations and are now more effective in tracking students' performance. The head of sixth form makes herself readily available to students for informal or formal discussions about their progress, future directions or any other issues they may have.
182. Tutors offer good support to the students and they in turn are well supported by the head of sixth form. In particular, strong links have been established with local universities and this has enabled good guidance to be given to students applying for university entrance. The head and assistant head of sixth form, tutors and other staff show great commitment to the students when the examination results are announced by helping them secure places at universities or by guiding them on other action to take if they have failed to achieve their target grades.
183. Subject leadership and management in the sixth form are good. In the thirteen subjects chosen for the inspection sample, leadership and management are: very good in physical education and theatre studies; good in English, mathematics, biology, chemistry, ICT, French and history; satisfactory in chemistry, product design, geography and business studies; and unsatisfactory in psychology.
184. The responsibility for ensuring that students are well taught in the sixth form is carried by heads of departments with some, but not enough, input from senior managers. The head of sixth form does not play a formal role in this process but it would appropriately strengthen her leadership position to do so.

185. The expenditure on sixth form courses slightly exceeds income but the overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory and it provides satisfactory value for money.

Resources

186. The qualifications and experience of teaching and non-teaching staff are appropriately matched to the needs of the sixth form curriculum.
187. The quality of the accommodation for teaching and learning in the sixth form is satisfactory. Social and study areas are good, with good access to ICT, the library and other study facilities.
188. Overall resources in the sixth form are satisfactory. The provision of suitable textbooks and other resources is at least adequate and in some cases good. Mathematics, English, design technology, ICT, physical education and modern languages are particularly good. Provision for drama is unsatisfactory.
189. The library does not have enough facilities for it to be used effectively by the sixth form as a resource centre. The number of computers available in the library is small for the number of students. Book resources are well below average. The small size of the library accommodation restricts further expansion.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

190. To order to raise standards and improve the school further, the headteacher, governors and staff should:
1. Improve senior managers' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses by:
 - making their links with middle managers, particularly heads of departments, more formal;
 - having regular reviews of subjects' progress in implementing their improvement plans.

148-156
 2. Ensure that the following issues are resolved as a matter of urgency:
 - all staff to receive training in identifying the signs of child abuse;
 - a policy for the administration of medicines to be agreed with governors, staff and parents;
 - risk assessments, that meet statutory requirements, to be carried out for all activities;
 - the reasons for pupils' absence to be accounted for on the first day.

106-113
 3. Improve the curriculum by:
 - ensuring that the art curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements in Years 7 to 9;
 - ensuring that all subjects fulfil statutory requirements for the use of ICT to promote learning in Years 7 to 9.

80,82,89,90
 4. Improve the use of assessment and examination and test data by senior and middle managers by:
 - providing appropriate training for all staff ;
 - ensuring that all formal meetings between senior and middle managers draw on data analyses of pupils' performance.

125,149,152
 5. Develop the accommodation for drama, modern foreign languages, history, geography and music by:
 - creating a specialist working space for drama that supports pupils' learning;
 - increasing the number of modern foreign language teaching rooms and improving the quality of the fittings in them;
 - creating specialist rooms for history and geography so that teachers can draw on appropriate range of resources in each lesson;
 - increase the accommodation available for music lessons to enable group work to take place.

Sixth form

1. Raise levels of achievement and the quality of teaching to match those in Years 7 to 11 by:
 - ensuring that students gain examination grades that reflect their levels of success at GCSE;
 - identifying effective teaching practice and then sharing expertise between subjects;
 - challenging students to take more responsibility for their learning;

18-29,66-79

2. Raise the achievement of students in psychology and general studies by:
 - improving teaching, the curriculum and assessment procedures in both subjects;
 - only recruiting students to the psychology course who have demonstrated the ability to achieve A-level standards;

18,19,28,76,77,103,227,228

3. Improve the range of sixth form courses by:
 - developing a sixth form curriculum strategy, possibly in partnership with other schools and colleges, to extend educational and career opportunities for students of all abilities;
 - meeting the aims of the government's Curriculum 2000 strategy particularly by extending the range of vocational courses.

100-105

4. Improve the quality of the library by:
 - increasing the range and quality of books;
 - increasing the number of computers available for private study;
 - increasing the size of the library to accommodate more students.

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PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	127
	Sixth form	64
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		83

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	4	26	59	34	4	0	0
Percentage	3	20	46	27	3	0	0

Sixth form

Number	2	14	27	17	4	0	0
Percentage	3	22	42	27	6	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 around two 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	1241	241
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	115	0

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	10	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	114	1

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	22

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	111	137	248

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	92	94	91
	Girls	128	115	120
	Total	220	209	211
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	89 (92)	84 (80)	85 (84)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	52 (68)	57 (55)	54 (47)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	96	96	94
	Girls	132	119	121
	Total	228	215	215
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	92 (89)	87 (83)	87 (88)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	67 (60)	59 (55)	54 (46)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	110	137	247

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	80	106	107
	Girls	90	136	136
	Total	170	242	243
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	69 (57)	98 (97)	99 (98)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	53.4
	National	39.8

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	81.0

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	42	59	101

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	51	69	120
	Average point score per candidate	12.8	13	12.9
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		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	42	59	101	13	10	23
	Average point score per candidate	13.4	13.4	13.4	6.9	10.8	8.6
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1445	30	1
0	0	0
21	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
3	0	0

Any other ethnic group	
No ethnic group recorded	

8
0

0	0
0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	90
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	601.72

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	25.5
Key Stage 4	21.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	4,489,235
Total expenditure	4,395,676
Expenditure per pupil	2,954.08
Balance brought forward from previous year	257,985
Balance carried forward to next year	351,544

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15.4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	17.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1482
Number of questionnaires returned	399

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	48	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	48	47	3	2	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	53	8	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	53	13	14	1
The teaching is good.	38	55	4	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	48	15	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	46	5	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	37	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	48	18	2	5
The school is well led and managed.	47	44	4	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	48	4	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	47	9	3	10

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 **good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and lesson preparation is generally of a high standard.
- The careful and thorough preparation of pupils for National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations leads to standards well above the national average.
- The encouragement of pupils to write at length in different styles at all stages.
- The positive attitudes of pupils to their work in English.

Areas for improvement

- More effective use of time in some lessons to involve pupils more fully in their learning.
- The need for access to computers to develop the curriculum in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	Well above average	Well above average
Seen during the inspection	Well above average	Well above average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen

Pupils' attainment in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 is well above the average reached in maintained secondary schools across the country. Boys and girls have reached broadly similar levels in the tests in the last three years (2000 – 2002). In this period, pupils' performance in English, based on the average test scores, has exceeded the national average by a higher margin than is the case in mathematics and science. The performance of boys at the end of Year 9 has exceeded the national average by a greater amount than has that of girls. The standards of reading, writing and speaking and listening in lessons, and, particularly, of completed long pieces of writing are well above average for most pupils towards the end of Year 9.

GCSE results in English are also well above the national average. They have remained consistently so since the last inspection report. Although the proportion of boys and girls gaining A* - C passes in 2002 was almost identical, boys' performance was higher compared with national pass rates than that of girls. GCSE results in English Literature in 2002 were very similar overall to the national average. In this examination boys' performance in gaining A* - C grades was higher than that of girls in a subject where girls usually do particularly well. The difference in performance in GCSE, however, is similar to the comparable attainment difference in English by the same pupils in the NC tests in 2000 and in the profile of the pupils on entry. The long-term absence of English teachers in the previous two years has affected the overall pass rate in English Literature but not in English. In lessons and in written course work of students in the current groups in Years 10 and 11 there is no indication of difference in the quality of work in preparation for the two examinations. Course work of very good quality related to the study of set texts such as: *An Inspector Calls*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Macbeth* indicates standards which are well above average.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Pupils' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Very good	Good
<p><i>Statements explaining why pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL) achieve as they do.</i></p> <p>Pupils arrive with standards of reading and writing which are above average and continue to achieve very well by the end of Year 9. This is due mainly to well-organised teachers planning lessons thoroughly and marking written work helpfully to encourage improvement. Pupils in Year 7 with literacy skills below the national average receive some extra 'catch-up' support during tutorial time. In Years 8 and 9 pupils are placed in attainment sets for English. This allows lower ability pupils to be taught in smaller groups where they receive more individual tuition. Pupils with SEN are often accommodated in these groups. They are supported well and, in most cases, make good progress. There is no discernible difference between the achievement of boys and girls in speaking and reading activities in lessons, nor in the samples seen of pupils' extended writing. The quality of expression and accuracy in writing improves markedly through the first three years in the school. The only handicap to progress noted for some pupils recently has been caused by longer-term teacher absence. By the end of Year 9 the reading, comprehension and writing skills of both boys and girls, as measured in the NC tests, have improved at a rate well above the average for pupils with similar attainment levels at the age of eleven.</p> <p>Pupils in Years 10 and 11 start the GCSE courses with well above average skills. They make good progress because they are taught well and because they are well motivated. Again, support is given to pupils with lower levels of language skills, including those with SEN, by placing them in smaller teaching groups. This ensures that they receive sufficient help in reading and discussing set books and guidance in improving their writing.</p> <p>Pupils follow a recently revised curriculum which encourages active participation. A very lively discussion and planning lesson in Year 11, for example, involved all pupils in small group discussion, note-taking, role-play, and finally the drafting of summative sentences as they examined the different perspectives in arguments between parents and teenagers. All pupils were fully engaged throughout the lesson. Learning is strong in most lessons because teachers' careful planning ensures that pupils are productively engaged throughout the time allocated. In a minority of lessons, however, the pace of learning is slower than it might be because the planning does not stretch all pupils sufficiently. The achievement and progress made by boys and girls towards the GCSE examinations is very similar and leads to very similar examination success. In the 2002 examination this indicates that boys are attaining more highly than are girls in comparison to national standards. This is related mainly to their starting points but also to the department's success in maintaining the boys' motivation.</p>		

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Good	Good
Quality of Learning	Good	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Good	Good
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Very good	
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good	

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Good

Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

191. The department has improved since the last inspection in a number of ways. Teaching is stronger than previously. All the lessons seen in this inspection were judged to be satisfactory, with three-quarters of them of a good standard. Just over a third of lessons seen (including the sixth form) reached a very high standard. Characteristics of this improvement are: the detailed planning of lessons and the effective use of time, the strong rapport between teachers and pupils, the active participation in learning by pupils in most lessons, and the supportive marking of writing and feedback to pupils. Only occasional glimpses remain of the main shortcoming noted previously of too much time used for teachers talking to pupils.
192. There has been improvement also in leadership and management with the introduction of clearer improvement planning and of the monitoring of teaching in the past year. The monitoring and supporting of teaching needs to be developed further, however, to help the development of less experienced teachers. It would be beneficial to provide opportunities for teachers to observe each other as they develop new approaches within the changing curriculum.
193. Accommodation for teaching is improved now for Years 9, 10 and 11. It is satisfactory but not ideal in the Arnold Building where teachers do not have specialist English rooms with appropriate equipment. As a result, time is lost through teacher movement and the movement of resources to the pupils' base rooms. Good use, however, is made of the Arnold building library for developing younger pupils' reading for enjoyment and the reviewing of books. The lack of access to the computer suites continues to prevent the development of some writing and media activities. Older pupils, mainly in the sixth form, use well the computers in the Newman building library to find access to web sites providing appropriate source and research information for literary topics such as Shakespeare and background information on Victorian England.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teaching and teachers' commitment to develop students to their potential.
- The subject knowledge and understanding of teachers.
- The model used for pupils' self-assessment in Years 7-9.
- National Curriculum test results in Year 9 and GCSE results in Year 11.

Areas for improvement

- Use of ICT to support learning in mathematics.
- Opportunities for students' independent learning, supported by, for example, use of the internet and library.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	Well above average	Well above average
Seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average

The difference between standards in tests and examinations and those seen during the inspection reflects the good preparation and the extra effort pupils make for tests and examinations. Standards on entry in Year 7 are above average. For the last four years standards achieved in National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 9 have been well above the national average. They are improving broadly in line with the national picture. Standards achieved by boys are higher than those achieved by girls. Standards in mathematics are similar to science but lower than in English. Standards at GCSE are well above the national average; and again boys achieve higher than girls. Pupils' standards achieved in mathematics are relatively higher than those in most the other subjects they take; this has been the case for four out of the last five years. Pupils of all abilities grasp key mathematical concepts as a result of good teaching coupled with their own positive attitudes.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Pupils' behaviour	Good

Achievement and Progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Good	Good

Statement about any differences in progress between students (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL):.

A high proportion of teaching is good or better, none is unsatisfactory. Expectations of pupils' behaviour and work are high, leading to high motivation and very good behaviour. This combination of good teaching and high expectations leads to good learning and progress. Boys achieve better than girls at the ends of Year 9 and Year 11. The achievement of pupils of all groups is good. This includes pupils with SEN and gifted and talented pupils. Teachers make good use of aspects of the national Key Stage 3 strategy and this enhances pupils' progress. The progress made by the pupils who took the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2002 compared with their results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 was well above average. Pupils develop good numeracy skills. Their learning is supported by the effective use of a commercially produced computer package and by the use of elements of the Key Stage 3 strategy. Lessons are well planned and are based on the department's detailed scheme of work. Pupils are expected to complete homework, which is regularly set and marked; this helps to reinforce learning that has taken place in lessons. Graphical calculators are used effectively in some lessons and computers are used to help pupils develop numeracy skills. However, computers are not used enough in learning mathematics across the ability range and this reflects the need for more independent learning. Due care is given to allowing pupils to successfully practise their literacy skills, by encouraging the use of correct mathematical language and by asking that they explain "Why?" rather than merely giving the answer.

Educational Provision

	Year 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Good	Good
Quality of Learning	Good	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
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Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good
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Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

194. The leadership and management of the department are good. The work of teachers is regularly monitored. The department has a clear view of the future. Teachers work hard as a team. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and most know their levels of attainment. In Year 7 to Year 9 pupils assess their own learning well, using a very good scheme developed by the department. Spiritual, moral social and cultural provision has some good features but is satisfactory overall because teaching does not always take advantage of opportunities to address cultural and multi-cultural issues.

195. Resources in the department are good overall. The department has access to two computer rooms, which are well used particularly by middle and lower sets. Pupils in higher sets do not have as much opportunity to use ICT. The provision of mathematics texts in the school library is poor.

196. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. In particular the development of the new scheme of work, which incorporates examples of resources available, has supported teachers in their planning and delivery of the curriculum throughout Years 7 to 11.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The well above average standards achieved by the pupils.
- Very good marking, enabling pupils to improve their work.
- Good teaching, leading to good learning.

Areas for improvement

- A more universal, active involvement of pupils with the development of ideas.
- The limited stock of science books in the library.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	Well above average	Well above average
Seen during the inspection	Well above average	Above average

For Years 7 to 9 the standards have been rising faster than the national average over the last three years. Standards are well above those found nationally and very high compared to similar schools. Standards are very similar for all four attainment targets. Top sets are operating at National Curriculum Level 7. For instance pupils can understand the linkage between electricity and magnetism, they can perform calculations at this level, concerning electricity and mechanics, they also use graphs well to interpret data. The performance of boys and girls is similar.

At GCSE the proportion of pupils obtaining grades in the range A* to C, in both double and single award courses, was well above the national average in 2002 and rose from the previous year. Observations of lessons and examination of the pupils work shows that these high standards have been maintained for both age groups.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Good
Pupils' behaviour	Very Good

Achievement and Progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Very good	Satisfactory

Good teaching, good resources and good laboratories have all contributed to the success of the pupils, together with a well-organised department. The more able achieve well, helped by the setting system, which enables them to receive high level teaching and sometimes extension work within their sets, although there could be more made of this at all levels. In 2002 17 pupils attained level 7. The progress made by the pupils who took the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2002 compared with their results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 was well above average. Pupils with SEN make similar progress to their peers helped by the writing of Individual science Educational Plans, which focus teachers' attention on their needs. However, these plans do not have crisp enough short term attainable targets at present to maximise their benefits. Nevertheless, sets with high proportions of pupils with SEN tend to be taken by teachers with experience. Their patient, persistent, friendly and understanding approach enable such pupils to maintain interest, gain in confidence and to progress well. Good attention is also paid to literacy and numeracy, which enables more to be gained from the written word, the use of simple calculations and graphical representation. Computers and data loggers are also well used, much more effectively than at the time of the last inspection, to gain and display information and for revision purposes. This was evidenced by a Year 9 lesson in which pupils used animated computer programmes with enthusiasm to confirm and extend their learning in preparation for the forthcoming examination.

The quality of teaching is good and is leading to good learning. Nearly half the lessons were good or very good and only one was unsatisfactory. In all lessons previous learning is checked and the objectives of the present lesson made clear to the pupils with, in most cases, the new learning well checked at the end. The best lessons exhibit a wide variety of activities and include some practical; the pupils are all actively involved in developing and discussing ideas in response to skilful teacher prompting. These features were well shown in a Year 7 lesson, considering the relationships between environments and the organisms which lived in them; it resulted in very good learning which the pupils felt that they had actively achieved: it was much enjoyed. Where lessons are less successful pupils are required to learn rather than to think and they follow recipes for practicals without much understanding. In one theory lesson few were clear what it was that they were trying to do. The quality of marking, especially for younger pupils, is very high with many useful comments and suggestions for improvement. Homework providing a useful extension to their learning is regularly set. Good use is made of old examination questions to familiarise pupils with answering techniques and what to expect.

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Good	Good
Quality of Learning	Good	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Good	Good
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good	
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Satisfactory	

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Good
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Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

197. The department is well run by an enthusiastic and efficient head, whose organisation and energy has done much to sharpen up procedures and to raise standards. There is a good curriculum taught to high levels and enhanced by visits, such as that to Chester Zoo. There are good systems of assessment with self-assessment and target setting together with pupil reviews. However, the awareness of the pupils and the occurrence of records of them in their books relative to levels and grades are still being developed. The resources are good; they are well deployed and maintained by an effective team of technicians. The new computer laboratory will be a great help, but the main library has a limited selection of science books. The laboratories are good, but some are too small to accommodate the larger classes of pupils in comfort, especially for practicals.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- The teaching and learning of technical skills.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons.
- The use of ICT to promote learning.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in Key Stage 3.
- Planning National Curriculum requirements for Key Stage 3.
- Tackling the long-standing staffing issues.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	Above average	Below average
Seen during the inspection	Below average	Average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen

Standards for pupils at the end of Year 9, recorded by teacher assessments, indicate them to be above average, although standards seen by the work in lessons and within pupils' sketch books for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are below average.

Standards at the end of Year 11 are average. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in GCSE examinations in 2002 was below the national average having fallen considerably from 2001 when it was well above the national average.

Although the percentage of A* - C grades fell in 2002, standards of work seen during the inspection were average.

Art is an optional subject in Years 10 and 11 and takes pupils at all levels of ability. It is a very popular subject and pupils show that they enjoy it. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Good
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Pupils' behaviour	Good
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Achievement and progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory

Statements explaining why pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL) achieve as they do.

Achievement is unsatisfactory during Years 7 to 9. While the teaching is satisfactory overall, weaknesses in the scheme of work do not enable pupils to develop the full range of artistic skills.

Pupils in some classes in Years 7 to 9 have made little progress over the last year. During this stage, pupils achieve satisfactorily in learning the basic technical skills of painting and drawing, although their achievements in the essential aspects of exploring and developing ideas, and evaluating and developing work are unsatisfactory.

The emphasis of the scheme of work in developing technical skills more than design skills is evident in pupils' work. A Year 9 class produced lino prints of a good standard depicting leaves drawn from a 'cheese' plant. They carefully used sharp tools to cut the lino, then used indelible printing inks with great care to print accurately onto paper. Their preparatory work lacked individuality and showed little influence of other stimuli or the work of other artists. Pupils' work shows that the curriculum does not fully cover National Curriculum requirements.

The achievement of some pupils has been adversely affected by staff absence. During the inspection, a Year 7 class was set work, supervised by a non-specialist supply teacher, designing a post card. This led to colourful drawings, but did not allow them to explore and develop a range of ideas, or experiment with a range of materials and annotate their ideas with thoughts in the preparatory pages of a sketchbook.

Achievement in Years 10 to 11 is satisfactory. Pupils in a Year 10 class extended their skills of drawing and painting by observation drawing of objects such as animal skulls and walking boots; the teacher in this lesson guided pupils well in how to meet examination requirements. Some good levels of drawing and painting were seen, though their preparatory work was limited in the investigation of materials, the exploration and development of ideas, and references to the work of other artists.

A study of composition was undertaken by a Year 10 class, supported by the use of electronic whiteboard and projector technology enabling the analysis of works of artists. This led to pupils analysing other works of artists themselves, which clarified their own understanding although tracing and analysing loose illustrations from popular magazines did not sufficiently challenge them. Pupils lack sufficient opportunities to develop their skills in a broad range of three-dimensional work.

Behaviour is good but on occasions, when the lessons are not taught by specialist art teachers and the activities are not sufficiently challenging, pupils find it difficult to remain on task without constant reminders. Good use is made of the electronic whiteboard and projector technology. The whole school focus on literacy is very well supported in the department in every lesson by the use of key words and technical language. Pupils with SEN are supported satisfactorily, although work to extend the gifted and talented was not evident.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Unsatisfactory

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Unsatisfactory
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Unsatisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Unsatisfactory

Overall the leadership and management of the art department is unsatisfactory. The head of department works hard to try and ensure that pupils learn well in art but this is hampered by staff absence which requires him to set work for other classes and to oversee, often, non-specialist teachers. The scheme of work is not sufficiently aligned to National Curriculum requirements during Years 7 to 9 and not sufficiently developed in Years 10 and 11. Systems for using sketch books to track pupils' individual progress, as well as using exemplars of work at every level to help with accurate assessment, are not in place. Work is not monitored closely enough to lead to an improvement.

There has been unsatisfactory progress with the issues identified at the last inspection.

Standards at the end of Year 9 remain below average and GCSE results remain variable. There remains an over reliance upon completing set tasks, rather than becoming fully involved with the work within the fuller range of National Curriculum through planned taught inputs. There remains a lack of imaginative work and limited approaches in Years 7 to 9. National Curriculum assessment remains underdeveloped. Split site problems have been resolved though there remains a staffing issue and the learning environment has been improved.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- The contribution of the school council.
- The quality of some materials produced by middle managers.

Areas for improvement

- A consistent approach to the teaching of the subject.
- Identifying and being explicit about citizenship when it is being developed.
- The quality of assessment.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching.

Standards (at the end of key stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	N/A	N/A
Seen during the inspection	Average	Average

The school carries out no assessment of citizenship work at present. Standards seen in lessons and pupils' work were in line with national standards but varied according to the quality of teaching and the quality of materials prepared for the study.

The citizenship seen within other lessons made some contribution to pupils' learning but, because the citizenship issues were not made explicit to the pupils, chances were missed to really develop their knowledge and understanding.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Satisfactory
Pupils' behaviour	Satisfactory

Achievement and progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

The school has not measured standards in the subject; work seen during the inspection was variable in quality; for example, in Year 8, very good teaching using well prepared materials resulted in pupils making significant gains in developing an anti-bullying ethic. In Year 11, the outcome from a study of

consumer rights was only satisfactory because teaching materials were only provided shortly before the lesson, giving the teacher little time to prepare for the lesson.

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of Learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Unsatisfactory

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Unsatisfactory
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Unsatisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	N/A

198. The provision of citizenship comes mainly through subjects, and all subject leaders have been asked to identify the elements that are covered in their subject. The PSHE scheme of work has been redrafted to cover elements missing. No overall scheme of work was seen during the inspection and the subject leaders and year heads are not co-ordinated in their delivery and provision for the course.

199. There is no programme for the monitoring of teaching of citizenship, although heads of years do monitor informally during visits to PSHE classes.

200. Assessment procedures have not been arranged to collect and co-ordinate information about pupils' development.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Good leadership and management.
- Good quality learning environment and very good ICT provision.
- Well above average examination results in GCSE food technology.

Areas for improvement

- Improve examination results overall.
- Attend to significant variability in results between similar GCSE groups.
- Develop the curriculum on offer in Years 10 and 11.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	Well above average	Average
Seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen

In 2002 the pupils' standards at the age of 14 are well above the national average, as judged by teachers' assessments, having increased from 2001 which was also above the national average. Pupils' work seen during the inspection was above average by the age of 14.

Standards for GCSE examinations in 2002 are satisfactory. In 2002 results are below those for 2001 though results have increased over the last three years. The courses undertaken allowed pupils to study in one of the following material areas: textiles, food, graphics, resistant materials or systems and control. Although results for resistant materials are lower than those of food in 2002, this is due to staffing issues resulting in variability of results between similar class groups. No vocational courses are offered. Pupils' work seen during the inspection in product design was above average.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Pupils' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Good	Good

Statements explaining why pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL) achieve as they do.

Achievements of pupils in Years 7 to 9 are good for all material areas, with the exception of Year 9 pupils in textile technology, which is satisfactory. Pupils' achievement by Year 9 is generally good given their progress from Year 7. During a well planned lesson researching the influence of ingredients used to make cakes, Year 8 pupils skillfully made their product to their design incorporating what they had learnt. Pupils could confidently talk about and demonstrate their use of the correct tools and equipment in making cake products. They could also talk about the influence particular materials gave to the taste of their food product. Pupils show a proper respect and a sense of responsibility for the workshops and the equipment they use. In a Year 8 food technology lesson pupils used computers to search on the internet for information on healthy eating to very good effect. Year 9 pupils used wood turning lathes and power saws to cut and shape wood materials sensibly and carefully to shape parts for making clocks. They knew what hand tools to use to shape and finely finish their pieces accurately at the bench. The carefully planned lesson structure enabled, through several sequences, a range of different activities to safely take place with a good degree of pace, ensuring that all pupils remained on task throughout. In a Year 9 food technology lesson pupils undertook to work in teams to batch produce a range of cookies and cakes previously designed. Pupils understood the need to work in teams and the roles and responsibilities necessary for success. The highly organised lesson, aligned to the industrial processing aspect of National Curriculum, involved design, batch production cooking, costing and presentation and led to good results.

In Years 10 and 11 achievements are good in product design and food technology, and satisfactory in textile technology. The school has changed to a new examination course where considerable numbers of pupils study product design combining resistant materials, graphic products and systems and control partly to attempt to combat some variability in teaching. Coursework folders show that achievement is very good for significant numbers of pupils studying for this new course. Pupils' folders are highly organised and clearly aligned and headed according to the requirements of the examination, they show a range of graphical techniques using computer-aided design. Following this work the pupils were well

able to design their storage boxes and small toys.

In a Year 10 textiles lesson pupils did tests on fabric properties before going on to make their designed clothes item, though, in some instances, the equipment used for testing was not appropriate. Their GCSE folders were not sufficiently well-organised or aligned to examination requirements.

Attitudes and behaviour seen during the inspection in design and technology lessons were very good. Access to computers in design and technology is very good which helps to speed up and enhance design work and the quality of folder work in all areas of the subject. The department makes a good contribution to developing literacy skills through the use of word charts of technical terms. A Year 11 class showed a good example of speaking and listening in a good revision session by working in groups on a past examination question based on factory layouts, they presented their answer to the whole class for further discussion. Good use of numeracy was seen in a food technology lesson for Year 8 pupils as they measured out the materials to use in making their product, they were then able to estimate the effect of altering the amounts used.

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Year 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Good	Good
Quality of Learning	Good	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Good	Good

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good

Teaching and learning are good in both key stages and promote high standards and quality. Good teaching is seen in most material areas. Where teaching is good, teachers have good classroom routines and management practices. Teachers have good subject knowledge which is used to support pupils well in design and make activities. Objectives are made clear to pupils at the start of most lessons and good use is made of electronic white boards and projectors to illustrate key points. In a well-managed Year 7 food technology lesson pupils were invited to use key technological terms during a question and answer session to find out what had been learnt. The teacher conducted a very effective 'question and answer' session about tools and learning in the 'design and make' activity. The department follows closely the school assessment policy. There is, through the assessment system, an understanding of the progress of pupils particularly at project review stages, though the link to levels in Years 7 to 9 is not sufficiently immediate. Consideration of what the pupils have learned before is used to ensure that all pupils make appropriate progress. Teachers know which of their pupils have SEN and what their difficulties with learning are. These pupils are supported well in lessons and generally make good progress. The department's response to Individual Education Plans are quite relevant. Gifted and talented pupils' learning is challenged through extension classes. Marking is mostly consistent and usually encouraging, providing clear direction on how pupils should improve their work. Homework is used satisfactorily within design and technology to both prepare for and extend the work in lessons.

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

Leadership and management of the design and technology department are good. The department functions as a coherent unit with a good balance between standard systems in place for the management of learning and retaining the unique differences between some material areas. Resources have been produced to guide and support pupils and are now becoming available on electronic board technology. There are a very detailed handbook and improvement plans for the department. The schemes of work detail learning outcomes aligned to the breadth of National Curriculum requirement. There has been good progress with the issues identified at the previous inspection but issues about the quality of some of the teaching have not yet been resolved.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE pass grades.
- Teaching seen during inspection.
- Tracking of pupils' progress.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation, particularly in Arnold Hall.
- Provision for ICT to support the subject.
- Accuracy of assessing pupils using National Curriculum levels.

Standards (at the end of key stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	Above average	Above average
Seen during the inspection	Average	Above average

Standards on entry of the current Year 7 were slightly above average; this is confirmed in evidence from scrutiny of pupils' work. Results indicated by teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 were above average; however, marking has been lenient and evidence from the inspection indicates the results to be in line with national averages.

Results at GCSE have risen in recent years and have risen since the last inspection and are now above national expectations with all pupils passing the GCSE examination at grades and 65 per cent of pupils gaining A* -C grades. The percentage of pupils who achieve grade A* and A is below national expectations. Girls' attainment is above that of the boys, but the gender difference is less than for pupils nationally. Recruitment to GCSE courses has improved since the last inspection.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Good
Pupils' behaviour	Good

Achievement and Progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory	Good

Subject specialists provide the teaching in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7, 8 and 9 there is also contribution from non-specialists. Overall, teaching was satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9. Geography lessons are taught in the pupils' form rooms in Years 7, 8 and 9. These are dispersed around the two sites and time is wasted with teachers carrying resources from storerooms to classrooms. As a result lessons often start late and teaching time is not well utilised. Also resources are away from classrooms

and video is not always available. Although pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 have their own text books, the lack of audio visual resources, wall display and atlases forces an over reliance on one text book in some lessons.

Assessment of pupils work to National Curriculum levels has been lenient with the awarding of higher levels than the work deserved.

Overall, teaching seen was good in Years 10 and 11; some was very good. However, teaching rooms are not located in one area and time is again wasted at the start of lessons bringing resources from the subject office and other storerooms. In one lesson seen with a foundation set the whiteboard was unsuitable for use with overhead projector and the video was locked away denying the use of visual stimuli to pupils. Where very good teaching was seen, teachers encouraged pupils to work collaboratively in enquiry and decision-making exercises. In other lessons seen, and in work presented for scrutiny there was evidence of a more teacher-centred approach which was less effective in promoting pupils' learning.

Pupils' performance is tracked from entry to GCSE with targets set and shared. Care is taken to ensure the inclusion of pupils with SEN. Teachers note the requirements defined in individual education plans and plan accordingly to ensure that the pupils make good progress.

Work is not planned well enough to cater for pupils who have the potential to achieve high standards. Although gifted and talented pupils are identified, there is no planning of extension work to meet their needs; this is one of the reasons why fewer pupils gain A*/A grades at GCSE in geography than in most other subjects.

In Years 10 and 11 classes are set by ability. The higher ability sets are much larger, up to 33 pupils in one class. Lower ability sets have fewer pupils, as few as 10 in the class. The pupils in these smaller sets receive more of their teachers' time and individual attention and make relatively more progress.

In Years 10 and 11 pupils make more progress, as their teachers are more secure in their understanding of GCSE requirements, than they are in their knowledge of level descriptors for National Curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9.

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Satisfactory	Good
Quality of Learning	Satisfactory	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Satisfactory

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Satisfactory
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Satisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Unsatisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Unsatisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

201. The department is well led and the subject head has worked hard over the years to improve standards, achieving some success since the last inspection. There has been no change to the accommodation since the last inspection and geography classrooms remain dispersed around the school and teachers still have to carry resources to lessons; this continues to have a negative impact on learning. There has been no improvement in the provision of ICT facilities to support the

teaching and learning and this also still has a negative impact on learning. The lack of ICT facilities to support the teaching of geography mean that the curriculum offered in Years 7, 8 and 9 does not comply with the requirements of the National Curriculum. Although the school has resources for ICT in excess of national targets, they are not available to pupils in geography lessons. The head of department has monitored the teaching by specialist teachers, but not that of the non-specialists.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards and results are improving.
- Pupils achieve well throughout Years 7 to 11.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Pupils enjoy history and have positive attitudes to learning.

Areas for improvement

- Strategies to eliminate unsatisfactory teaching and bring up the overall quality to that of the best.
- Marking could push the higher attainers in Years 7-9 to do even better.
- The use of computers to assist learning.
- Practices for using information gained from assessment procedures are not as well established in Years 7-9 as in Years 10 and 11.
- Insufficient rooms are dedicated to teaching history and the accommodation lacks stimulation.

Standards (at the end of key stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	Well above average	Well above average
Seen during the inspection	Above average	Well above average

Standards in history on entry to the school are broadly average. The results of the most recent teachers' assessment of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 indicated well above average standards. However, the school does not have effective means of ensuring the reliability of its procedures, for example by comparing marking and having samples of work to indicate exemplar standards. The inspection evidence indicates that the standards reached by pupils currently in Year 9 are above average and there is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Understanding of chronology and the use of chronological conventions are good and are well embedded in pupils' writing. Most pupils are adept at selecting information appropriately from a range of historical sources and can assess their reliability and make effective comparisons between them, for example in their investigation of different newspaper accounts of the battle of the Somme. Pupils can explain the reasons for and results of major events and developments such as the Industrial Revolution. The quality and extent of the writing of many pupils is impressive and many, girls in particular, take great pains in the way that they present their ideas and the results of their investigations. Pupils understanding of the way that there can be different historical interpretations of the same event is relatively under-developed because they have little opportunity to practise this key historical skill. Relatively few pupils fail to reach average standards in history by the end of Year 9.

GCSE results in 2002 were well above average and represent an improvement on those of the previous two years, when they were close to average. Pupils' performance in history was significantly better than in their other GCSE subjects. Boys did particularly well and outperformed girls by some margin, in contrast to the national picture A strong feature of these results was the proportion of pupils obtaining the highest A* and A grades. Standards of work seen in the inspection generally conform to the well above average picture represented by the most recent examination results and there is no evidence to indicate a significant difference in the standards reached by boys and girls. Strengths of the work include the use of detailed knowledge and understanding selected well to write at length in even-handed evaluations of, for example, the relationship between the United States and the League of Nations. Lower ability pupils use their knowledge and understanding accurately but tend to lack real precision when drawing evidence together, for example, by not using relevant quotations in otherwise competent

analyses of sources of evidence, such as political cartoons.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Pupils' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and Progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Good	Good

Pupils make good progress throughout Years 7 to 11. They receive a good grounding in basic historical skills in chronology and the use of sources of information at the beginning of Year 7 and are able to build on this well as they move through the school. The overall good quality of teaching and the pupils' own positive attitudes to learning also contribute to the good progress which is made. Pupils concentrate well, are keen to share their knowledge and understanding by volunteering to answer questions and, when given the opportunity, work well with one another. Learning activities are generally interesting and challenging although in a few lessons they could be better adapted to the requirements of lower ability and those who have SEN. In Years 10 and 11 teachers also ensure that pupils learn to adapt the way in which they use their knowledge and understanding to reflect examination criteria. This approach worked well in a Year 11 lesson, in which pupils learnt to analyse political cartoons.

In lessons where pupils who have SEN are helped by learning support assistants, they make particularly good progress. This is because effective liaison between the teacher and the learning support assistant ensures that learning activities are well adapted for the pupils and enable them to take a full part in the learning. Lower ability pupils in Year 11 have made particularly good progress because of good strategies used to make up for a lack of consistency in teaching in the earlier part of their examination course. In most lessons, teachers involve pupils well in the learning, for example through role-play and competitive questioning and this motivates them well to take part. Learning objectives are usually made clear at the beginning of lessons and pupils are able to assess their progress in a concluding recap of learning. Lessons are generally well planned around workbooks designed by the teachers and these provide interesting tasks that stretch pupils well. However, while some lessons use other resources well, for example, extracts from films, and PowerPoint presentations, there are relatively few opportunities for pupils to have experience in selecting information for their investigations from a variety of different sources of information including good quality text books. Learning was unsatisfactory in only one of the lessons seen because tasks were relatively undemanding and pupils were not given sufficiently clear guidance about what they were expected to do. Pupils do not have sufficient planned opportunities to use computers to assist their learning. Pupils' work is marked regularly but in Years 7 to 9, in particular the highest ability, are not pushed to do even better.

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Good	Good
Quality of Learning	Good	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Satisfactory

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Satisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Unsatisfactory

Improvement since the last inspection	Good
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202. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The overall quality of teaching has improved although a small proportion remains unsatisfactory. Subject monitoring procedures have improved. Standards are now better. Assessment procedures are good in Years 10 and 11 where they are linked to examination requirements and the information obtained used in curriculum planning. Assessment information is not used as well in Years 7 to 9 and, although their work is marked regularly, pupils are not clear about how well they are doing in relation to the subject's attainment targets. Classrooms used for history lack the stimulation provided by the display of posters and pupils' work and, in a significant number of cases, particularly in Years 7 and 8, have to be shared with other subjects. Management is effective, relationships are good, and there is a good climate for subject improvement. Improvement planning covers relevant issues such as the incorporation of history trips into the schemes of work but does not include sufficiently precise means of monitoring progress towards achieving the targets set.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Well above average standards of attainment at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- Good teaching leads to pupils learning and achieving well.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to the subject which enhances their learning.

Areas for improvement

- Develop a wider range of teaching methods in ICT lessons to improve pupils' achievement still further.
- Planning for the whole school development of ICT.
- Provide more access for other subject areas to use ICT to support pupils' learning.

Standards (at the end of key stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	Well above average	Above average
Seen during the inspection	Well above average	Well above average

Most pupils' ICT skills and capability develop well between Years 7 and 9.

The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels at the end of Year 9 is rising. The attainment of boys and girls is similar.

Most pupils evaluate their work well. They understand the advantages and disadvantages of software applications and so can make well-informed choices of which to use for a particular task. When using ICT to present their work most understand the importance of tailoring these to the audience they are addressing.

Standards in Year 11 are higher than in the past because teachers have more experience of the requirements of the GNVQ course and they support pupils well.

The proportion attaining higher than a C grade is rising. The number gaining A* grades is small because of the limited amount of time allocated to the subject. Most pupils' coursework on databases and spreadsheets shows well above average understanding of their purpose for particular users. Most understand the importance of correct design in order to achieve a specific purpose.

There is no significant difference in the standards reached by girls and boys.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Very Good
Pupils' behaviour	Very Good

Achievement and Progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Good	Good

The quality of teaching is good overall and never less than satisfactory. Good planning enables pupils to begin their GNVQ course in Year 9. This is a major reason why pupils are able to attain above average standards and to achieve well. Higher attaining pupils achieve well, within the time limitations set for the subject. The progress of pupils is well monitored. As a result teachers support all pupils well both in and out of lessons. In particular they help those with special educational needs well so that they also make good progress. Girls and boys achieve at similar rates. Teachers know their subject very well so they advise pupils very effectively. The marking of pupils' work is very good. It is detailed and gives pupils specific points for improvement that would gain them marks in examinations. Homework is set regularly. Many pupils use the very good technical systems that are in place to transfer their work from home to school. This provides good continuity for their learning. The best lessons engage pupils actively in their learning by using a variety of methods that make them think. A particular strength is the probing questions that the teachers pose which helps to reinforce pupils' understanding. However some lessons lack variety so the pace of learning is reduced. Pupils' behaviour is managed very well so that learning proceeds without interruption. Lessons that clearly state what is to be learned at the beginning then checked and reinforced at the end are most effective. However, not all lessons follow this good pattern. The achievement of pupils in ICT is adversely affected by the lack of co-ordination of ICT provision through the other subjects of the curriculum including the access of departments to computers.

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Good	Good
Quality of Learning	Good	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Good	Good

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

203. The leadership and management of the ICT department are good. Computer resources are good and fully utilised. Very good technical support ensures that the computers are invariably available for pupils to use. The vision and planning for the further technical development of the subject is very good. The ICT teachers work well together as a team with a focus on improving pupils'

attainment. Planning of the courses is good. These build up the pupils' skills and understanding in sequence with good reinforcement of the concepts. However the basic skills of numeracy and literacy development are not emphasised enough in the department's planning. The monitoring of teaching and learning is developing but not enough emphasis is placed on developing a wider variety of teaching styles. Issues in the last report that were specific to ICT as a subject have been successfully addressed.

204. The use of ICT in other subjects is unsatisfactory overall. Access to ICT resources for many subjects is unsatisfactory; this was a criticism in the last inspection report. There are 11 ICT rooms in the school. These are allocated to departments. However no monitoring of how these departments use the rooms has been carried out. As a result those departments without ICT facilities do not know when they can book an ICT room. Therefore several departments do not meet the National Curriculum requirements for the use of ICT in their subject. No mapping of the ICT experiences that pupils' receive in the school has been undertaken and there is no overall plan for the future development of pupils' ICT capability throughout the school.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Teachers' use of the languages to teach the subjects.
- Standards in Spanish.
- Improvements achieved in recent years and the capacity to improve further.

Areas for improvement

- Providing reading and writing tasks matched to the pupils' individual abilities.
- Integrating the use of ICT into the curriculum.
- Increasing the proportion of A and A* grades in French.
- Making opportunities available for pupils to study a second language to a broader age and ability range.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Test/Examinations	Above average	Average
Seen during the inspection	Above average	Average
<p><i>Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen</i></p> <p>Standards in French at the end of Year 9 have increased progressively over the last three years, at a faster rate than the national average.</p> <p>Standards in French at the end of Year 11 have increased steadily over the last three years and are now broadly in line with national averages but lower than pupils attainment in other subjects. The number of A* and A grades is below the national average.</p> <p>Standards in Spanish at the end of Year 11 for a small group of pupils have increased over three years and are now well above average and in line with the pupils' attainment in other subjects.</p> <p>Work seen during the inspection in lessons and in scrutiny of pupils' work is broadly consistent with these standards. There is a range of attainment consistent with the setting arrangements. Standards in French are good by the end of Year 9 and average by the end of Year 11.</p> <p>Standards observed in Spanish are good throughout.</p>		
Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Good	
Pupils' behaviour	Very good	

Achievement/progress

	Year 7 – Year 9	Year 10 – Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Good	Unsatisfactory
<p><i>Statement about any differences in progress between pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL)</i></p> <p>Pupils make rapid progress in the first year of learning both French and Spanish. Progress slows in Year 8 and improves in Year 9, when standards in French have been consistently above national averages. Progress of the small number of pupils beginning Spanish in Year 8 is good and they will attain average standards by the end of Year 9.</p> <p>The progress in French is not sustained and at the end of Year 11 standards are at national average levels. Good progress in Spanish is maintained and pupils attain A* and A grades at above the national average.</p> <p>Lessons are consistently conducted in French or Spanish and teachers encourage pupils to make use of the language in when speaking and listening. There is, however, too much use of English and translation in reading and writing tasks. The teaching of grammar is not always linked to the way that language is used in practice.</p> <p>Teachers plan their lessons effectively and make use of a good range of materials and equipment when it is available.</p> <p>Lessons in Years 7 and 8 often suffer from late starts, lack of equipment and teacher or pupil movement because of the lack of specialist accommodation in Arnold Hall.</p> <p>Few lessons take into account the different ability levels of the pupils. The include progress of pupils with SEN, in particular, is only satisfactory, despite good achievement of many pupils in lower sets.</p> <p>The curriculum in modern foreign languages is unsatisfactory. The recent change to joint first languages of French and Spanish is a welcome development but the lack of a sustainable strategy for pupils to learn a second language is a major weakness in a school of this size. Opportunity to learn two languages in Years 10 and 11 is limited. No pupil in Years 7 and 8 has this opportunity at present. It is not clear how the second language could be introduced, nor to what proportion of the pupils. In addition to restricting breadth in the curriculum in the main school, this limits the options of gifted linguists in both the sixth form and beyond. Provision is unsatisfactory for the teaching of ICT through the modern foreign languages curriculum because the department has no dedicated facilities and access to ICT rooms is severely restricted.</p> <p>Assessment procedures are in place and are developing. They meet statutory requirements at the end of Year 9 and the needs of the examination boards at the end of Year 11. There are records of the progression of all pupils' attainment levels. Pupils are not involved in assessing or recording their own levels and the information has not yet been used to guide curriculum planning.</p>		

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Good	Good
Quality of Learning	Good	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good	
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Satisfactory	

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve the subject's quality	Good

Adequacy of resources	Very Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Unsatisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

The department has made good progress since the last inspection. New leadership and a number of new teaching appointments have resulted in a number of improvements: standards have risen at the end of Year 9; and at the end of Year 11 in recent years; the quality of teaching has improved significantly and there is now no evidence of unsatisfactory teaching; the use of the language in speaking and listening is now a strength of the teaching; satisfactory procedures are now in place to report to parents at the end of Year 9; a reading scheme has been introduced and regular lessons timetabled; and learning resources have improved significantly. For a minority of issues, there has been no progress or a decline in the provision: there is limited opportunity to study two languages to GCSE; there has been no improvement in the access to ICT; and the specific provision for pupils of lower attainment is still unaddressed. Despite some improvement, accommodation remains unsatisfactory in quantity and quality: there are too few rooms available; those in Arnold Hall have insufficient equipment and those in Newman Hall lack carpeting and do not constitute a welcoming learning environment for language teaching.

These improvements have been brought about by good management and the development of a team identity where responsibility is shared and delegated. The department is developing good systems for constructive self evaluation and monitoring of standards, teaching and learning. There is sufficient evidence of the progress made thus far to be confident that the department has the capacity to take these improvements further.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The behaviour and attitudes of pupils.
- Technology in music except for ICT.
- The nature and use of music diaries in all lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Music accommodation which lacks sound proofing, has no practice or group work facilities, and is very overcrowded and inflexible with insufficient space for many important musical activities.
- Provision for music in the sixth form.
- The development of pupil self assessment to increase its impact on subsequent work.
- ICT in music.

Standards (at the end of key stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
<i>Tests and Examinations</i>	Average	Above average
Seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average

Standards at the end of Year 9 are at the national average for pupils reaching National Curriculum Level 5 and above.

GCSE results in 2002 are below the national average for grades A* to C, but in this small group the underachievement of two pupils had a significant negative impact. Between 1999 and 2001 GCSE results were well above average.

The overcrowded and inflexible accommodation limits the nature of musical activities and thus important access to progress and achievement; ensemble and group work in lessons are totally impracticable.

Some excellence was seen, for example with a Year 11 saxophone player whose produced a liquid

sound and whose composition work was of equally high quality.
Instrumental teaching which, unusually, is provided free of charge, produces excellent players; three Year 8 and 9 clarinetists were heard played well, and one girl played with a fluent line even when sight reading.

The lack of ICT in Years 10 and 11 limits pupils' opportunities to create more varied composition work.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Pupils' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and Progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Good	Good

Pupils' attitudes, linked to high quality relationships with their teachers, have a very positive impact on achievement and progress.

In the best lessons teachers' passion and enthusiasm shine through, and pupils respond with fascination and equal enthusiasm; these lessons are fun, hard work and provide the pupils with rewarding musical experiences.

A tendency to focus on either whole class or individual work gives limited opportunities for pupils to work together and learn from each other when composing.

Planning and target setting are very good, linking into the 'music diary', which helps pupils to measure their own progress effectively.

The assessment system is very good with pupils using their individual diary to assess their own progress; it needs tightening up to maximise impact on subsequent learning.

In the best lessons questioning is used skilfully to promote individual and collective learning; it broadens and opens minds.

Opportunities for pupils to explore music making with each other are limited by the lack of practice rooms.

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Good	Good
Quality of Learning	Good	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Unsatisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Unsatisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

205. Leadership is good and management efficient. Working relationships across the department are very good. Technology and sound recording are very good but, while software is highly appropriate and teacher skills well developed, ICT hardware is unsatisfactory. Machines are not suitable for the software and this results in them often 'crashing'. It is a major development issue for the department since statutory curriculum requirements are not fully met. The lack of curriculum provision in music in the sixth form is another major issue. Extra-curricular opportunities are good, including regular productions and good links with the local education authority ensembles and activities; a significant proportion of pupils are involved, and this extension to the curriculum is of great value to all involved. The free provision of instrumental tuition reveals the school's commitment to equality of opportunity.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching, including excellent expectations of learning.
- Teaching of key skills.
- Leadership and the collective will of the department to improve further.

Areas for Improvement

- Develop assessment procedures to inform learning between the age of 14 and 16 and to reflect National Curriculum levels at all ages.
- Further develop curriculum planning and lesson content with variable complexity to meet the demands of all abilities.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Test/Examinations	Above average	Above average
Seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen
 Standards in the 11-14 and 14-16 core programmes are above the national average.
 GCSE standards over the last few years have been well above the national average.
 The number of students who gain A* and A grades in these examinations is also well above the national average.
 Present standards in Year 11 examination groups exceed previous very high standards.
 Standards in athletics are high; the school also has a strong reputation for success in local athletics' competitions.
 Pupils' very good learning attitudes and commitment to the subject are a major reason for the quick pace in lessons and very good levels of learning over time.
 A considerable extension of work and raised standards is achieved through very high participation levels in extra-curricular clubs and inter-form competitions.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Very Good
Pupils' behaviour	Very Good

Achievement/progress

	Year 7 –Year 9	Year 10-Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Very Good	Very Good

Statement about any differences in progress between pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL)

Achievement is very good across all age-ranges; both boys and girls make very good progress. Programmes of study have been completely overhauled since the last inspection so learning is improved by very good continuity and progression from year to year. Year 9 boys efficiently display shot-put techniques learnt in two previous years before making very good progress in learning a new advanced technique.

Learning is very good because teaching is consistently very good. During the inspection approximately 50 per cent of teaching observed was excellent.

Teacher expectations are very good. In athletics, for example, targets are carefully set for all levels of ability. These inclusive strategies ensure high participation rates and industrious responses by pupils.

The implementation of literacy skills in learning is excellent. White boards are used in changing rooms to analyse a range of key vocabulary and their meaning in next stage learning. The use of literacy strategies in examination courses is an important reason for the successes achieved. In theory lessons Year 11 exam students use advanced language skills to debate the compelling political and financial issues involved in holding international sporting events.

Year 10 examination students show a very good understanding of training methods, distinguishing energy systems with correct physiological terminology. This reflects the excellent work the department does on promoting health-related fitness across all modules of work.

Teacher expectations that require students to plan and evaluate their performances are another reason for high levels of speaking and listening skills.

The department has made very good progress in developing teaching methods to match the learning needs of pupils. All teachers have excellent management skills and, because they are very aware of how pupils react in lessons, can adapt their methods accordingly.

Well-structured lessons allow students many opportunities to consider the objectives being learnt; they respond very positively to the challenges set for them. Assessment criteria developed alongside programmes of study is helping to improve the standards of targeted groups of students. Further refinements that ensure the recognised gifted and talented pupils are fully challenged will improve these procedures further.

Similarly, more variety in teaching tasks to match the range of ability levels in the option groups for students aged 14 to 16 would improve standards further.

ICT is used well in helping pupils to evaluate their performances and to research and complete GCSE studies. Inconsistent access to ICT facilities restricts the use of this good practice. The resources that teachers have developed to support GCSE learning in lessons and additional study and revision strategies are of a very high calibre.

Educational Provision

	Year 7-Year 9	Year 10-Year 11
Quality of Teaching	Very Good	Very Good
Quality of the curriculum	Very Good	Good

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Very good
Quality of assessment and progress monitoring	Very Good

Leadership and management

Leadership and management	Very good
Effectiveness of action to improve the subject's quality	Very good
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Good

Improvement since the last inspection	Very good
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206. Leadership within the department is excellent. The dual heads of department have been very successful in developing and implementing a range of policies relating to curriculum and teaching and learning that have raised standards since the last inspection. There is very good capacity for future success, due to department expertise and their shared commitment to continual improvement. Further support and monitoring by senior managers and governors will help the next stages in direction. They need to be more involved in identifying appropriate priorities and targets and rigorously monitoring their outcomes. Further identification and support of the innovative teaching and learning practices within the department can only benefit the school as a whole.

DRAMA

Overall, the quality of provision in drama is **unsatisfactory** at Key Stage 3 and **good** at Key Stage 4.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11. • The subject is very well led and managed. • The quality of teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11. • Older students have very good attitudes to learning. • The department makes a very good contribution to the school's reputation in the community. <p>Areas for improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation and resources for teaching the subject. • The time allocated to teaching the curriculum in Years 8 and 9. • The attitude of pupils in Years 8 and 9 towards the subject.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

	Year 9	Year 11
Tests and Examinations	N/a	Below average
Seen during the inspection	Below average	Above average

<p><i>Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen</i></p> <p>Standards at the end of Year 9 are below average. This is because of the limited time allocated to the subject, which amounts to about two per cent of curriculum time in each of Years 8 and 9. No drama is taught in Year 7. Pupils' achievement during this time is unsatisfactory because of the discontinuity in their learning and the negative impact of the teaching space for the subject.</p> <p>In 2002, GCSE results were below the national average in the subject. This marked a decline from results in 2001 which were well above the national average. The decline in results partly reflects the lower prior attainment of pupils who took the examination in 2002 but not entirely, because the pupils achieved relatively lower results in the subject than in their other subjects.</p> <p>In 2000 and 2001 pupils performed relatively better in drama, than they did in most of their other subjects.</p> <p>By the end of Year 11, standards have risen considerably for those pupils who continue with the subject and are above the national average. The achievement of these pupils is very good overall.</p>

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Satisfactory overall. Very good in Years 10 and 11
Pupils' behaviour	Satisfactory

Achievement and Progress

	Year 9	Year 11
How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory	Very good

Statements explaining why pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL) achieve as they do.

Pupils in Year 8 and 9 follow a well-planned curriculum of educational drama with an emphasis on developing personal and social skills and an understanding of relationships and responses. While in individual lessons pupils' learning is satisfactory, because of the gap between lessons pupils' progress over time is unsatisfactory. Pupils' levels of self-discipline, as well as their listening skills, are below what are expected and these further hinder progress. Only when the teaching is very good do pupils listen closely and work very hard to reach the targets set. In a very good Year 9 lesson, pupils sustained very good concentration and were able to come to a good understanding of social hierarchies because they were well motivated and wanted to succeed. They were able to make decisions about which jobs in society were the most important and explain their reasons for these decisions. In this lesson pupils' achievement was good.

In other classes many pupils are not able to recall their previous work with sufficient clarity to be able to move forward sufficiently and teachers spend a significant part of the lesson helping them recall what they learned in the previous lesson. Many boys and some lower attaining pupils find it very difficult to sustain concentration in lessons and their weak attitudes are reflected in the low numbers who choose the subject for study in Years 10 and 11.

In Years 10 and 11 pupils' progress improves very significantly and their achievement is very good. When pupils are in Year 11, they are able to devise their own scenes to portray a range of real and imagined events. They can create a character from a few significant facts. In a good Year 10 lesson, pupils devised background for a young woman and created minor characters to give her story depth and detail. They showed good collaborative skills and an ability to think deeply about the situation when they asked searching questions of the character in the 'hot seat'. By Year 11 pupils are able to work very effectively to create scenes from plays by published playwrights or of their own devising. They sustain concentration well and produce convincing characterisations. Their written work shows reflective thought about situations and how a character might respond. Higher attaining pupils are able to write well-structured essays showing similarities of theme or characterisation in different play text or films.

Teaching is satisfactory overall in Years 8 and 9. In Years 10 and 11 it ranges from good to excellent. Teachers have to overcome many obstacles to learning to enable their pupils to make progress. The time allocated to the subject in Years 8 and 9 does not allow them to develop any of the themes to a significant depth, so that pupils' knowledge and understanding remain superficial. The distribution of lessons – one every two weeks - prevents good progression and continuity as time is lost in lengthy recapping of previous learning. The gap between lessons prevents the development of secure relationships and many pupils find it very difficult to develop the trust necessary for work in drama. The impact of the accommodation also has a negative effect on pupils' attitudes to the subject and many overtly display a distaste for the hall they work in. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 8 and 9 have declined since the previous inspection. In Year 10 and 11 teaching is very well planned and lessons move at a good pace because pupils are so interested in the activities. Relationships with pupils improve very quickly and teachers have a very good rapport with them which does much to instil high levels of trust and confidence in the pupils. Because of this learning proceeds at a very good rate and pupils' achievement is very good.

Educational Provision

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11
Quality of Teaching	Satisfactory	Very good
Quality of Learning	Unsatisfactory	Very good
Quality of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory	Good

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
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Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Satisfactory
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Leadership and Management

Leadership and management	Very good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Poor
Adequacy of accommodation	Very poor
Improvement since the last inspection	Unsatisfactory

207. Accommodation for learning is very poor. Lessons are timetabled into one of the two school halls. Neither of these lends itself easily to creating good conditions for teaching and learning. The main teaching hall is in a dilapidated condition, the stage is dirty and inner curtains are torn, creating a very bleak environment for creative work. The start of lessons is delayed most mornings while chairs are cleared after assembly, thus losing a sizeable portion of already limited teaching time. For the early part of the lesson there are interruptions from people using the hall as a corridor, distracting pupils and interrupting the flow of teaching. The floor is not well cleaned so that teachers are reluctant to ask pupils to sit or lie on it in the course of their work. Finally, because the halls are used for examinations there are several times in the year when lessons are relocated at short notice to classrooms that are not suitable for the subject and teaching time is again lost. Improvement in this aspect of provision since the previous inspection has been very poor.
208. Leadership in the subject is very good. The head of department has very good vision for the subject and succeeds in giving it a high profile in the community through regular productions and pupils' involvement in local and regional productions. His dedication to the subject and the joy he brings to his work inspire pupils to sustain their interest in the subject and continue it in Years 10 and 11. Despite the very difficult circumstances the head of department works under he sustains a very high commitment to developing the subject through links with local schools in a creative partnership and in enlisting the support of colleagues for whole school productions. His vision for the subject has led to much out of school involvement for pupils, including a visit to Auschwitz in preparation for a production about World War Two. His links through the local creative partnership initiative have led to the school being involved in much collaborative work with local schools for the benefit of pupils' learning.

BUSINESS STUDIES

209. GCSE results were average in 2002. Amongst higher grades, results were close to the national average at grade A and above average at grade B. Boys' results were above average at A*, A and B. Girls' results were above average at B grade.
210. Two lessons were seen during the inspection. Teaching and learning were good in a Year 10 lesson and very good in a Year 11 lesson. In both lessons students' attitudes were very good. In both lessons there was effective activity-based learning. Year 10 students worked in a paired activity to decide on the target market for different magazines and find reasons to justify their choices. Year 11 students worked through a number of linked activities including developing a marketing strategy for a particular product. Learning in the Year 11 lesson was better because there was a series of activities offering progressive challenge including defining and using key terms required for the examination. The lesson served its purpose of revision very well.
211. Work seen was average with no significant differences between standards of girls and boys. Higher ability pupils in Year 11 carried out detailed investigations of businesses for their coursework. In one example a wide-ranging investigation of a football club included original research with a clear explanation of research objectives and very good use of ICT to present

results. Lower ability pupils also made good use of ICT, for example in using websites to investigate a mobile phone company, but their use of business terminology was limited and their evaluation skills in assessing the effectiveness of research methods were also weaker. Assessment procedures are very thorough and well matched to syllabus requirements so that students know what they have to do to achieve well.

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

In the inspection, 13 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**.

List subjects in Framework order

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	8	100	62	0	15	2.00	1.51
Biology	3	0	52	0	2	0	0.79
Chemistry	1	0	43	0	5	0	0.77
Psychology	5	100	74	0	11	1.00	1.47

GCE A level and GNVQ courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
A level unless stated		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	10	100	87	30	43	6.00	5.80
Biology	51	80	88	10	34	3.53	5.25
Chemistry	9	78	90	22	43	4.22	5.90
Science - GNVQ	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.50	9.80
Physics	6	100	88	33	40	6.67	5.67
Design and Technology	6	100	91	0	30	4.33	5.38
Economics	13	77	89	8	36	3.38	5.52
Computer Studies	38	97	86	13	23	4.58	4.62
Art	4	75	96	25	46	4.00	6.57
Theatre Studies	8	100	93	13	31	4.75	5.53
Geography	10	90	92	20	38	5.00	5.74
History	26	81	88	16	35	4.08	5.45
Psychology	25	60	87	8	34	2.56	5.30
English Language	50	92	92	14	30	4.16	5.28
French	2	100	89	100	38	8.00	5.59
General Studies	99	64	85	9	30	2.75	4.91

Advanced vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England

Business Studies	13	84.6	61	15.4	28.3	23.1	17.3
Science GNVQ	4	100	71	75	17	0	1

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business Studies	14	92.8	62	35.7	16.3	0	1.2

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The inspection covered AS and A2 mathematics courses. In the great majority of cases the courses are run as a two-year course to A-level. A total of four lessons was sampled. A small number of students re-take GCSE mathematics in Year 12 – usually in November (after the inspection, so no lessons were sampled).

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teachers' understanding and knowledge of the subject.
- The positive attitudes of students to the subject and to their teachers
- A-level examination results in 2002.

Areas for improvement

- Provision of broader sixth form study opportunities for students who do not achieve the highest GCSE grades.
- Opportunities for independent learning.
- Use of ICT to support learning and to develop students' research skills.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Above average
Seen during the inspection	Above average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen.

Each year a small number of students re-take GCSE mathematics in order to gain a 'C' grade or better; between one third and two thirds usually attain these levels.

The number of students certificated for AS-level mathematics is very small as most continue straight onto A-level. This makes it impossible to arrive at reliable judgments about standards in examinations at the end of Year 12. However evidence from workbooks and tests show standards to be above average, with students making satisfactory progress.

Students studying A-level and AS-level mathematics have all achieved very good grades at GCSE in Year 11. With the exception of the below average results in 2001, standards in A-level mathematics for the last five years are above average.

Students' secure skills in algebra support their learning in other aspects of the subject such as in a Year 13 lesson on mechanics.

Students have good recall of previous learning and this helps them to progress at a good pace through A-level and AS-level schemes of work. An example of this was seen in a Year 12 lesson dealing with the transformation of graphs.

Boys almost invariably achieve higher standards than girls.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Students' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and progress

How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory
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All groups of students, across the whole ability range, make satisfactory progress. Boys tend to make more progress than girls but the reasons for this are not clear from the inspection evidence.

Standards are supported by good teaching. Students are challenged during their lessons. Their learning is supported by the provision of well prepared notes, and by model solutions, which aid understanding.

Teachers are skilled mathematicians who draw on their depth of knowledge to stretch students' understanding and skills.

Teachers' skills in asking questions are good; for example, in a Year 12 lesson the teacher stretched the students by pushing them to offer solutions to problems. The result was that students gained confidence and understanding, even when they did not immediately produce correct answers.

Students' positive attitudes to the subject ensure that they persevere when difficulties arise; they very much value the support freely provided by teachers out of lesson time.

Homework is regularly set. It is marked diligently and with constructive comments that help students improve their understanding.

The school has an effective system for monitoring the progress of students in the sixth form. This system, together with the teachers' good marking of work, means that students know how well they are doing and are able to evaluate their own progress.

Students enjoy the subject; they are very positive about it and the support that they get from their teachers. This accounts for the relatively small number of students who 'drop out' from mathematics in the sixth form.

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Good
Quality of Learning	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

212. The provision of post-16 mathematics for students who attain very good GCSE grades is good, but there is currently no provision for other students. Probably as a result of this is, the number of

students studying A-level mathematics is smaller than would be expected for the size of the sixth form and the school.

213. The good teaching leads to good learning and positive attitudes to the subject. Nevertheless students would benefit from more opportunities for independent learning both in lessons and outside them. The school library offers some opportunities for the use of computers, but otherwise offers very little to support the learning of mathematics.

SCIENCE

A-level and AS-level courses are offered in biology, chemistry and physics. The main subjects sampled for the inspection were biology and chemistry: one lesson of physics was also seen.

Biology

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

Strengths

- The good subject knowledge of the teachers helps students learn well.
- Good relationships between students and teachers encourage students to seek individual help when they need it.
- The department works well together and provision is well planned.

Areas for improvement

- More frequent checking of students' work showing corrections and how to they can improve.
- The inadequate selection of books in the library for independent learning.

Tests and Examinations	Below average
Seen during the inspection	Average

A-level results in 2002 were below the national average, but were an improvement upon 2001. They were lower in 2001, because there was a weaker group of students and the department had considerable staffing difficulties, which resulted in larger sets and less experienced staff teaching. This also impacted unfavourably on the students who took A2 in 2002.

There is no significant difference in the performances of boys and girls.

Observations of lessons, questioning students together with examination of the pupils' work shows that standards have improved. This was well illustrated in a Year 13 lesson, where students exhibited a thorough knowledge about the causes and types of mutations and their consequences.

AS-level results in 2002 standards were what might be expected nationally and from the students GCSE grades. The proportion of A and B grades was below that found nationally, whereas the national average was exceeded for the proportion obtaining the pass grades in the range A to E.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Good
Students' behaviour	Very Good

Achievement and progress

How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory
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The achievement of the A-level students in 2002 was as expected from their GCSE grades. The achievement of the present Year 13 was satisfactory at AS-level relative to the students' GCSE performance. At present in both years achievement is satisfactory, but some of the weaker students are finding it hard to cope with the more intellectually demanding sixth form work.

The quality of teaching is good.

Lessons are well planned with definite objectives, explanations are clear and students' understanding is

regularly checked. Good use is made of diagrams and dissection to clarify structures and processes. In the best lessons students are all involved with having and developing ideas in a logical fashion, using what they already know or have just researched.

Sometimes teaching is less stimulating and becomes more of a lecture, with questions to check assimilation. Some students are keener to learn than they are to think. For instance in a good Year 12 lesson, where the teacher was using dissection of hearts to encourage students' understanding of structure and function, the students learned well; but many were unwilling to respond to questions outside what they had been taught. Good use is made of computers, such as the employment of data loggers in pulse rate experiments and making temperature and pH effects spreadsheets.

Teachers are always willing to help students with problems in their own time.

Students' progress overall is regularly reviewed but their work is not checked regularly enough to identify weaknesses in knowledge and understanding. More comments from teachers indicating how students might improve the quality of their work would also help to raise standards.

Students standards are also improved by:

- The good internet access.
- The good selection of periodicals in the main library.
- The field course at Ainsdale beach.
- Visits to lectures.
- The coherence and good planning of the staff.

However, there is an insufficient number and range of books in the library to facilitate independent learning and interest.

Educational provision

Quality of Teaching	Good
Quality of Learning	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Good

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Satisfactory

Leadership and management

Leadership and Management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

214. The number of students wishing to take biology in the sixth form has fallen slightly over the last few years, but it is a healthy 40 at present. Last year all the students who set out on the AS course completed it and only three who begun the A2 course did not finish it.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- The good subject knowledge of the teachers is well used to produce informative and interesting lessons.

- The involvement of pupils in the formulation and development of ideas.
- Good relationships between students and staff.

Areas for improvement

- The correcting of students' work, including the grading of performance on old examination questions.
- The provision of a suitable selection of books in the library to facilitate independent learning and interest.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Average
Seen during the inspection	Above average

In 2002, A-level results were at the national average and much improved from 2001, when they were below average.

AS-level results in 2002 were average. In both years the proportion of students obtaining A or B grades was lower and the proportion gaining grades in the range A to E was higher than the national average.

Numbers of students taking the subject are small, but boys performed better than girls.

Observations of lessons, questioning of students and looking at their work show that standards in both Years 12 and 13 are above average.

Year 13 students demonstrate a sound knowledge of the hydrolysis reactions of metal ions and can handle terms such as pK_a .

Students in Year 12 can apply Le Chatelier's principle, when considering the effects of concentration, pressure and temperature on reactions.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Very Good
Students' behaviour	Very Good

Achievement and progress

How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory
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The achievement of the students who took A-level in 2002 was less than it should have been considering their GCSE grades. The achievement of the present Year 13 was satisfactory at AS-level relative to their GCSE performance. Observations of lessons and the questioning of students together with examination of their work, indicate that it is stronger now. There have been problems of continuity in the subject due to staff instability, which have affected achievement. Year 12 students are achieving as might be expected from their GCSE performance.

The quality of teaching is good. All lessons observed were either good or very good. Strong features of the teaching are the requirement for the pupils to have ideas and then to develop them by means of well directed teacher questions coupled with a good degree of challenge.

Good relationships between students and teachers enable study to take place in a positive learning atmosphere.

The good knowledge of teachers is used well to make the lessons interesting. This is leading to good learning with interested and involved students. In one such lesson students were enabled to interpret the reactions of five different metal aqua ions with two bases from their own practical data. They could explain what happened and why and then represent it as ionic equations.

Good use is made of computers, for instance a computer simulation was effectively employed to illustrate the effects of changing the concentrations of one of the reactants on outcomes.

Whilst students are given much practice at answering examination questions the outcomes are not well linked to examination grades, nor are the answers always marked. Some of the marking is incomplete or gives incorrect information.

Teachers are always willing to help students with problems in their own time.

Students' progress is regularly reviewed and discussed with suggestions for improvement and what grades they are heading for.

Students standards are also improved by:

- The good internet access and from material on the intranet.
- The good selection of periodicals in the main library.
- Links with Liverpool University.

However, there is an insufficient number and range of books in the library to facilitate independent learning and interest. Also there are no industrial visits.

Educational provision

Quality of Teaching	Good
Quality of Learning	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Good

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Satisfactory

Leadership and management

Leadership and Management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Satisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

215. Numbers opting for sixth form chemistry are falling and there are at present 18 chemists. In 2002 only one of the students who settled down on the AS-level course failed to complete it whereas all those who set out on the A-level course finished it.

Physics

216. The physics lesson observed was very good. It concerned using spectra to investigate binary pairs, distant stars and galaxies. By the end students demonstrated that they were able to use the red and blue shifts of spectra and associated mathematics to identify such things as the direction and period of rotation in binary pairs and how far apart they were. The lesson was very skilfully taught by an experienced teacher, who planned it well so that it was student led and teacher guided. His very good knowledge of the subject was reflected by his clear explanations. A-level results in 2002 were well above the national average.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

PRODUCT DESIGN

Product design is offered at A and AS-level. Take-up has been satisfactory at AS-level but only 50 per cent of students have continued to A-level in the last two years.

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

Strengths

- Students are interested and enjoy their work.
- The imaginative quality of students' work is good.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- The objectives of lessons are very clear.

Areas for improvement

- Tracking of student progress should be more comprehensive to clarify achievement from GCSE to A-level.

Standards

Tests and examinations	Below average
Seen during the inspection	Average

In 2002, the A-level results were below average and represented a decline from results in the previous year, which were also, however, below average. In both these years no student gained an A or B grade though no student failed to gain a pass.

Numbers taking the A-level examination were small with five in the most recent year and six the year before. In each case this represents a significant drop from the numbers taking the AS course in the preceding year. Work seen during the inspection was in line with the improved AS-level results in 2002 at around the average level. A particular strength is the imaginative quality of design. This is strongly evident in an AS-level project devoted to the design of clocks and deriving inspiration from the work of the 'Memphis' design group.

An A-level project on children's toys also gave rise to imaginative design. The wide demands of A-level, however, are less successfully met. The written work of some students, for example, is relatively weak in an A-level context and detracting from the overall quality of research and course work.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Good
Students' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and progress

How well students achieve	Satisfactory
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Students show a good level of interest and commitment, particularly in their practical work. Several students who were interviewed were unconcerned about the fact that their expected A-level grades were lower than the grades they had gained at GCSE.

Progress is, consequently, driven by interest and enjoyment. These factors promote a pleasant, informal working atmosphere in workshops, rather than a striving for the highest grades.

Achievement, in terms of academic success is below average when measured over time from GCSE. Progress in lessons is, however, purposeful, aided by very good behaviour and positive attitudes.

The teaching is sensitive to students' aims and interests. A strong feature is the good quality of relationships between teachers and pupils.

Instruction is positive and clear and is delivered from a good base of teacher subject expertise and versatility. This enables one-to-one tuition to be closely related to individual student need.

Students at AS-level are encouraged to work within identified design traditions to provide security and promote confidence as a basis for independent working at A-level.

Students are taught to use computer-controlled design and manufacture in their work and they develop a good level of expertise in this area.

Although student progress is 'tracked', a fuller knowledge of students' overall school profiles would facilitate a more useful analysis of results and aid the planning of work to improve achievement and progress.

In order to avoid student complacency a very searching analysis of achievement between GCSE and A-level is needed.

Educational provision

Quality of teaching	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Satisfactory
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment and progress monitoring	Satisfactory

Leadership and management

Leadership and management	Satisfactory
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Satisfactory

217. The chosen product design A-level and AS-level syllabus is sufficiently flexible to accommodate an extended range of student interests, which an increasing take-up will bring in train. However, the demands of this course can be interpreted in a way that enables students to avoid confronting the fullest rigour of A-level study.

BUSINESS

There is a good range of opportunities to study the subject. It is offered at GNVQ intermediate level and also at AVCE level, with the choice of taking either the single or double award course. Some GNVQ students go on to study the subject at AVCE level.

Business Studies

Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- New courses have been successfully established.
- Procedures for monitoring and assessing students' progress are very good.
- Resources are well used, including ICT.

Areas for improvement

- Staffing absences within the department affect students' achievement and departmental planning.
- The sharing of good practice to raise the quality of teaching to the best in the department is limited.
- Industry links are narrow in range.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Average for GNVQ. Below average for AVCE.
Seen during the inspection	Average for GNVQ and below average for AVCE.

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen
There were no distinctions in GNVQ results in 2002 or in the previous year.
In AVCE double award results there were no passes in the AA – BB range. In AVCE single award results there were no passes in the A – C range.
(The comparisons with national standards are with national statistics published by the examination board).
There are no significant differences between girls' and boys' results.
Currently, both GNVQ and AVCE students display good ICT skills in compiling and presenting assignments.
Assignments produced are thorough and have good structure and coherence because teaching is well matched to examination syllabus requirements.
Students' understanding and application of theory varies according to the quality of teaching.
Literacy skills are variable and this has an impact on the quality of finished work, for example on students' own evaluations of the effectiveness of research methods used for investigations.
Investigation skills develop well with, for example, students carrying out primary and secondary research into local and national business organisations.
Numeracy skills are variable and work involving calculations requires close support from staff.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Very Good
Students' behaviour	Very Good

Achievement and progress

How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory
<p><i>Statements explaining why pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL) achieve as they do.</i></p> <p>Students' achievement is satisfactory and in line with expectations. Boys and girls achieve equally well as do higher and lower attainers, because of the very thorough monitoring procedures used to check progress.</p> <p>Variations in teaching quality have an impact on achievement. During the week of the inspection one Year 13 group had been taught by three different temporary staff over a one month period.</p> <p>Specialist teaching is satisfactory overall but there is a wide range and this, too, affects achievement.</p> <p>In the most effective teaching theory is well taught with frequent checks on understanding through class discussion and investigation activities; for example, in a Year 12 lesson on economic management.</p> <p>In some teaching, explanations of theory dominate the lesson and are not, alone, an effective means of consolidating learning; for example, in a Year 12 lesson on elasticity of demand.</p> <p>Learning is better when there is a very clear distinction between, and mixture of, tasks and discussion with both used to reinforce the other.</p> <p>The management of class discussion is variable. It is sometimes too teacher-dominated without offering sufficient challenge to individuals. Time is sometimes used unproductively, with over-long lesson introductions.</p> <p>Both GNVQ and AVCE students are very well motivated because teaching is well matched to syllabus requirements. Students know what they have to do to complete assignments and presentations and this enables them to develop good independent study skills. Activities build confidence with, for example GNVQ students planning formal meetings and AVCE students organising trips.</p> <p>ICT skills develop well because ICT is an integral part of many lessons and because facilities are provided in all teaching rooms.</p> <p>The development of numeracy skills is supported well by thorough assessment although opportunities are sometimes lost to demonstrate correct methodology when misunderstandings arise.</p>	

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Satisfactory
Quality of Learning	Satisfactory
Quality of the curriculum	Good
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Very Good

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Satisfactory
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Satisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

218. Good teamwork and strong collaboration have been achieved despite significant staffing problems. This does not extend sufficiently to include the sharing of good practice of the best teaching in the department. Very good monitoring and assessment procedures have been developed. There is a good division of labour in the teaching of the various courses, reflecting well staff expertise and interest. There is a good range of textbooks and other resources including those that offer current “real world” examples, although the range of links with industry is narrow. ICT has been well developed to form an integral part of teaching and learning. The

long term staffing problems that have led to protracted periods of staff absence remain unresolved, although the acting head of department and line manager have worked constructively to reduce their impact.

ECONOMICS

One Year 13 lesson was seen during the inspection. Teaching and learning were very good. Students examined the economic tests for Britain’s entry into the single European currency. Methods used enabled students to cover the topic in both breadth and depth. A clear explanation was given of each test and students were questioned to check their understanding. They then had to investigate and “report back” on different key points. Time was very well used with each “report back” shared with the whole group through well-managed discussion. The method enabled each student to be challenged and then all to gain a wider understanding through each other’s investigations. They identified the benefits of a single market, analysed the effect on different labour markets of being part of a single market and gave explanations of why economies had been affected differently by the current economic downturn. In written work seen Year 13 students wrote about how firms attempted to increase their market power and how governments attempt to control them, with higher ability students able to apply theoretical ideas well to the question.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology is offered at A and AS-level. Computer studies is taught at AS-level and will continue into A-level. Courses are popular with 58 students studying ICT courses in Year 12. A vocational course, certificated by Cisco, on computer and network engineering is offered to Year 14 students: 16 students are taking this course.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Teachers support students well, especially with their coursework.
- Students’ work is well monitored.

Areas for improvement

- Range of courses offered, especially for those students who are less likely to succeed at A level.
- Employ a wider range of teaching strategies in theory lessons to stimulate students’ learning still further.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Average
Seen during the inspection	Above average

In 2001 A-level results were in line with the national average and were amongst the best in the school. Results for previous years were also in line with the national average. A-level results in 2002 results show an increase in the proportion of A or B grades. The subject is popular, with more than 30 students being entered for A level each year.

The current sixth form are in line to achieve above average results. These students' AS-level results so far confirm this. The improvement is due to the strategies that have been put in place since 2001. Chief amongst these is the improved use of assessment data to set student targets. Also monitoring of student progress is more carefully monitored and many of the teachers are now experienced A level examiners.

A particular strength is students' coursework. Most students show good understanding of how databases can be used in specific situations. They plan their solutions thoroughly and implement them well. Their evaluations, especially by the higher attaining students, are clear and show good awareness of the benefits and difficulties when applying ICT to particular situations.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Very Good
Students' behaviour	Very Good

Achievement and Progress

How well students achieve	Good
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Most students in Year 13 had limited access to ICT before entering the sixth form. Their achievement from this base line is good. Boys and girls achieve equally well.

Students make good progress because of the good teaching they receive. This is especially marked in the effective support they receive throughout their course. Advice and guidance on their coursework is a particular strength.

Teachers have very good up-to-date subject knowledge. They use this well to develop students' learning and to respond to their questions; for example, in a Year 12 lesson on the capabilities and limitations of hardware.

Progress is well monitored. As students move through the course teachers use this information well to help individual students.

Teachers question students well in lessons; for example, in a Year 13 lesson the teacher conducted a skilful question and answer session at the end of the lesson which reinforced students' learning well.

The best lessons actively involve the students in their own learning because of the appropriate activities used by the teachers. However, in some theory lessons students are not challenged enough to find their own solutions to problems.

In some lessons, such as a Year 13 lesson on human and computer interaction, a limited range of activities are used to stimulate students' interest and learning.

Homework is set regularly and students use the very good technical systems to transfer their work from home to school and vice versa.

Students have very positive attitudes towards ICT. They listen carefully to their teachers and concentrate well. Their active involvement in the lessons is best where they are given opportunities to work together. Many use the ICT facilities well outside lessons to further develop their work.

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Good
Quality of Learning	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

219. The department is well led and managed. Teachers are well supported especially in their professional development to enhance their sixth form teaching. The team of teachers work well together. Resources are well managed and accessible to students. Technical support is very good.

220. Some students enter sixth form courses with low GCSE grades. For some of these students A-level success is unlikely but there is no provision of other courses that would give them a greater likelihood of being successful.

Cisco Course

221. This is a successful course for students in Year 14 who wish to gain a valued professional vocational qualification in computer and network engineering. The school is a leader in this field and is responsible for a number of regional academies which also offer the course. It is very well taught and supported in a purpose built room. The students value the course highly as a route to employment or higher education. Standards attained by the students are high with most reaching the required levels set by Cisco. The school as a whole has benefited from resources and equipment that have been donated by Cisco and other businesses. In addition the assessment and monitoring systems used in the course are being developed for use with the rest of the school. Currently the costs of the course are high compared to the income received. Financial viability will be improved with the expected increased provision per student from September 2003.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

A-level and AS-level courses are offered in physical education with A-level being examined for the first time in 2003. Courses are growing in popularity with most students in Year 12 planning to continue their studies into Year 13.

Physical Education

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching.
- Above national average examination results in 2001.
- Very good introduction of AS physical education and capacity for A-Level courses.

Areas for improvement

- Further development of assessment criteria to inform students of progress using examination grading.
- Further support and monitoring by senior managers and governors.

Standards (at the end of Key Stages)

Test/Examinations	Well above average
Seen during the inspection	Above average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen
AS Level results in 2001 were well above the national average with 67 per cent achieving A or B grades. Using the same national statistics the 2002 group achieve average results. Many carried over very high GCSE profiles from practical elements of their work but could not maintain the same very high standards into 6th form theoretical work.

Present Year 12 students are achieving standards above those expected nationally; they are making relevant progress towards gaining good grades in Year 13 A-Level physical education.

In practical lessons students use key skills of communication and appraisal very well to evaluate their own performance and that of other group members. Students appreciate the connection between theoretical and practical work; they have a good understanding of the acquisition of skills and how these are improved through different training practices.

Excellent learning of health-related issues in previous years aids students learning in physiological work.

Students have very good attitudes to the subject. This is transferred into research outside of lessons and into high standards of personal performance.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Very Good
Students' behaviour	Very Good

Achievement/Progress

How well pupils achieve	Very Good
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Statement about any differences in progress between pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL)

Present AS-level students are making very good progress when compared to their very high results at GCSE level; there are no differences between boys' and girls' achievements.

Recently developed learning resources, including student handbooks, are improving the problems some students have with the demands of AS-level theory.

Involvement in community sport enables the students to be assessed in their strongest areas; this policy also further develops challenges and procedures for the gifted and talented students.

Teaching is consistently very good, often excellent. Provision is greatly enhanced by teachers' subject expertise and by the effectiveness of varied teaching methods. For example, a power-point demonstration in a Year 12 lesson considerably enhanced students' understanding of skill acquisition. By the end of this lesson students had made excellent progress in connecting how performers learn skills with practice methodology. In the same lesson students used their understanding of practical work and psychological aspects of learning to further consolidate progress.

Teachers have high expectations of students using key skills key skills to aid learning. When rehearsing their practical portfolios they are expected to consider the roles of communication, working with others, describing the improvement in learning and problem solving in response to eventual external moderation. There is good use of ICT in personal folders that enhance studying techniques.

Students have very good attitudes to their learning. There is extensive evidence in their folders to show independent research and structured study methodology. Short examination-type questions given to students are useful in relating study to exam requirements.

Assessment procedures are good enabling teachers to perceptively track the progress being made by all students and refine teaching and the curriculum where necessary. Criteria for assessments have been successfully developed in conjunction with the new programmes of study. This also ensures relevant and constructive marking is used to guide the students towards relevant targets.

The department is aware of the need to develop these procedures further so that assessments more strongly relate to actual examination comparisons.

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Very good
Quality of Learning	Very good
Quality of the curriculum	Very good

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Very good
Quality of assessment and progress monitoring	Very good

Leadership ensures clear educational direction	Very good
Effectiveness of action to improve the subject's quality	Very good
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Good

Improvement since the last inspection	N/A
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222. There has been a very successful introduction of AS-level physical education into the department profile. The department is aware of the problems of converting A* and A grades at GCSE consistently into equivalent sixth form standards. However, because of the procedures in place to evaluate the quality of its work and the strong collective will to succeed, these issues are being successfully tackled. Recent staff development has importantly enabled the department to acquire the relevant expertise to extend present provision into a full A-level course for students. The majority of Year 12 students are keen to continue their education into Year 13. Further support and monitoring by senior managers and governors will help the next stages in direction. They need to be more involved in identifying appropriate priorities and targets and rigorously monitoring their outcomes.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Theatre studies and art are offered at A-level and AS-level. The main focus of the inspection was on theatre studies but one lesson was observed in art.

THEATRE STUDIES

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

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The subject is very well led and managed. Very good assessment and its use enable students to reach their potential. Students are enthusiastic and committed to their work. <p>Areas for improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timetabling arrangements prevent Year 12 students from being taught in the same group for all their lessons. Accommodation and resources are poor; the hall is frequently in use for other purposes and is used as a thoroughfare by other staff and students.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Average
Seen during the inspection	Average

In 2001 and 2002 A-level results in the subject were in line with the national average. Although this is lower than at the time of the previous inspection, the nature of students who choose the subject has changed in the intervening time and not all have taken drama at GCSE level. Consequently, there is a wide range of ability in both Year 12 and Year 13 and results vary across a wide spectrum, with students generally attaining higher grades for their practical work rather than their written work. Inspection evidence indicates that standards of attainment at the end of Year 13 are currently above average. Particular strengths lie in students' enthusiasm for the practical skills involved and the conscientious effort they make in their written coursework. Over 50 per cent of students continue from AS level to A level and many of the more academic students are those who do not continue the course, because of their commitment to other A-level subjects.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Pupils' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and progress

How well pupils achieve	Good
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Students make good progress throughout the course, in performance skills, improvisation, understanding of some major practitioners of twentieth-century theatre and in their written records and evaluation of their own work. Although there are more girls than boys in the classes, there is generally little difference in the standard of achievement and students are co-operative and helpful to each other. Higher attaining pupils are extended to the full by the nature of the tasks set for them. The major reason for students' good achievement is the very good quality of the teaching they receive. The drama teacher provides students with an excellent role model in practical skills. He is dedicated to promoting all students to the height of their potential and does so by a high degree of encouragement, advice and help. Above all, he ensures that students acquire the ability to think for themselves and explore what they are trying to achieve with an evaluative approach and sensible self-criticism. This was seen clearly in a Year 13 lesson on the Brechtian style of acting, based on extracts from the text of *The Measures Taken*, in which students were led to discover ideas for themselves through skilful teaching and time was used to best possible advantage to help students' understanding grow rapidly. The relationships between teacher and students are excellent and promote committed and enthusiastic learning. Although the accommodation and resources for the subject are poor, the leadership and management of the department are very good. Curriculum, programmes of work and day-to-day lesson planning are of a high quality. The assessment made of students' work is also very good. It is very detailed, constructive and invaluable in the way it enables teaching to meet the individual needs of every student. Self-assessment is also very well used. The enthusiasm and commitment of students is most impressive. They are prepared to work very hard and with full concentration at all times, even when they do not find the work easy. Their level of effort is rewarded by the pleasure they take in achieving major and minor goals.

Educational provision

Quality of Teaching	Very good
Quality of Learning	Very good
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Very good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Very good

Leadership and management

Leadership and Management	Very good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Very good
Adequacy of resources	Unsatisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Poor
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

223. The department is led by a very good co-ordinator, who is whole-heartedly dedicated and committed to raising and maintaining standards at as high a level as possible. His leadership is inspirational to the students, his organisation strong and his use of continuous assessment of a

constructive nature is invaluable to the achievement made by his students. The opportunities he offers students both in lessons and outside them, not only equip them with good dramatic skills, but also build their self-esteem, strengthen their self-confidence and enable them to present themselves with assurance and understanding of others.

224. However, resources in the form of lighting, sound equipment and opportunities to build ICT skills into their work hinder students in the technical areas of their progress in theatre skills. Above all, the accommodation is poor, since it is a school hall used for many other purposes and frequently inaccessible for theatre studies and it is used as a convenient passageway for other members of the school, creating much distraction during lessons. There has been little improvement in this area since the previous inspection and conditions make it hard to teach and help students to learn successfully, although the co-ordinator, by determination, manages to do so.

Art

225. In the 2002 A-level examination, all ten students passed but a lower than average proportion gained A or B grades. The one AS-level student in 2002 gained an A grade. Students make satisfactory progress. Their sketch books show a good level of painting and drawing. These skills are used well to develop their ideas from primary and secondary source materials including the work of other artists. In the one lesson observed in Year 12, which was focused on the work of Andy Warhol, the quality of teaching was satisfactory. The teacher worked effectively to support students' individual work.

HUMANITIES

A-level and AS-level courses are offered in history, geography, psychology, sociology, general studies and an AS-level course in law will be examined for the first time in 2003. The focus of the inspection was on history, geography and psychology. A small sample of lessons was also seen in the other subjects.

History

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

Strengths

- Students' attitudes to learning are very good.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge well to explain work and to question students effectively.
- The quality of the department's resource booklets is high.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results and students' achievement.
- The range of teaching and learning strategies.
- Marking helps students to improve but does not always clearly indicate what students need to do to reach higher standards.
- Improvement planning.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Below average
Seen during the inspection	Average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen

In 2001, the A-level results were below the national average. They improved slightly in 2002. Over the last few years, results have fluctuated between below average and high in comparison with national averages. During this same period, boys' results have been better than girls' results and students have generally performed better in history than in their other A-level subjects. However, overall, these students did not do as well as might be expected from their starting points on entry to the sixth form. Other than in 2000, the proportion of students obtaining the higher A-B grades has been lower than found in most schools. Around half the students who sat the AS-level examination in 2002 failed to obtain a pass grade, although some of these students have since retaken the examination with more success. There was no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Students currently studying history in the sixth form are reaching average standards. Evidence from the work seen and assessment information indicates that there is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Most use their knowledge and understanding well in their essays, which are well prepared and written to a good length. Higher attainers in particular are gaining a broad understanding of factors contributing over time to events such as the American Revolution. Essays in Year 12 are well planned drawing on good strategies for organising information and ideas. Although some students use computers to write their essays, few make use of the opportunities they present for research, and there is relatively little evidence of students preparing for and participating in activities such as debates and presentations.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Students' behaviour	Excellent

Achievement and Progress

How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory
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Students make satisfactory progress overall. Knowledge and understanding are developed steadily, making effective use of the high quality booklets written by the teachers that form the major resource for each unit of work. In addition, students' skills in essay preparation and construction are well provided for in regular well-focused assignments.

In the lessons seen and in an analysis of a sample of their written work, boys and girls achieve equally and in Year 13, higher attainers are coping well with the synoptic approach which is required at this level. However, opportunities for students to work independently are relatively limited.

The time provided for teaching the subject is less than that recommended. This, together with the fact that a significant number of students currently in Year 13 had relatively modest starting points in terms of their prior attainment on entering the sixth form and some have chosen to attempt to improve their AS-level grade rather than take the A2-level examination, has resulted in teachers adopting a rather directed approach to learning.

The teachers use their subject knowledge effectively in their explanations, to question students about their work and to develop skills in writing essays, which are well matched to the demands of the subject specification. This approach also characterises the learning in Year 12 where more students have obtained higher average grades in their GCSE examinations. Consequently, although knowledge and understanding develop well, students have relatively limited experience of other learning strategies that prepare them for the demands of higher education.

Students' work is marked regularly, and the teachers' written comments are generally helpful. However, the marking does not always provide sufficiently precise indication of how the student can reach the higher attainment levels of the marking scheme.

Relationships are good. Students enjoy history and feel well supported by their teachers. Most students feel that they are helped to improve their performance and have a clear idea of their initial target grades and, and in some cases, subsequent modifications made in response to their performance as they progress through the course.

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Satisfactory
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Quality of Learning	Satisfactory
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment and progress monitoring	Satisfactory

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Satisfactory
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Satisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Unsatisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

226. There is a good range of history textbooks in the school library and students appreciate this although they do not make much use of the historical journals which are provided. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. No significant issues were raised at the time and examination results still fluctuate. Improvement planning, while having some good features, for example the creation of a subject website, does not focus closely enough on raising standards and improving students' achievement. It also lacks sufficiently precise means of monitoring progress towards the targets set.

Geography

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in examination results in 2002. • Teachers' knowledge and understanding.
Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the accommodation. • The setting of targets to extend all students.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Average
Seen during the inspection	Above average
<p>Results at both A/S and A2 examination were close to provisional national averages in 2002. This represents considerable improvement over results in 2001. 18 students took the A-level examination in 2002. All the students passed and 44 per cent gained A or B grades.</p> <p>Standards had been falling from a peak in 1999 to be well below expectations in 2001. Evidence from the inspection shows that standards have been maintained at the 2002 level. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students use their knowledge of the physical processes in cold mountainous climates to analyse the human impact on this environment.</p> <p>Boys answer questions more confidently than girls.</p> <p>Recruitment to sixth form courses has improved in recent years. Most students who start courses in Year 12 continue their studies into Year 13.</p>	

Students' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Students' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and Progress

How well pupils achieve	Satisfactory
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Lessons are planned thoroughly and this enables learning to take place at an appropriate pace. Teachers have very good subject knowledge as seen in a Year 13 lesson about the characteristics of environments with wet and dry seasons. Teachers' understanding of examination requirements is good, which means that pupils are well-briefed on how to prepare effectively. Students' performance is tracked well. Targets are shared with students and this motivates them to improve the quality of their work. Targets, however, are based on Year 7 data as well as GCSE results. By not using the most recent data, many targets are lower than they should be and therefore students are not always stretched enough. Teaching in lessons seen was good as students were involved well in the learning process. However, some students prefer to be given information rather than being asked to think for themselves. Most students have a very positive attitude to the subject, they listen well when their teacher, or other students, present a theory, and make positive contributions to discussion in lessons; they keep up a good pace of working during lessons.

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Good
Quality of Learning	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Satisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Unsatisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

227. The subject head has worked hard over the years to raise standards. As a result there have been improvements to standards of attainment since the last inspection. There has been no change to the accommodation since the last inspection and geography classrooms remain dispersed which results in teachers having to carry resources to lessons. A limited number of ICT facilities are available to students in the school library, but these have to be booked well in advance. Fieldwork makes a positive contribution to the curriculum.

PSYCHOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The popularity of the courses.
- Aspects of teaching and learning, especially in Year 13.

Areas for improvement

- Raise standards in both AS-level and A-level courses.
- Improve teaching, curriculum and assessment procedures to tackle issues of underachievement.
- Develop self-evaluation procedures further and set appropriate improvement targets for the subject.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Well below average
Seen during the inspection	Well below average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen
 2001 A-level results were well below the national averages. The 2002 A-level results were also well below the provisional national averages. Boys achieved significantly higher results in 2002.

In 2001 the AS-level results were very low in comparison with the national average; they are at a similar level in 2002.

A large percentage of Year 12 students do not continue their studies onto the Year 13 A-level course. Because of the drop-out rate, a higher proportion of Year 13 students make satisfactory progress compared to progress made by students in Year 12, although there is still evidence of underachievement. Some students' 2002 A-level results compare well to their results in other subjects.

Psychology was not reported in the last inspection. However, recent results at A-level are lower than those in the years prior to 2001.

Psychology is a popular choice for students and the present cohorts are large when compared to other subjects. The school policy is to accept into the sixth form all those interested in following a psychology course. Many of these have very low entry profiles when using previous GCSE results as an indicator. A high percentage of these do not achieve a pass at AS-level when predicted to do so; this is unsatisfactory.

Present standards in Years 12 and 13 are well below average. The small number meeting or exceeding teacher expectations take good lesson notes and independently develop supportive texts to aid their studies. Most students enthusiastically discuss areas of study in lessons but their ability to draw on theoretical perspectives to support their ideas is under-developed. In lessons and scrutinised work there are weaknesses in understanding research methodology and quantitative and qualitative findings from research to further aid study and revision.

Teachers are beginning to have a more informed view of expected exam grades. But present faculty structures are insufficiently rigorous in identifying ongoing signs of underachievement or signs of gifted or unexpected potential.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Good
Pupils' behaviour	Good

Achievement and progress

How well pupils achieve	Unsatisfactory
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Statements explaining why pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL) achieve as they do.

Overall, achievement in psychology is unsatisfactory. Many students have very low GCSE profiles on entry to the sixth form and receive unclassified grades at the end of 2001 and 2002 AS and A-level programmes.

A significant number of others with better entry profiles are predicted and achieve the lowest grades in

these exams and could achieve more with appropriate challenge and monitoring of their performance. There are insufficient procedures in place to identify and target those with previously high levels of success at younger ages to aim for the top grades in AS and A-level courses. Additional revision classes provided for students are a useful strategy to improve examination techniques. Student folders reflect a lack of short exam-type questions and answers that would further benefit revision procedures.

Good teaching was seen resulting in good learning during the introduction to a Year 13 lesson about the study of gender bias in psychological research.

Teaching that does not recognise the diverse abilities and learning needs in other lessons is less successful because tasks and further challenges are not designed with individual and group targets in mind. A Year 13 class studying behavioural approaches to psychology consisted of students whose grades at AS-level ranged from unclassified to A; the structure of the lessons and tasks given were inappropriate.

The students' have positive attitudes to psychology and appreciate the support they are given by teachers. They are attentive in class and listen well, for example in a Year 12 lesson studying ethical issues.

A successful Year 12 lesson requires students to work in groups to design an experimental framework. They make good progress in deciding relevant research issues as well as considering ethical issues and research design.

In another lesson students spend too much time working from texts to compensate for the present practice of combining A-level students and those withdrawn from the course to resit AS-level examinations in the same group. This poor practice significantly reduces the impact of teaching and potential for learning.

Other curriculum arrangements make learning more inefficient and impacts on standards. Timetabling arrangements result in students changing teachers and losing continuity in their learning. Newly introduced arrangements mean that students who are re-sitting AS-level examinations sometimes are required to study in the library with no direct teaching assistance.

Relationships with the students are good and in some lessons this results in a productive and relaxed learning atmospheres. The amount of independent study and research undertaken as a result of studies introduced in lessons is less than required for students to achieve higher grades.

Further challenges are needed for students to develop key skills and knowledge and further understanding of psychological theory and its application in clinical and investigative terms. The use of ICT in research is considerably under-developed. Productivity in students' folders is also an issue. There is a lack of balanced and detailed study of research using primary and secondary sources. Students lack the necessary skills to confidently apply theory to contemporary issues in every day life. Review sessions at the ends of lessons observed did not pick-up on some fundamental lack of understanding or set homework or additional study in an attempt to redress these issues.

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Unsatisfactory
Quality of Learning	Unsatisfactory
Quality of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Unsatisfactory

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Unsatisfactory
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Unsatisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory

Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	N/A

228. Long-term staff absences in the business education faculty have made it more difficult for the school to tackle the problems of underachievement and the poor results since the introduction of the AS-level course. However, even when key staff are present the school has too low expectations for students to produce higher quality work. There is some evidence to suggest an understanding by senior management of some of the key issues in the future development of psychology. A new staff appointment has redressed some issues but recent improvement plans to rectify others have lacked rigour and monitoring and reviewing procedures have not been fully completed. Newly revised programmes of study have improved teachers' awareness of examination requirements but the curriculum still does not fully meet students' learning needs. Many students still lack crucial key skills of being able to cross-reference the areas of learning in all modules studied. New assessment procedures allow teachers to set predicted grades but the lack of systematic tracking and targeting of individual progress reduces the chances for students to add good value to their predicted grades.

GENERAL STUDIES

Overall, the quality of provision for general studies is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The commitment of many students to preparing well for the examination with limited support.
Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need to prepare students more thoroughly over two years for the A-level examination. A reduction in the number of students not achieving an A-level grade. The need to plan and teach a more coherent curriculum to cover the syllabus requirements. To provide a more participatory style of learning than was seen during the inspection.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Below average
Seen during the inspection	Average

<p><i>Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen</i></p> <p>Standards in the AS-level and the A-level examination have been below average compared with schools nationally in recent years, (1999 to 2002). They have been below the average grades gained in other A2 subjects within the school also. In the most recent examination, in 2002, there was a very wide spread of attainment. Sixteen of the 94 entrants gained the highest possible grades, A and B, but 27 students failed to gain a graded pass (some of these students were awarded an AS-level grade on the basis of the results). The results in this latest examination were an improvement overall on the performance in 2001 when measured by the students' average points score.</p> <p>In 2001 results were well below the national average.</p> <p>In the lessons seen students were mainly listeners to teachers who see the students for only three consecutive weeks to pursue aspects of a broad topic. Only in one group seen did students discuss issues related to a theme for the course; in another they attempted a translation from French, using clues provided. The regular change of teachers does not encourage the undertaking of longer creative projects or research to develop wider understanding of topics.</p> <p>The most successful students are those with an existing breadth of general knowledge and those who are already experiencing success in other AS/A-level courses.</p> <p>There is no teaching for students in Year 12. These students are trusted to undertake a series of self-help exercises in their own time. Their work is checked by the subject co-ordinator.</p>
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Pupils' attitudes to the subject	Satisfactory
Pupils' behaviour	Good

Achievement and Progress

How well pupils achieve	Unsatisfactory
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Statements explaining why pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL) achieve as they do.

The main concern is about students who do not complete the course satisfactorily. For some students there is inadequate guidance and teacher support, particularly in Year 12, to help them to prepare adequately for a challenging course. The pressure to complete the AS-level course in one term using one lesson per week in Year 13 with five different teachers is difficult for most students. The completion of the A-level course in the following term together with the students' main A-level subject courses is also burdensome for most students.

The response of students is variable. Some approach the A-level course positively; for example, those with some facility in French or Spanish and those with a strong pattern of success in a range of GCSE subjects cope well with the situation. In other lessons such as one on literature and another on politics, students had negative attitudes to the subject and made limited contributions.

Many of the students are very conscientious in completing the unsupervised units of work, which are set and monitored by the course director.

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Unsatisfactory
Quality of Learning	Unsatisfactory
Quality of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Satisfactory
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Satisfactory

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Oversight and administration by the course director is satisfactory.
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Unsatisfactory
Adequacy of resources	Satisfactory
Adequacy of accommodation	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	No information in last inspection report.

229. The general studies course is a valuable one which is intended to broaden students' education. Although some students do very well in the examination, largely by using their existing skills and background knowledge, the overall value is lost because insufficient time is allocated to teaching the course.. There is a need to provide a more stable pattern of teaching to cover the two-year course.

Sociology

230. One lesson was seen during the inspection. Teaching was satisfactory. Clear explanations of key points were given but the lesson contained too much "teacher talk", with students neither engaged in discussion nor guided sufficiently in note taking during explanations. Resources were well used with a question booklet provided for a homework task, to guide the reading of sections from a textbook. A note taking activity using the textbook occupied about a third of the lesson but opportunities were not taken to check students' understanding of notes taken through

discussion. Learning overall was satisfactory with students understanding some of the key factors in research conducted into differences in educational attainment. Students played a passive role in the lesson rather than being actively engaged by, for example, investigating the meaning of key concepts and then joining in discussion.

231. Work seen was below average. Students use appropriate terminology and refer to relevant research findings in writing about family structures and industrialisation but without strongly making the link between the two. Literacy skills are weak, especially in adopting an appropriate “academic” style when investigating social change, for example changes in divorce rates.

Law

232. Law is an imaginative addition to the curriculum, which is being examined for the first year at AS-level in 2003. The course is taught by way of a one-hour session per week over a video-conferencing link. Students work on assignments in three other timetabled slots under the supervision of a teacher at the school. The course materials are clearly written and this enables students to learn effectively. They are able to resolve any problems by contacting the teacher, usually using email. Standards of work seen in a selection of assignments were broadly average. It is a good strategy for the school to identify a teacher within the school to supervise students’ progress. Students would benefit more from this arrangement if the teacher enlivened lessons and helped reinforce students’ learning by, for example, organising discussions or other activities.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English, French and Spanish are offered at A-level and AS-level. The focus of the inspection was on English and French but one lesson was observed in Spanish.

English Literature

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

Strengths

- Very good quality of teaching and learning, particularly in Year 13.
- Very positive and mature attitudes to learning by the students.
- The units studied make a strong contribution to the students’ continuing spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- Create opportunities for younger teachers to share good teaching practice by observing more experienced colleagues.
- Consideration of ways to broaden the range of sixth form courses offered in English.

Standards

Tests and Examinations	Average
Seen during the inspection	Above average

Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen

Examination results at A2 level were in line with nationally expected levels in 2002 despite the absence through illness of one of the key teachers in that year. As a result of this absence some students attained lower marks than might have been expected in the Victorian novelists unit of the examination. Three students who chose to be re-examined in this unit in January 2003 improved their final grades to an A and two B grades.

The average points scores of students in English literature have been significantly above the school average in recent years.

Both the students entered for AS level in 2002 passed the examination; neither gained an A or B grade.

The quality of group discussion and the completed essays of students in the current Year 13 indicate that standards are above average overall.

In lessons students show a strong detailed understanding of the main themes and social attitudes emerging from the Dickens, Hardy and Gaskell novels read.

Essays on aspects of Chaucer, Shakespeare and the Victorian novelists show increasing maturity of thought and stronger selection of evidence to support arguments as the course progresses.

Students' attitudes to the subject	Very good
Students' behaviour	Very good

Achievement and progress

How well pupils achieve	Good
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Statements explaining why pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL) achieve as they do.

All students have chosen the course because they have been successful in GCSE English courses and in most cases have enjoyed the subject.

The main reason that students achieve well is because the teaching they receive is of a very good standard. This helps to maintain their enthusiasm for the course as well as promoting their learning. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on King Lear, the teacher led the analysis of the play very well while drawing well-considered responses from the students.

Teachers are very knowledgeable about the subject and skilled in encouraging students to think. In another Year 13 lesson about the Victorian novel, the quality of teaching was excellent because the teacher challenges the students to consider in depth the passages studied to extract important messages about structure, language and communication.

The quality of the students' essays in response to the texts studied improves markedly through the course. The very good relationships between students and teachers are also a contributory factor to helping students' learn well.

Very few students drop out of the course after the initial settling in period.

All students entered for A-level have achieved pass grades in recent years; in most cases these are in line with the predicted grades.

There is no marked difference in achievement between boys and girls; progress in analysing, understanding, and appreciating literature is very much a matter of individual development.

Students with SEN benefit from discreet help to assist them to make appropriate progress.

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Very good
Quality of Learning	Very good
Quality of the curriculum	Good
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Very good
Quality of assessment & progress monitoring	Good

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

233. The English literature provision is organised and led well by the head of department who, at the moment, teaches exclusively in the sixth form. Good support has been provided to compensate for any loss of impetus for students affected by long term teacher absence in the last two school years. The department is concerned to lift students' performance at A-level to a position above the national average as it was in 2000 and at the time of the last inspection. It would be helpful to teachers relatively new to AS-level and A-level teaching to observe some of the very high quality teaching of the experienced teachers. The students and the school might benefit also from having available other types of English courses to broaden their choice.

French

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

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of teaching. • Students' attitudes and behaviour. <p>Areas for improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suitability of the accommodation. • Greater breadth and balance in the sixth form languages curriculum.

Standards

Examinations	Above average
Seen during the inspection	Above average
<p><i>Commentary including explanations for any differences between exam/test results and standards seen</i></p> <p>Standards in examinations and those seen during the inspection in Year 13 were above average, although only small numbers of students have taken examinations in recent years. There were no AS-level results in 2002.</p> <p>Standards seen in Year 12 are average. Students in Year 12 are making a successful transition from GCSE to the demands of sixth form language learning. They are beginning to react instinctively in discussion in the language even if much of their spoken language is not yet extended.</p> <p>The one student in Year 13 has developed a range of vocabulary and a pleasing fluency, which enable her to respond spontaneously in discussion. Students in both years demonstrate a good standard in reading and listening. Standards of writing in Year 12 show a developing style and good use of a range of vocabulary and structures. Writing standards seen in the work of the Year 13 student are very good, being accurate and fluent with a range of good vocabulary and idiom and a mature style.</p> <p>Students approach their work with commitment and concentration and their positive approach towards using the language for discussion and communication contribute to the progress they make. Students are developing self-confidence and discussion skills through their study of French.</p>	
Students' attitudes to the subject	Excellent
Students' behaviour	Excellent
Development of personal and learning skills	Good

Achievement/Progress

	Year 11 – Year 13
How well pupils achieve	Good
<p><i>Statement about any differences in progress between pupils (girls/boys, SEN, most able, EAL)</i></p> <p>Achievement in Year 13 is very good. The one student has made significant progress during her sixth form course. She is now able to engage in discussions on a range of topical issues, demanding specialist vocabulary and to write to a high standard.</p> <p>Achievement in Year 12 is good. Students have increased their use of French for real communication and are beginning to make use of the language to discuss topics based in French culture, politics and social affairs. Their comfort with spoken language is having a positive effect on their writing, which is developing in accuracy and style.</p> <p>The quality of teaching is very good and leads to the good standards and achievement seen. Teachers are high quality linguists and provide their students with very good role-models.</p> <p>Lessons are well planned with imaginative and challenging resources, many of them drawn from the French media. The learning atmosphere is based almost entirely on the use of French and has a high degree of challenge. Issues of grammar and vocabulary are examined as they emerge from the discussion topics; for example in a Year 13 lesson on immigration.</p> <p>The sixth form curriculum in modern foreign languages lacks breadth and balance and the provision needed to develop gifted linguists. The structure of the pre-16 curriculum dictates that no student reaches the sixth form equipped to study more than one language. This reduces the number of students, particularly in Year 13.</p>	

Educational Provision

Quality of Teaching	Very good
Quality of Learning	Good
Quality of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision	Good
Quality of assessment and progress monitoring	Good

Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Good
Effectiveness of action to improve the subject's quality	Good
Adequacy of resources	Very Good
Adequacy of accommodation	Unsatisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

234. Leadership and management of sixth form French are good. The provision of teaching and learning resources is good. Assessment procedures enable teachers and students to monitor progress. The accommodation is not a good learning environment. Some of the teaching takes place in large rooms that are not ideal for the sixth form study. They also have poor sound characteristics owing to the lack of carpeting; this is an obstacle to the development of good speaking and listening skills.

Spanish

235. All of the five candidates entered for A-level in 2002 passed the examination and three of the five gained A or B grades; this represents an above average performance. In the single Year 12 Spanish lesson observed, standards shown by the students were good. The teacher provided them with a very good role-model of the language and they respond spontaneously. All students are capable of extended sentences in discussion. Good teaching and their own very good attitudes enable them to use Spanish naturally in dealing with challenging concepts.