

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST MARGARET'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND
HIGH SCHOOL**

Liverpool

LEA area: Liverpool

Unique reference number: 104720

Headmaster: Dr D F Dennison

Reporting inspector: Mr D Cox
10297

Dates of inspection: 24th – 26th March 2003

Inspection number: 249656

Short 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:	11 – 16, male Sixth form, mixed
School address:	Aigburth Road Liverpool
Postcode:	L17 6AB
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Revd J Anders
Date of previous inspection:	28 th April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
10297	D Cox	Registered inspector	Design and technology	What sort of school is it? The school's results and students' achievement. How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9086	R Watkins	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with its parents?
22411	A Axon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
19596	B Treacy	Team inspector	English	
4145	C Harrison	Team inspector	Chemistry Biology	
11933	D Driscoll	Team inspector	Physics	How good are the curricular opportunities?
15462	C Blakemore	Team inspector	Geography Business studies	
21975	A King	Team inspector	French	
15208	A Briggs	Team inspector	Computer studies	
30072	J Skivington	Team inspector	Psychology	
15320	A Penn	Team inspector	Art and design	
22590	B Castle	Team inspector	Sports studies/ Physical education	

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Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Margaret's Church of England High School is an average sized comprehensive school in Liverpool, educating students between the ages of 11 and 18. The school serves many of the neighbouring authorities. Students come from an extensive area which covers at least 23 postal districts in Liverpool, some of which are areas of considerable deprivation. The school educates boys between the ages of 11 and 16, and is co-educational in the sixth form. St Margaret's is a Voluntary Aided school with a strong Christian ethos; the school is also a specialist Technology College.

There are 992 students on roll, which is significantly higher than when the school was last inspected. There are 220 students in the sixth form which is again much higher than previously. The school is very popular with parents and is well over-subscribed. Few students are from ethnic minority backgrounds and only one comes from a home where English is not the mother tongue. There are no students at an early stage of language acquisition.

The overall socio-economic circumstance of the students is average. The attainment of students on entry varies; for example, students in the current Year 11 entered the school with average levels of attainment whilst students in the current Year 7 entered with well above average levels of attainment. The attainment of students on entry is generally above average. Students enter the sixth form with broadly average levels of attainment. There are 99 students on the special educational needs register; this is 12.2 per cent of the 11 to 16 school population, which is below the national average. There are 2.5 per cent of students with statements of special educational need, which is average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school with a good sixth form; the school is continuing to improve under the excellent leadership of the headmaster. Students achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 and, therefore, achieve very well overall; students leave with well above average standards. Teaching is consistently good. Students now leave St. Margaret's with much better results than would normally be expected given their attainment on entry. Students in the sixth form do better than expected and leave with results that are above average. Overall, the school is providing very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Provision for spiritual, moral and social development is very good; it is highly valued by students and parents.
- A strength of the school is the regularity with which students experience teaching of good quality and this brings about very good achievement between Years 7 to 11.
- The school provides an exceptional range of extra activities to improve students' achievement and raise their aspirations.
- The school makes very good provision for students with special educational needs and these students make very good progress.
- The headmaster provides outstanding leadership and, as a result, excellent progress has been made since the previous inspection.
- The school cares for the students as individuals – form tutors know their students well and support their academic and personal development.

What could be improved

- Students' achievement is unsatisfactory in physics in the sixth form as a result of unsatisfactory teaching.
- Whole-school strategies for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are not taught consistently within all subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made excellent progress since it was last inspected in April 1997. GCSE results have shot up and are continuing to improve and students are now achieving very well. The quality of teaching has improved. The excellent leadership provided by the headmaster has brought about many improvements in the school's systems. The sixth form has made very good progress; standards and results have improved significantly. The school has addressed the key issues from the previous report well.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	C	*	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

**There are no national figures available at the time of writing.*

By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average and students achieve well given their attainment on entry to the school. Standards in English, mathematics and science are well above average. Results in the 2002 national tests for 14 year olds were well above average in comparison with all schools, and with similar schools in English, mathematics and science. The trend in the school's results is above the national trend.

By the end of Year 11, standards are well above average. Since starting their courses in Year 10, students in the current Year 11 have achieved well. Standards in English, mathematics and science are well above average. Results in the 2002 GCSE examinations were well above average compared to all schools and to similar schools. The trend in the school's results is above the national trend. The school sets challenging targets and has met or exceeded its GCSE targets every year since the previous inspection.

The achievement of gifted and talented students is very good, as is the achievement of students with special educational needs.

Standards are above average in the sixth form and students achieve well. Results at AS-level and A-level were average in 2001; however, compared to the national average for AS/A-level/AVCE, results were above average. There are no national figures available for 2002 as yet, but, if anything, results appear to have improved. In 2001, overall there was no significant difference in the results attained by male and female students.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students' attitudes are very good in Years 7 to 11. They are keen to do well and enjoy going to school.
Behaviour, in and out of	Behaviour is very good. There is a clear moral code that fosters a sense of

classrooms	community where everybody acts responsibly together.
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Personal development and relationships	Students' personal development and their relationships with one another are very good.
Attendance	Attendance is well above average.

Sixth form students show good, responsible attitudes to learning although they are not always punctual to lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is good in all years. It is the consistency of the good teaching that students receive that ensures teaching provision is very good overall. This enables students to achieve very well over time. Teaching is good in English, mathematics and science.

A significant strength of the teaching is the sheer volume of work that students are expected to do in lessons, and also outside of normal lesson times. Teachers set exceptionally demanding targets for students and the students respond by throwing themselves into the work. Teachers have very good strategies to manage the behaviour of students and consequently relationships between staff and students are very good. However, the part that teachers play in developing students' skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT is inconsistent.

Teaching is good in the sixth form. Many characteristics found in the teaching in the main school are also evident in the sixth form, although the marking of students' written work is inconsistent. Students respond to the good teaching by working hard. Too much teaching is of a lecturing style which does not prepare students for later life in terms of equipping them with the skills of debate, enquiry and research. Teaching is unsatisfactory in physics and, as a result, the achievement of students is unsatisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a very good curriculum for its students. It meets the needs of the students very well. There is outstanding extra-curricular provision. There is a good choice of courses for sixth form students.
Provision for students with special educational needs	The school makes very good provision for students with special educational needs and these students make very good progress.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	No special provision is made by the school, although the curriculum meets the needs of students for whom English is not their mother tongue very well overall.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for spiritual, moral and social development is very good; it is highly valued by students and parents. Provision for cultural development is good.

How well the school cares for its students	The school cares for the students as individuals – form tutors know their students well and support their academic and personal development.
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The school's designation as a specialist Technology College has brought significant improvements from which students are benefiting, not least the provision of new accommodation for technology. The way that the school has developed courses in the sixth form to meet the needs of all students is good and ensures a very high degree of equality for students. The school has very good links with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headmaster and other key staff	The headmaster provides outstanding leadership and as a result excellent progress has been made since the previous inspection. He is well supported by a very good senior management team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors support the headmaster well. They have a good understanding of the school's work.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Very good procedures for identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching have meant that the school has been able to improve the education it provides.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Excellent use has been made of funds from gaining specialist Technology College status and the Excellence in Cities initiative. The principles of best value are applied exceedingly well.

The school has a very good match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum. There are enough resources. The school has enough accommodation, but there are many mobile classrooms and the school spends considerable funds to prevent being vandalised by outsiders. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The good standard of teaching. • The good results that students achieve. • The good care that students receive. • The way the school is managed. • The extra-curricular activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are not always kept well informed about progress.

Inspectors agree with all the positive comments made by parents. However, inspectors disagree with parents and found that the systems and procedures for informing parents about their children's progress are good and that parents are kept well informed.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

St. Margaret's Church of England High School

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than that found in most other schools. There are currently 62 female and 158 male students in the sixth form. The students come from a very wide range of backgrounds that are similar to those of the main school. Overall standards of attainment on entry to the sixth form are average. The school provides a wide range of AS-level and A-level courses and one vocational course.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides a good standard of education for students and its cost effectiveness is good. The quality of teaching is good and leads to students achieving well and attaining better results than would normally be expected, given their standards on entry to the sixth form. The sixth form meets the needs of the students well. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.

Strengths

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive.
- Sixth form students have good attitudes to learning. They show a well-developed sense of responsibility both to their work and towards the needs of others.
- Students achieve very well in French, art and design and biology because of the very good teaching they receive.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good and there has been a significant rise in standards since the previous inspection.

What could be improved

- Students' achievement is unsatisfactory in physics as a result of unsatisfactory teaching.
- The marking of students' work by teachers is inconsistent.
- Students are not always punctual to lessons.
- Students are not provided with enough opportunities in lessons to prepare them for later life in terms of equipping them with the skills of debate, enquiry and research.

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	Satisfactory: Standards are above average. Teaching is satisfactory and students do as well as expected.
Biology	Very good: Standards are above average. Teaching is very good and students do much better than expected.
Chemistry	Satisfactory: Standards are average. Teaching is satisfactory and students do as well as expected.
Physics	Unsatisfactory: Standards are below average. Teaching is unsatisfactory and students do not do as well as expected.

Design and technology	Good: Standards are average. Teaching is good and students do better than expected.
Business studies	Good: Standards are average. Teaching is good and students do better than expected.
Computer studies	Satisfactory: Standards are below average. Teaching is satisfactory and students do as well as expected.
Sports studies/Physical education	Good: Standards are above average. Teaching is good and students do better than expected.
Art and design	Very good: Standards are well above average. Teaching is very good and students do much better than expected.
Geography	Satisfactory: Standards are average. Teaching is satisfactory and students do as well as expected.
Psychology	Satisfactory: Standards are average. Teaching is satisfactory and students do as well as expected.
English literature	Good: Standards are above average. Teaching is good and students do better than expected.
French	Very good: Standards are well above average. Teaching is very good and students do much better than expected.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Support and guidance are very strong for sixth formers. The Christian beliefs of the school are clearly reflected in the way teachers care for every aspect of students' well-being. As well as all the very good day-to-day support, there are very effective systems for longer-term educational guidance.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The academic and pastoral systems have been combined to provide a very clear picture of a student's progress so that teaching can be targeted at specific weaknesses. Results are analysed very well and the sixth form uses the same systems as the main school for ensuring the quality of teaching. As a result standards have improved significantly. The wide range of courses ensures excellent equality of opportunity.

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"> Students are very happy with the way that the choice of courses matches their needs and aspirations. Students value the way teachers are always willing to give them any extra help they need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are unhappy with the marking of their work. A sizeable minority of students do not feel well advised about their future options.

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by students and that the marking of students' work is inconsistent. A sizeable minority of students not feeling well advised about their future options probably relates more to the timing of the questionnaire in relation to the cycle of careers and other guidance, than to any true failure to meet individual needs; during the inspection students spoke very favourably of the advice and help they had received about their future options.

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

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Provision for spiritual, moral and social development is very good; it is highly valued by students and parents.

1. The school offers a wide range of activities that enhance students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Students are actively encouraged to maximise their intellectual achievement and develop their talents in all areas of their work within a culture that celebrates prayer as an integral part of school life. The school chaplain is responsible for worship and assemblies and makes a very good contribution to the spiritual life of students who in turn value his role very highly. Each term begins by celebrating the Eucharist for the whole school. Festivals are also marked with a Eucharist or special service. Students attend either a form or full assembly at the beginning of each school day.
2. The school's strengths lie in its commitment in providing a clear moral code and in fostering a sense of community where everybody acts responsibly together. In assemblies there is a strong focus on spirituality and students are given opportunities to reflect on their own thoughts; students respond very well to this. In one excellent assembly for sixth form students, an ex-student; now a local clergyman, gave a talk drawing similarities between preparing for Lent and preparing for future life. The students listened intently as he spoke of living with, and accepting responsibility towards, others. They then joined in prayer and reflected on what had been said.
3. There is a very strong commitment to the welfare of each student and a focus on Christianity within the school family. The school is aware that spirituality is not a synonym for religion and promotes this very well through the beliefs and values aspect of the general studies course. There is a weekly theme for thought and this is considered in some detail by all tutors. The school has very strong links with the adjacent St Anne's Church and holds its carol service and prize-giving ceremony in Liverpool Cathedral.
4. The ethos of the school supports the belief that the establishment of good relationships between teachers and students is central to everybody working effectively. This is borne out in the very detailed policy on behaviour, which is rooted in trust and high expectations. The school council and the links with the Christian Union offer students very good opportunities to become involved in improving school life and organising fund-raising events. Students are also involved in 'Industry days', supported by the Liverpool Compact.
5. The school encourages students to take an interest in aspects of cultural development that relate to music and the arts. In many lessons, opportunities are carefully planned to relate the topic to social, moral and cultural issues. For example, in a Year 13 biology lesson focusing on disease, the teacher made very good use of a recent newspaper article relating to a 'mystery illness' and then made links with the outbreak of diphtheria in Liverpool. This added real impact and realism to the topic.
6. Students are aware of other cultures and have been involved with the United Nations' Forum. Each year there is a European day of languages, with visiting lecturers from John Moores University. There are visits from organisations such as 'Community Spirit' which explore other faiths and beliefs, but the school is aware that it does not

yet provide enough opportunities for students to develop an understanding and appreciation of the rich variety of cultures represented in Britain today.

A strength of the school is the regularity with which students experience good quality teaching and this brings about very good achievement between Years 7 to 11.

7. Students receive lessons that are consistently taught to a good standard. It is this consistency in the quality of teaching that leads to the teaching provision being very good in Years 7 to 11 and students achieving very well.
8. The teachers expect their students to achieve high standards and this is observed in many aspects of their work. The tasks that are chosen are demanding and are matched to the needs of all students, so that all students are extended, regardless of their previous levels of attainment. Lessons regularly start with questions that test students' previous knowledge and understanding of the topic, so that the teacher can quickly assess where to pitch the content of the lesson. The questions are particularly searching and ensure that students must think hard about their answers. The planning of lessons is very good and promotes rapid learning on most occasions. Teachers use short-term targets very well and do not waste time in the lessons. Deadlines are set and students know that these deadlines will be rigidly enforced and so work very hard to meet them. The number of students in some classes is high, but this has no detrimental effect on the quality of learning, with many teachers turning the class size into an advantage by promoting greater competition between the students.
9. The attention paid to the consolidation of students' learning is good. All subjects match the content of their work exactly to the requirements of the examination syllabuses. Students are given a substantial amount of homework, but this is fundamental in bringing about the high standards at the school. Homework is used very well to extend the work covered in class and to ensure that students have a secure grasp of the work. Deadlines for homework and coursework are rigidly enforced. Above all, however, the teachers believe that all students are capable of much higher achievement than their attainment on entry to the school would normally suggest.
10. Students achieve very well during their time in compulsory education between Years 7 to 11. The students that gained the well above average GCSE results in 2002 entered the school in Year 7 with broadly average levels of attainment; students achieved very well indeed.

The school provides an exceptional range of extra activities to improve students' achievement and raise their aspirations.

11. There are three areas that are quite exceptional in the school's provision; those aimed at the gifted and talented, those that aim to encourage students to aspire to higher education, and the more general study support, open to all. All are managed extremely well and make excellent use of the funding made available through the Excellence in Cities initiative.
12. Activities for the gifted and talented students start within the curriculum itself. For example, students can study three separate sciences to GCSE or study electronics in design and technology. Far more, though, takes place outside normal lessons. In the past 12 months there have been 47 separate events for the most able students in all years. Activities taking place in the school have included 'writers' workshops' for students in Years 7 and 8, a business dynamics course for sixth form students,

'sculpture workshops' and many sporting and language-based activities. The school keeps careful track of the progress of the students who take part and last year their GCSE results were very much higher than would have been expected from their standards on entry to the school.

13. 'Excellence Challenge' is the name of the project aimed at encouraging able students to aspire to the best that higher education can offer. The school clearly has students who are very high attainers and going to university is just accepted as the norm for such students. Nevertheless, there are students who have all the attributes necessary for higher education, but need to have their aspirations raised, as they would not consider themselves 'university material'. The school starts its work in Year 9, with the aim of raising standards at GCSE to provide the foundation for good A-level results. Each student is set targets for improved performance in the national tests for 14 year olds or GCSE examinations and an individual action plan is drawn up with the assistance of a graduate mentor. The action plans are detailed and specific to the student concerned. As well as these student-specific actions, all subjects are providing separate activities and there are activities for large groups of students, such as residential visits to universities for Year 10 students and research projects for Year 9, again based on a university campus.
14. An outstanding feature is the school's study support, which encompasses all the other activities available to students outside of lessons. This extensive range of clubs, courses and other activities includes: academic clubs, such as extra lessons for many subjects at AS-level and GCSE level; many sporting and musical opportunities; clubs based on specific interest areas, such as war-gaming and bus restoration; and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.
15. The extent to which the school goes in these areas is playing a significant part in the continuing improvement in standards across the school.

The school makes very good provision for students with special educational needs and these students make very good progress.

16. The school and, in particular, the co-ordinator for special educational needs are determined to meet the specific needs of each individual student. Arrangements are flexible, imaginative and sometimes unconventional. For example, students in Year 7 with weak literacy skills attend half hour lessons in the library. Here they are taught by the librarian, whose title masks her very important role in teaching and supporting these students. The lessons include the 'progress units' from the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy and provide very good opportunities to develop reading, spelling and writing skills. Students are also learning keyboard skills because it was discovered that they lacked confidence in using computers. Students concentrate really hard in these sessions, clearly enjoy what they do and make very good progress.
17. Apart from these short and carefully planned lessons in the library, all students with special educational needs are taught within mainstream lessons. Teachers are well informed about students' needs and use appropriate strategies to meet those needs. Where necessary, students receive additional support from learning support assistants and that support is sensitive and effective and enables students to make progress which is the same as that of others in the group.
18. Much is provided by the school for students with special educational needs, but there is no pampering or misplaced indulgence. The individual education plans make it clear that the school expects these students to work hard and to practise their skills, whether reading, spelling, number skills, keyboard skills or whatever is needed, in

their own time. Students are rewarded by much care and support, a special haven in the library when they need it and, sometimes, a highly valued 'early lunch' pass. Parents are also expected to play their part in their child's development, by checking homework, testing spellings and hearing students read. This three-way co-operation, backed by meticulous management, organisation and attention to detail by the co-ordinator, leads directly to the very good achievement of students with special educational needs.

The headmaster provides outstanding leadership and, as a result, excellent progress has been made since the previous inspection.

19. Since the previous inspection report, the outstanding leadership and management provided by the headmaster have resulted in excellent progress being made. The headmaster has the confidence of the staff and is fully supported by the very good senior management team. Members of the senior management team are well informed and all have considerable expertise in each of their own specialist fields. Together they form a formidable team that has helped to steer the school through a period of considerable change and improvement. There is a shared commitment to improvement and a very good capacity to succeed. Under the leadership of the headmaster, examination results have shot up. At the time of the previous inspection, 47 per cent of students were attaining five or more passes at GCSE grades A*-C and in 2002 this percentage had risen to 71 per cent.
20. St Margaret's is an educational community where all-round development of people, both staff and students, takes place in a context firmly rooted in Christian beliefs and values. The headmaster exemplifies the approach of valuing all members of the school community; when dealing with any member of the community, he does so with extreme sensitivity and respect – he is always supportive and dependable. The headmaster is a leader par excellence. His vast experience and clear thinking in educational developments have meant that the school has not only kept abreast, but ahead, of new initiatives. The headmaster has established a very good rapport with the governing body, which places implicit trust in his management skills and strategic development. He has guided the governing body, with immense skill, through the change of status from Grant Maintained to Voluntary Aided. The school has acquired specialist Technology College status and the local community is able to avail itself of the school's resources.
21. The headmaster believes very strongly that a successful school needs members of staff who are prepared to enhance their skills and engage in continuous professional development. He is prepared to delegate responsibilities and staff are trusted to carry out their roles as professionals, knowing they have his support at hand.

The school cares for the students as individuals – form tutors know their students well and support their academic and personal development.

22. The school has an effective and very supportive pastoral system. The positive, all-embracing approach is 'achievement orientated', which students understand and appreciate. All members of staff involved in the system, from form tutors, through heads of year, are in accord and fully committed to the school policy. Students are confident that they can find a member of staff to turn to if they need help to overcome any problem. Very good child protection arrangements are in place and the school gives very good care and attention to health and safety issues.
23. Support to monitor and enhance students' academic performance is particularly strong. This helps students to attain examination results that are well above average. Students' progress is closely monitored, and data showing students' levels of attainment and potential is used with increasing effectiveness in helping to inform staff and students of the standards which can be achieved. Teachers provide many extra lessons out of timetabled time, including at weekends and during holidays, helping students to prepare for their examinations. Parents much appreciate the care and support that their children receive from teachers.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Students' achievement is unsatisfactory in physics in the sixth form as a result of unsatisfactory teaching.

24. In the sixth form, students' standards of attainment are below average in physics. Students in Year 12 are underachieving, particularly the higher attainers, because the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and can produce lively lessons. However, there are significant weaknesses in the teaching. Marking is very poor; very little work is marked in any way whatsoever. Some tests are marked, but the students mark others themselves. This means that neither students nor teachers have a good enough idea of how well the students are progressing and mistakes in students' written work go uncorrected.
25. The planning of lessons is poor; there are no schemes or lesson plans from which to work and this results in lessons that are undemanding of higher attainers in particular, although lower attainers do well as the basics are covered so thoroughly.

Whole-school strategies for literacy, numeracy and ICT are not taught consistently within all subjects.

26. The school has worked hard to introduce strategies such as literacy, numeracy and ICT across the whole school. However, these strategies have yet to be implemented consistently in all subjects. For example, in design and technology, students make very good use of technical vocabulary when discussing the finer points of manufacturing techniques, whereas in a history lesson, opportunities are missed to explain terminology and deepen students' understanding of the topic.
27. Students generally have good levels of numeracy, but the development of these skills across the curriculum varies considerably. In science, for example, students use calculators with ease and carry out complex calculations. However, in other subjects, teachers do not reinforce work on graphs or on mental arithmetic.

28. ICT is not built into the schemes of work of all subjects and students' experiences of ICT are variable. For example, in design and technology, students use ICT very well to enhance their work whilst in other subjects there is limited use of ICT. The school has significantly improved its ICT provision since the previous inspection and the expansion and use of ICT is noted as an area for development in the school development plan.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

29. To improve further the quality of education provided and students' standards, the management of the school should:

Improve the achievement of students in physics in the sixth form by improving the quality of teaching. (Paragraphs: 24, 25, 34, 41, 45, 62, 95-99)

*Ensure all teachers implement whole-school strategies for literacy, numeracy and ICT consistently. (Paragraphs: 26-28)

Sixth form

Ensure the school's marking policy is implemented consistently. (Paragraphs: 43, 51, 60, 70, 91, 115, 123, 156)

Improve students' punctuality to lessons by ensuring all teachers challenge and chase up students who arrive late for lessons. (Paragraphs: 38, 55, 116)

Provide students with more opportunities in lessons to prepare them for later life in terms of equipping them with the skills of debate, enquiry and research. (Paragraphs: 44, 68, 76, 82, 88, 108, 135, 142, 149)

*Any items marked with an asterisk are already identified in the school development plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	33
	Sixth form	56
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		49

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	2	5	17	9	0	0	0
Percentage	6	15	52	27	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	2	11	21	21	0	1	0
Percentage	4	20	37	37	0	2	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	772	220
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	92	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	94	5

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	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.1
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	155	0	155

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	130	137	134
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	130	137	134
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	84(87)	88(84)	86(86)
	National	66(64)	67(66)	66(66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	46(33)	72(61)	65(47)
	National	32(31)	45(43)	33(34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	122	134	132
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	122	134	132
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79(86)	86(83)	85(87)
	National	67(65)	70(68)	67(64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39(33)	57(61)	46(41)
	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)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	131	n/a	131

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	93	131	131
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	93	131	131
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	71(53)	100(99)	100(99)
	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	50.8 (45.2)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	68	29	97
	Average point score per candidate	16	17.5	16.4
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18.0	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	68	29	97	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	16.0	17.5	16.4	n/a	n/a	n/a
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	n/a	n/a	n/a

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
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
969	32	2
1	0	0
4	0	0
0	1	0
3	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	1	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
5	0	0
3	1	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)	62.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	55

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.2
Key Stage 4	20.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	3160783
Total expenditure	2972357
Expenditure per pupil	3387
Balance brought forward from previous year	164757
Balance carried forward to next year	353183

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	7
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	11
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	992
Number of questionnaires returned	175

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	46	47	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	46	51	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	49	43	4	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	52	14	3	0
The teaching is good.	49	47	1	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	42	20	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	37	3	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	28	1	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	35	46	15	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	61	35	3	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	45	3	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	59	29	7	1	4

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

30. Students achieve well in the sixth form and leave with better examination results than would usually be expected, given their GCSE results.
31. Results at AS-level and A-level were average in 2001; when the vocational courses are included, results were above average. There are no national figures available for 2002 as yet, but, if anything, results appear to have improved in 2002. In 2001, overall there was no significant difference in the results attained by male and female students.
32. In 2001, results were well above average in biology, French, religious education and English literature; above average in general studies, German and mathematics; average in history and psychology; and below average in art and design, chemistry, computer studies, physics and sports studies. Results were well below average in economics, music, design and technology and geography. However, the results themselves are not a measure of how well the students have achieved on the course, as some courses started with higher attaining students than others.
33. The students who left at the end of Year 13 in 2001 did so with above average results, despite joining the sixth form with average standards. The current Year 13 were broadly average, in terms of standards of attainment, when they joined the sixth form and they are doing well so their standards are now above average. Their good progress reflects the good teaching they receive in the sixth form. There is no significant difference in the performance of males and females or students from different ethnic backgrounds.
34. In the subjects inspected in detail, students are now doing very well in biology, art and design and French; well in business studies, design and technology, sports studies and English literature; and satisfactorily in all other subjects with the exception of physics where achievement is unsatisfactory. In all of the subjects inspected, the students' achievement is a direct result of the quality of teaching; when students are taught well, their achievement is good.
35. There is a small number of students in the sixth form with special educational needs and they make the same good progress as other students. Gifted and talented students are provided with many opportunities to excel both inside and outside the normal curriculum and many attain high standards in music and sport and make good progress.
36. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection, when examination results were below average.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

37. Sixth form students have good attitudes to learning as at the previous inspection. They show a well-developed sense of responsibility both to their work and towards the needs of others. Their warm relationships with each other and with staff contribute to the quality of their work. Their attendance is very good

38. When lessons are under way, a high level of interest and concentration is apparent, in response to the consistently good teaching that students experience. Enjoyment in learning is often evident and this aids students' progress. For instance, Year 13 students in a practical design and technology lesson were encouraged by well-judged advice from their teacher and worked really hard to make progress with their projects. Most were so keen and interested that they stayed after the end of school to continue their work. A similar determination to succeed was seen in biology when some students struggled to understand work on aerobic and anaerobic respiration. Their sense of satisfaction when they succeeded in grasping the meaning was very noticeable. Students listen to one another and help each other. On occasion, females are more willing to take an active part, in discussions for instance, than males. When the lesson gives less opportunity for students to get actively involved, the sense of enjoyment is less but they still work hard. Straying attention is rarely a problem. The few drawn from minority ethnic backgrounds are fully integrated into the school community and show the same strong focus on learning as others. In one respect, students' attitudes are less good and a sense of responsibility is lacking. A number often drift into lessons late, and this unpunctuality means that time for learning is lost.
39. In other respects students show a very good sense of responsibility, coupled with very good skills in organising themselves. They mostly respond well to the expectations about using study periods for independent work. They usually keep their folders of work in good order. Higher attaining students in particular are confident on occasions when they are asked to engage in independent research. Students also accept responsibility for helping others. They contribute regularly to the wider community, for instance by fund-raising efforts to help charities identified by the school council. They organise events including an annual Christmas meal for older members of the local community. Students studying art and design visit primary schools for special projects and add to the breadth of the primary pupils' artistic experience. A number volunteered and trained as mentors to help students in the main school, and were disappointed when for reasons beyond their control they had little chance to put their skills into action. Other aspects of their personal development are also very good. They respect the religious traditions of their school. They keep abreast of current world affairs. They can explain their own opinions about what is right and wrong, for instance, with regard to the present situation in Iraq, while still respecting others' views.
40. Attendance in the sixth form is very good, just as in the main school. This reflects students' motivation to learn, their respect for the school's high expectations regarding their regular presence, and also the pastoral support that is extended to any student whose attendance begins to slip. The regular attendance of sixth form students contributes to their success.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

41. Teaching is good in the sixth form and students learn well. In the subjects inspected, teaching is very good in biology, art and design and French. Teaching is good in all other subjects, except for mathematics, chemistry, computer studies, geography and psychology where it is satisfactory, and physics where it is unsatisfactory.
42. As in Years 10 and 11, teachers know their subjects and the examination syllabuses very well. This means that they can plan lessons that target specific areas of the syllabus very well. At the same time, their knowledge of their subjects is extensive. For example, this was seen in a Year 13 English lesson on the significance of the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. The teacher's skilled questioning and her ability to

draw parallels between different passages from the text ensured that students better understood the play's intellectual and artistic complexity. Such approaches lead to students learning at a good rate; they make good gains in their knowledge and understanding as they move through the sixth form.

43. The marking in the sixth form is not as good as that in other years, and is satisfactory overall. In some subjects, such as biology, the marking is good; it explains to students what they have done well while pointing out where they need to add information to improve their work. In other subjects the marking is much more variable. Even in subjects that are very good there are inconsistencies. For example, in French, marking is broadly satisfactory, but the students are not given a clear picture of how well they are progressing towards their A-level goal, because A-level grading is not used frequently enough, and there is only occasional use made of critical comment explaining in specific, helpful terms how students might improve the quality of their work.
44. Many of the lessons in the sixth form are of a good quality; they are interesting and encourage students to work hard. Levels of concentration among students are good, even when teachers adopt a more lecturing approach that students find uninteresting. This lecturing approach also has the drawback that it does not prepare students for later life in terms of equipping them with the skills of debate, enquiry and research. In general, students like to be active in lessons rather than sitting passively listening to the teacher. Students do, however, work hard in their own time as well. The new Study Centre in the sixth form block provides students with the opportunity to work on their own and most students take full advantage of this very good facility.
45. In physics, teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and can produce lively lessons. Nevertheless, there are significant weaknesses in the teaching. Marking is very poor; very little work is marked in any way whatsoever. This means that neither students nor teachers have a good enough idea of how well the students are progressing, and mistakes in students' written work go uncorrected. The planning of lessons is poor; there are no schemes or lesson plans from which to work and this results in lessons that are undemanding of higher attainers in particular, although lower attainers do well as the basics are covered so thoroughly.
46. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and examination results have risen significantly.

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

47. The curriculum is very good. The school provides a wide range of AS-level and A-level courses and one vocational course. This is an appropriate balance of courses given the huge range of vocational courses available at a nearby college, although the school plans to add more courses of a vocational nature to meet the needs of those students who may find difficulty in coping with a move to a much larger establishment. A significant strength is the provision that the school makes for students who come from two partner schools; the school goes to very good lengths to ensure that courses meet their needs and that students are prepared well for their move to St Margaret's. However, the real strengths of the curriculum lie in all the extras that the school provides for its students. All students receive lessons in general studies, which lead to an extra AS-level and provide the statutory content for religious education. Students also have lessons in key skills to improve their numeracy, literacy

and ICT skills and in personal and social education to improve their understanding of their role as good citizens in society.

48. Overall, students have a very full timetable, but still the school provides much more in the way of enrichment. Two of the most important aspects are for gifted and talented students and the 'Excellence Challenge' that is aimed at encouraging students to have higher expectations of what they can do when they leave the school. Last year, for example, there were trips to universities to encourage students to apply to Oxbridge, master classes in different subjects at universities and days where students from the school could shadow undergraduates so that they got a real feel for a day in the life of a university student. In total, there were 411 opportunities for students to gain experience of university life last year. As well as this highly impressive range of activities, the school provides a remarkable range of opportunities for gifted and talented students in which to excel. The foreign languages are particularly strong in this area with trips to the French theatre, specific tutorials and students being used as mentors lower down the school. Almost all subjects provide some sort of specific activity for the most able students.
49. The very good careers' guidance plays a full part in support for students. The programme includes both lessons and one-day conferences. It raises students' aspirations by using visiting university speakers and organising visits to universities. Students are supported throughout the university applications process. Well-judged help is also given to those who do not wish to proceed to higher education. They are helped to consider their options and to follow their chosen course of action. Students also benefit from the availability of Connexions advisers to give interviews when they are needed.
50. The curriculum has undergone significant changes since the previous inspection. The introduction of the new system of AS-levels and A-levels has been managed well and there is a much broader range of subjects now on offer. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

51. Overall the arrangements for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good. The information available is very extensive and is given to each subject to help them support students' progress and assess their individual needs. Unfortunately, not all subject leaders use the information consistently well. There are particular strengths in subjects such as art and design, design and technology and business studies where all students are aware of their standards and the teachers know which areas are in need of more work. There is very poor use made of the data provided in physics; students do not know how well they are doing because their work is never marked. Marking is also unsatisfactory in computer studies and predicted grades have been overestimated consistently.
52. The use made of information from assessments in order to plan the curriculum is good. Students' performances in GCSE examinations is used to set 'minimum target grades' for AS-level and A-levels. There is a very good system of self-assessment for students; they find this very useful because it is used well by most departments and provides valuable information on the targets each student is working towards. Students are clear about the grades expected, and are appreciative of the sessions

they have with teachers to discuss their progress. Assessment procedures have improved significantly since the previous inspection.

Advice, support and guidance

53. The Christian beliefs of the school are clearly reflected in the way teachers care for every aspect of students' well-being. Students' needs for personal and educational guidance are supported to very good effect. Parents are encouraged to be fully involved in supporting their sons and daughters.
54. Induction to the sixth form is very good. It starts during Year 11, when students are told about the provision offered. Staff make sure students think about whether the sixth form is a good match to their needs and aptitudes or whether some other post-16 route is their best option. Very good efforts are made to offer students their preferred subject combinations in the sixth form and this is an important factor in students' high level of satisfaction with their courses. A number of students, both male and female, join from partner schools. Good care is taken to make sure they settle in academically and socially during their first weeks at the school. For instance, females joining are grouped together in tutor groups, so that none feel outnumbered or isolated. Similarly, when students return for Year 13 the right kind of guidance is organised. A day is set aside for students, together with their teachers and parents, to consider their AS-level results and to decide which courses to continue with during the next year. Tutors and senior sixth form staff have an overview of how each student is doing. Students rate highly the way both pastoral staff and subject teachers always respond if they ask for extra help over any problems. As well, teachers are quick to notice any emerging concerns such as failure to meet coursework deadlines and they give well-judged support to any who need it.
55. Students are supported in developing good habits of independent work outside of lessons. Each week they are expected to spend at least half their free periods in supervised study and teachers check carefully that they live up to this aim. Attendance in lessons is carefully monitored. Senior staff go to great lengths to follow up any unexplained absences from school and to try and bring about improvements. One aspect of guidance needs more attention; there are systems for following up any unpunctuality, but so far these have not overcome a tendency for students to drift into lessons late.
56. As well as all the very good day-to-day support, there are very effective systems for longer-term educational guidance. Teachers make sure students know the grades they should aim to get, encourage their skills in self-assessment, and involve them in setting targets for their own improvement. The personal and social education programme makes valuable contributions to students' guidance, for instance when invited speakers gave a helpful presentation about bank accounts and about how to plan to meet the costs of attending university.
57. Other aspects of guidance are also very good. Students' high motivation to meet the school's expectations means that any lapse in behaviour is almost unknown. However, the pastoral system can respond effectively if this ever becomes necessary. There is good liaison with parents over any cause for anxiety that arises. Just as in the main school, staff respond with very good practical care to the individual needs of any student in difficult social or personal circumstances. Similarly, the same very good health and safety routines as in the main school provide for the safe conduct of learning activities.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

58. As at the previous inspection parents are positive in their views of the school. They have great confidence in the high quality of the leadership. Most of them appreciate many aspects of the provision the school makes for their sons' and daughters' good progress. Few have concerns about any part of the school's work. The school fosters a strong partnership with parents and they make a very good contribution to its work.
59. Sixth form staff make effective efforts to maintain a strong partnership with parents. The sixth form prospectus provides both students and their parents with a clear and helpful outline of the breadth of provision, organisation and expectations for Year 12 and 13 students. The system for reporting progress to parents is very good. They and their son or daughter receive a brief but informative summary which they can then discuss with teachers. Just as in the main school, nearly all parents come to these discussions. These are very worthwhile because students, as well as their parents and teachers, are involved in thinking about the progress they have made and agree targets for their next steps in learning. Parents are also quickly informed and involved at other times if the need arises. Parents make an outstanding contribution to school finances by direct donations. Their donations have been steadily increasing and currently they give around £40000 a year. This is very important in helping the governing body meet its 10 per cent share of the cost of building projects, such as the new sixth form accommodation.
60. Sixth form students, like their parents, are enthusiastic about the provision made by the school. They enjoy their studies and are very happy with the way that the choice of courses matches their needs and aspirations. They value the way teachers are always willing to give them any extra help they need with their work outside lessons. Their views on a number of areas are more variable; for instance, in a questionnaire issued by inspectors, a considerable number indicated that they were unhappy with the marking of their work and that they wanted more information about their own progress. This links to the variations in the quality of marking of students' work that were found by inspectors. A sizeable minority did not feel well advised about their future options. This probably relates more to the timing of the questionnaire in relation to the cycle of careers and other guidance than to any true failure to meet individual needs; during the inspection students spoke very favourably of the advice and help they had received about their future options. Disruption due to building work in the recent past also resulted in some negative views, but by the time of the inspection students were very content to be occupying their new purpose-built accommodation. The views of sixth form students are regularly considered and staff also consider other comments that students may advance, for instance through their sixth form council. Students feel that the school does consult their views, but a few comment that the time-scale for response is slower than they would like.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

61. The sixth form benefits from very good leadership and management and as a result very good progress has been made since the previous inspection; examination results have risen significantly. Much of the drive for improvement emanates from the assistant headmaster with responsibility for the sixth form. The assistant headmaster has a highly visible presence around the sixth form, is approachable to students and teachers and manages the sixth form very well. His vision for the sixth form is very clear; he knows where he wants the sixth form to be in the short, medium and long term. There is a real sense of commitment to creating an environment within which every one of the students feels valued, respected and able to succeed. The assistant headmaster has ensured that the expansion of the curriculum is meeting the needs of the increasing numbers of students who are staying on into the sixth form well. The governors are equally aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form as they are in the rest of the school.
62. There are areas of strength in the management of subjects, such as in French where there are some excellent features, particularly the very strong educational direction for the work of the team of A-level teachers and the French assistante, and the ethos and teamwork in the department. However, there are weaknesses in the leadership and management of physics. In physics, teachers are not aware of their students' targets; there is no documentation to support the teachers and no plans to address any of the weaknesses.

Resources

63. The sixth form has a good match of teachers and support staff to its needs and ensures that they operate well by using the same excellent systems for training and performance management as those in the rest of the school. Generally, the sixth form is well resourced, because the monies available are used so efficiently and targeted to exactly the places where they will have the biggest impact.
64. Overall, the provision of sixth form accommodation is good. Since the previous inspection good planning and significant financial investment have ensured improvement to the school's sixth form accommodation. Provision, especially in English, modern foreign languages, business studies and computer studies is good. However, the new accommodation, as yet, does not provide for suitable art and design accommodation. Art and design provision was a weakness at the time of the previous inspection and it still needs to be addressed. Cramped and unsatisfactory accommodation constrains the range of students' work and prevents access to studios outside timetabled lessons.

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.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	2	100	52	-	2	1.0	0.8
Chemistry	5	60	43	-	5	0.6	0.8
Other Sciences	1	-	78	-	27	-	2.3

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	22	95	87	45	43	6.1	5.8
Biology	25	100	88	44	34	6.8	5.3
Chemistry	11	91	90	27	43	4.7	5.9
Physics	10	90	88	20	40	4.4	5.7
Other Sciences	31	97	90	23	30	5.0	5.2
Design and Technology	16	81	91	13	30	3.9	5.4
Economics	8	75	89	13	36	3.5	5.5
Computing	25	92	86	12	23	3.9	4.6
Sports/ PE Studies	16	88	92	13	25	4.4	5.1
Art and Design	10	100	96	30	46	5.2	6.6
Music	4	50	93	-	35	2.5	5.7
Geography	11	64	92	18	38	3.6	5.7
History	20	80	88	40	35	4.9	5.5
Religious Education	3	100	92	67	38	8.0	5.84
Sociology	1	-	86	-	35	-	5.3
General Studies	47	83	85	36	30	5.1	4.9
English Literature	33	97	95	61	37	7.3	5.9
French	3	100	89	100	38	8.7	5.6
German	2	100	91	50	40	7.0	5.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus for the inspection was on mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics.

Mathematics

Overall, the quality of provision for mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers are generally knowledgeable about their subject and this promotes students' confidence and respect for their teachers.
- The wide range of topics provides students with good opportunities to study new areas of mathematics.
- The good attitudes of students contribute well to their level of commitment to studying.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for students to develop their study skills are limited.
- Students are not involved enough in lessons and sometimes too little is demanded of their initiative.
- The marking of students' work does not always contain sufficient detail to help students see how they can improve.

65. The school offers mathematics at AS-level and A-level and it is very rare for a student not to complete the course. In total, 39 students study the subject in the sixth form of whom 13 students are studying it at A-level. The school offers AS-level and A-level in the three areas of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. In Year 12, the students study 'methods' as an introduction to the course. The school also gives students the opportunity to retake their GCSE.
66. In the 2001, results in A-level mathematics were above average. Results in 2002 were better than those in 2001 and the achievement of students was satisfactory. Results have improved over the past four years. In 2001, seven students were entered to retake their GCSE in mathematics and 43 per cent attained grades A*-C.
67. Standards are above average in Years 12 and 13 and this represents a satisfactory level of achievement given their attainment on joining the sixth form. Students are successfully extending their GCSE work into new areas; for example they have the opportunity to study mechanics and extend the work on statistics that they were introduced to on their GCSE mathematics course. When studying mechanics, students demonstrate a secure understanding of forces, components and resultants. They can resolve forces accurately and use equations of uniform acceleration to solve problems. In statistics, they extend their understanding of probability by examining conditional probability using notation correctly and the laws of probability. In pure mathematics, students in Year 13 generally have a good understanding of vectors and use it effectively in their work in pure mathematics and also in their mechanics work. Students can find the Cartesian equations from vector equations. They progress to investigating the relationship between equations of planes and their normal vectors by calculating the angle between two planes.
68. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and all students learn at a satisfactory pace as a result. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and there are examples of good

teaching. The best feature of the teaching is the good knowledge and understanding of teachers. Subject content is accurate and teachers explain principles well. This promotes the students' confidence and respect for their teachers. Most students respond well to the teaching they receive, have positive attitudes to the subject and work hard. In the better lessons teachers set challenging tasks, for example, introducing the concept of complex numbers when solving problems involving roots of quadratic functions. Although teaching methods are sound, and in the better lessons students are generally asked probing questions which develop good thinking skills, there are missed opportunities to involve students more actively in lessons and to develop their capacity for independent study and research. Teachers build on previous understanding, for example in a lesson where the teacher introduced students to trigonometric equations. The teacher consolidated their understanding of the sine curve and tangent graphs before suggesting ways of solving the equations.

69. Students respond well to questions and this enhances their learning. They are usually attentive in lessons and show an interest in the subject. In the better lessons, the teachers conduct lessons at a stimulating pace, resulting in rapid gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Students are alert throughout the lesson and a high level of concentration is maintained. In these lessons, students participate well in discussions, responding well to questions and volunteering suggestions in articulate ways. Work is generally well presented and well organised. This is not always the situation and needs to be monitored more effectively so that students develop good skills in co-ordinating their work.
70. Effective use is made of homework to consolidate work that is introduced in the lesson. However, the quality of the day-to-day marking and assessment of students' work is inconsistent. The better marking indicates where students have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve. This is not always the case, particularly in Year 13 where the student or the teacher does not regularly mark or annotate the work. Although students have worked solutions to problems there is little evidence that they have used them to assess their own work. There needs to be a more consistent approach so that students and teachers can track the progress made. In Year 12, there is a sound programme of regular assessments that allows teachers to see how students are progressing over time so that they can give effective support for those experiencing difficulties, and teachers do assist students well in lessons.
71. Satisfactory leadership and efficient management are rooted in effective consultation and collaboration amongst teachers. There is appropriate monitoring of teaching and there is a clear commitment by the whole team to improving standards by raising achievement for all students. The wide range of topics within the mathematics curriculum provides students with good opportunities to study new areas of the subject, ensuring that interest and motivation are maintained and extended. There are satisfactory procedures for assessing the students' performance as they progress through the sixth form through the regular assessments and modular tests. There is insufficient evidence of how ICT and other resources are organised in the development of mathematics and there are missed opportunities to develop this further to support students in their study of mathematics.
72. The subject has made satisfactory progress since the previous report. The quality of teaching is similar and standards are improving.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Examination results were well above average in 2001 and similar in 2002.
- Teachers are very knowledgeable and enthusiastic and make use of a wide variety of interesting resources to hold students' interest.
- Students enjoy the subject, appreciate the benefits of the different teaching styles within the department and value the extra help that is always available.

Area for improvement

- Occasionally, the teacher does not use enough questions to involve students fully and ensure that they are learning effectively.

73. The department offers courses in AS-level and A-level biology. There are 28 students taking the subject in Year 12, making biology one of the more popular AS-level subjects in the school. Almost all those who begin the AS-level course continue to the end of the year and take the examination. Over three-quarters of students usually choose to continue with the subject and 17 are taking biology in the current Year 13.
74. Results in the A-level examination in 2001 were well above the national average. Overall, students gained much better results in biology than they did on average in their other subjects. Male and female students gained similar results in biology. Results improved significantly between 2000 and 2001. Results in 2002 were similar to those in 2001. All 13 students gained pass grades and five gained the higher grades A or B. In relation to their GCSE grades when they started the course, students achieved much better results in 2002 than might be expected.
75. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in the current Year 12 and Year 13 and not as good as those indicated by the 2002 A-level results. However, these standards still represent very good achievement for these students because these groups entered Year 12 with GCSE grades that were below average for students beginning the AS-level course.
76. Students in both Year 12 and Year 13 show good knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying and make good use of specialist terms associated with the particular topics. For example, students in Year 13 understand the impact of farming practices, in particular the use of fertiliser, on the number of plant and insect species found in an area. They know the types of vaccine used to protect against various diseases. In Year 12, students understand the causes of cystic fibrosis and appreciate the current limitations in the use of gene therapy. In both year groups, students' files are very well presented and provide a very useful resource for further study and revision. Students' skills in speaking and presenting their work to others are not as well developed as other aspects of their work and this is an area where more practice is needed and is being provided by teachers.
77. Students' investigation skills generally match their standards in other aspects of biology. Their investigation reports show good presentation and analysis of results, notably in drawing and using graphs, but also, particularly in Year 12, some lack of precision in the planning and evaluation aspects because students do not always say exactly what they mean.
78. Teaching is very good and students learn very quickly as a result. The strength of the department lies in the consistency of teaching quality provided by the four teachers who share the A-level and AS-level teaching. The teaching styles of these teachers

vary and students value the variety, because they recognise that quite different ways of explaining ideas mean that there is always an explanation available to meet their particular needs.

79. Teachers are very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the subject. They use a variety of interesting resources to capture and maintain students' interest. There is very good use of Internet websites to gain up-to-date information. Good fieldwork opportunities and visits to university departments extend students' experience still further. Teachers demand a lot from students, both in terms of the effort they make and the standards they achieve. Students indicate that the workload can sometimes become rather too much, but they enjoy the subject and recognise the reasons why teachers set the work that they do. They particularly appreciate the fact that teachers are always available to provide extra help and support when necessary.
80. Teachers mark work regularly and there is constant reference to the A-level grades that such work would merit. Hence, students know just where they are in terms of meeting their targets and teachers usually give very good indications of how the work can be improved. Students' files are constantly checked to ensure that everything is well organised and complete. It is this attention to detail that plays an important part in ensuring that students achieve very well.
81. Occasionally, teaching is excellent. In one lesson on aerobic and anaerobic respiration, a wide variety of techniques and activities kept students fully involved throughout. Students hung on the teacher's every word, all filling in the gaps in what she said, or answering her questions, so that they were constantly reinforcing the main learning points. The lesson ended with a wonderfully dramatic representation of bonding and the action of enzymes which attracted envious attention from passers-by looking into the classroom through the windows and will long be remembered by the whole class, all of whom played an active role.
82. In lessons that are rather less successful, though still good, some of the learning activities are carefully planned and often imaginative but slightly less successful in ensuring students' learning. Occasionally there are parts of lessons where students are not as actively involved as they might be, particularly when there are not enough questions to check that they are actually understanding what is being taught.
83. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The arrangements are unusual but they work well. The head of science is in overall charge of all science subjects in the sixth form and he provides the management of resources and valuable analysis of examination results. However, the particular strengths of the biology course are the result of dynamic, though unofficial, leadership of the main teacher of the sixth form course, backed by strong teamwork from the other teachers and technicians. The shared enthusiasm has led to the introduction into sixth form teaching of many of the most successful techniques from, for example, the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Teachers have observed each other teaching in order to share their individual strengths.
84. There has been very good progress in biology since the time of the previous inspection. Results have risen from average at the time of the previous inspection to well above average in 2001 and similar in 2002.

Chemistry

Overall, the quality of provision for chemistry is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers know their subject well and plan lessons carefully.
- Students have positive attitudes to the subject and particularly enjoy practical work.

Areas for improvement

- Students did not do as well in chemistry in 2001 as they did on average in their other subjects and results were similar in 2002.
- Many of the answers to examination questions in students' files are neither marked nor corrected by the student so students do not learn as much as they should from attempting such questions.

85. The department offers courses in AS-level and A-level chemistry. There are 17 students taking the subject in Year 12 and four in Year 13. Almost all those who begin the AS-level course continue to the end of the year and take the examination.
86. Results in the A-level examination in 2001 were below the national average. Overall, students did not do as well in chemistry as they did on average in their other subjects. There were only two female students taking chemistry in 2001 so it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons between the results of male and female students. There were no candidates for A-level chemistry in 2000, though four Year 13 students did gain AS-level passes. Hence, it is not possible to identify any trend in A-level results before 2001. Results in 2002 were similar to those in 2001. All eight candidates gained pass grades but none gained the higher grades A and B. In 2002, most students gained the results that might be expected in relation to their GCSE grades when they started the course.
87. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average in the current Year 12 and Year 13 and are better than those indicated by the 2002 A-level results. These groups began the sixth form with average GCSE grades for students starting AS-level chemistry and they are achieving the standards that might be expected. Their achievement is, therefore, satisfactory.
88. Students generally have appropriate knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying but students in Year 13 have not done as well in organic chemistry as they have in other parts of the course. Their investigation skills are average for students taking chemistry in the sixth form. Students in Year 13 are rather quiet and tend to give very short answers to the teacher's questions. They do not get enough practice in giving extended spoken explanations or answers to enable them to use their experience of speaking about a topic to improve the precision of their written answers.
89. In both Year 12 and Year 13, students' files contain notes covering the required topics in appropriate depth and detail. However, these notes are not always as well organised and clearly presented as they should be if they are to be really useful for revision. This is one weakness that lies behind the problems in organic chemistry where it is important for students to appreciate the underlying patterns.
90. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers know their subject well and plan lessons carefully to provide appropriate learning activities for students. There are good relationships between teachers and students, and students have positive attitudes to the subject. Students enjoy practical work and work efficiently and thoughtfully in, for example, identifying transition metals and writing formulae for the

complexes formed and equations for the reactions. Throughout that lesson, the teacher moved between students, questioning them closely and ensuring that they understood what they were doing and were making full use of the available evidence. Teachers make appropriate use of ICT to support learning in chemistry, with particularly interesting use of CD-ROMs for gaining information on spectroscopy.

91. Teachers give tests at the end of each topic and mark those tests well, usually giving clear indications where the student has gone wrong and what A-level grade is being achieved. They also provide many questions from previous examination papers for students to do in class and for homework. This is valuable for students in testing what they have understood and giving practice for examinations. However, many of the answers to these questions are incomplete or poorly presented. They are often not marked by the teacher, and not corrected by the students, so that students are not learning as much as they should from answering these questions.
92. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The head of department analyses results carefully and has made appropriate adjustments to the curriculum as a result. He has, for example, introduced organic chemistry earlier in the course to allow more time for students to assimilate the ideas. However, there is not yet enough monitoring of students' files to ensure that each student is working as efficiently as possible. The head of department was absent from school at the time of the inspection. However, the school is fortunate in having a skilled and experienced specialist who is providing temporary cover in sixth form chemistry.
93. There has been satisfactory progress in chemistry since the time of the previous inspection. Standards have improved from below average at that time to broadly average in the current Year 12 and Year 13.

Physics

Overall, the quality of provision for physics is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and can relate lessons to everyday life.
- Teachers make themselves available to give students extra help.

Areas for improvement

- Marking is very poor so neither students nor teachers have a true picture of how well students are achieving.
- Too much time is spent on basic level work so higher attainers underachieve.

94. The school offers courses at AS-level and A-level. The subject attracts viable numbers each year; there are currently five students in Year 13 and 24 in Year 12. It is rare for a student not to complete a course.
95. Whilst no student failed in either year the results in the 2001 A-level examination were below average and were similar in 2002. Students gained results in physics that, overall, were similar to those they obtained in their other subjects. However, this overall result masks the true picture of lower attaining students doing well, but higher attainers underachieving badly.
96. The standards of students currently in Years 12 and 13 are below average. Students in Year 13 are doing as well as expected, but those in Year 12 are underachieving, particularly the higher attainers. Students in Year 13 have a satisfactory knowledge of

the topics they have studied, but their work files are poor. Their notes are disorganised and scrappy. Most of the written work consists of single sentences, often incomplete, with no longer, written passages at all. Calculations are poorly presented and often contain minor errors, such as missing units or incorrect indices. Students in Year 12 have better folders, with longer and more complete notes. Nevertheless, calculations are sometimes incorrect or, as in Year 13, have elements, such as units, missing. Students in Year 12 have a below average knowledge of the topics they have studied; failure rates in recent tests have been very high. They have a good basic knowledge of their topics, but this is not extended into any real depth of understanding; they are able to answer questions superficially rather than really explain what is happening in a given situation.

97. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and can produce lively lessons that are illustrated well by their wider understanding of the applications of physics, such as referring to the temperatures on distant moons as measured during the Voyager survey. Nevertheless, there are significant weaknesses in the teaching. Marking is very poor; very little work is marked in any way whatsoever. Some tests are marked, but the students mark others themselves. This means that neither students nor teachers have a good enough idea of how well the students are progressing and mistakes in students' written work go uncorrected. Another result of the very poor marking is that teachers do not have the information to allow them to plan lessons that can address weaknesses that might have been identified.
98. The planning of lessons is poor; there are no schemes or lesson plans from which to work and this results in lessons that are undemanding of higher attainers in particular, although lower attainers do well as the basics are covered so thoroughly. Too much lesson time is taken up with revision of the basics without pushing on quickly enough to the more demanding work. Much of this revision could be done for homework, as could the questions that students in Year 13 spent a whole lesson answering. Time is also wasted in some lessons, such as one where the teacher laboriously worked through some test questions without involving the students. The higher attainers had already got the answers correct anyway, while lower attainers switched off and started to misbehave. On the whole, however, students enjoy the subject because the teachers are always available to help them.
99. The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory. The head of science has overall responsibility for physics and is not aware of what is happening in lessons because nobody checks on the quality of teaching or marking. Teachers are not aware of their students' targets; there is no documentation to support the teachers and no plans to address any of the weaknesses. Progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory. Standards remain below average, as do examination results. Teaching is worse and students are now underachieving.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus for the inspection was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching.

- Relationships between teachers and students are very good and lead to a good deal of mutual trust.
- Teachers give up a great deal of their spare time to help students with project work.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not always answer questions in enough depth.
- The pace of lessons varies from rapid through to more pedestrian.

100. The school offers AS-level and A-level in product design and Intermediate General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in Engineering. Each year there are around 30 students who choose to study design and technology-based courses and it is rare for a student not to complete the course. Results in the 2001 A-level examinations were well below average and students did worse in design and technology than in most of the other subjects they studied. Results in 2002 were similar.
101. In work seen, by the end of Year 13, standards are average and this represents good achievement given these students' attainment on entry to the course. Results were disappointing in 2001 and the head of department analysed what went wrong and has tightened up on assessment procedures and produced a much more structured scheme of work. This is leading to higher standards in the classroom than recent examination results would suggest. Students' standards of practical skills are above average. Most students are able to measure, mark out and shape a range of materials. For example, in a Year 13 class, students were preparing their major projects. One student's project involved the production of a 'workbench'; this was of good quality, the fabrication work was accurate and the student had paid good attention to detail. Design work is average although there are weaknesses in the depth of answer that students give. For example, in a Year 12 class, students could name different design groups such as Memphis and Bauhaus but struggled to explain how these influenced their own projects.
102. By the end of Year 12, standards are average and this represents satisfactory progress. Students have a sound grasp of manufacturing techniques. In a Year 12 Intermediate GNVQ engineering class, students had a good grasp of how a lamp stand might be manufactured and the processes involved. Students have good ICT skills and use computer-aided design/computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM) well; for example, a Year 12 student used the computerised milling machine to produce a grill for his project which saved him considerable time.
103. All students make good progress; for example, students who do well at GNVQ then go on to study AS-level product design.
104. The quality of teaching and the learning that it promotes is good. Teachers have a very good knowledge not only of the subject material but also of the examination syllabus. For example, in a Year 12 class, the teacher provided students with helpful hints on what constitutes a high quality design specification. There are very good relationships between students and teachers and between students themselves. For example, in a Year 12 class, a female student struggled with the design for her CD-storage device and was very well supported by a group of males who aided her with her design. The pace of lessons varies from rapid through to more pedestrian. For example, in a Year 12 class on mind-mapping techniques, the pace was slow, the lesson was rather uninspiring and students gave the appearance of being uninterested. Work is well marked and there are helpful and constructive comments on students' work that help them to improve their work. Teachers have high expectations of students and they are rewarded with loyalty from their students;

teachers give up a tremendous amount of their free time to support students with project work. Homework is well set and extends students' learning.

105. The subject is well led and managed. The specialist Technology College funding has had a major impact on improving the quality of accommodation and resources; particularly impressive are the CAD/CAM resources which are used by all students in the school. The subject has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. Standards are similar and the good quality of teaching has been maintained.

BUSINESS

The focus for the inspection was on business studies.

Overall, the quality of provision for business studies is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching leads to students achieving well in Years 12 and 13.
- The well-established links with the local business community lead to students having a sound, practical understanding of business organisation.
- The very good procedures to assess students' progress inform them clearly about how well they are doing.

Area for improvement

- Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to be self-reliant in learning, or expect enough of them in discussion.

106. The school offers courses at AS-level and A-level in business studies. It is rare for students not to complete their chosen course. The A-level course commenced in 2000 and the first results obtained were in 2002. All students achieved at least a pass grade with several gaining the higher A or B grades. Male students attained higher grades than female students did.

107. Standards seen in both Year 12 and Year 13 are currently average. This represents good achievement given the standard of entry to the course. Students' theoretical studies are well supported through their practical knowledge of the organisation of business. In Year 13, for example, students achieved well in applying their studies about contingency planning and crisis management in companies to a study about how a multi-national company managed global issues, following customer reaction to the decision to change the taste of the product. High standards were attained by a group of students in work with Merseytravel to develop a new marketing strategy. Students researched the project well, analysed information and presented a report of their findings. Students know a range of business terms such as 'stakeholder' and understand how businesses plan strategies to meet the interests of different groups such as shareholders and employees. Higher attaining students produce above average standards in written assignments. They know about sources of business finance and how businesses prepare balance sheets, whilst lower attaining students know about different types of business costs and reasons for the location of business, but do not evaluate the methods about why firms locate in places in sufficient detail. Generally students do not make enough use of knowledge of actual businesses in assignments.

108. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. Teachers are enthusiastic and have very good subject knowledge. Students respond well to encouragement and

consistently make good progress. This is particularly evident in the high quality of assessment of assignments when strengths and weaknesses are indicated and guidance given on improvement. As a result, the standards of many students rise quickly. Teachers expect much of students' effort and the standards they reach. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students discussed ideas about social and ethical responsibility of companies and then related their findings to issues about waste disposal in Runcorn. They concentrated well, accepted the challenges presented and made very good progress in improving their understanding about how businesses meet the expectations of different interest groups. Resources are used well, particularly materials produced by the teachers, and they provide a good foundation for learning. Learning is managed well but better use could be made of lesson summaries. Frequently teachers talk too much and do not make enough demands on students in discussion with the result that students are passively engaged in learning. Similarly, insufficient importance is attached to lesson summaries because not enough time is planned and students are not asked to show how much they have learned.

109. Leadership and management are good. The newly developed course is well planned with clear policies and practice to promote learning. The curriculum is well supported through links with business such as the local education and business partnership. The arrangements to assess attainment and progress are very good and students know what is expected of them, but the training of students to contribute to the assessment of their performance is at an early stage of development and not yet contributing to improving standards. Resources for learning are very good and effective use is being made of ICT to research assignments and present work. There was no report on the current business course at the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus for the inspection was on computer studies.

Computer studies

Overall, the quality of provision for computer studies is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers are knowledgeable about their subject and support students well in lessons.
- Students have good attitudes to the subject because they enjoy using the up-to-date computers and Internet facilities.
- There are good relationships between staff and students.

Areas for improvement

- The below average results attained in A-level examinations.
- The marking of students' work lacks the rigour necessary to enable the students to achieve high grades.
- The course studied is not appropriate to the needs and abilities of most students.

110. The school offers courses in AS-level and A-level computer studies. Most of those who begin the AS-level course complete the year and take the examination, but do not choose to continue with the subject in Year 13.
111. Results at A-level were below the national average in 2001. Overall, students did not do as well in computer studies as they did on average in their other subjects. Results dropped in 2002; many students did not do as well as they should have done.

112. The standards of work seen during the inspection are below average in both Year 12 and Year 13. This represents satisfactory achievement given students' standards on entry to the course. Not all students have experience of computers prior to starting the computing course. Most students studied the GCSE ICT short course but generally struggle with the transfer to the computing course. Students joining the course from other schools have even less experience of ICT, but are still allowed to take the subject. The school is reviewing its admission policy for the course.
113. Higher attaining students can confidently validate their method of data entry and show good understanding of file organisation and processing. They can identify the possible sources of error in their programming and can test their work effectively. For example, a Year 12 male student designing a model examining board information program carefully ensured he cross-checked the security and integrity of his data. Students' understanding of basic programming is generally weak; many students are struggling with the programming module. Standards in this unit are well below those expected. Lower attainers can copy-type the program code into their programs with reasonable accuracy but struggle with producing an accurate specification for the required system. In one Year 13 lesson, two male students had difficulty in recognising their own code for future referencing.
114. Students in both Year 12 and Year 13 have adequate literacy skills and good experience of note taking. They use calculators well to check their formulae and there is good use of numeracy skills when writing program code. Students' notes are appropriately detailed but the files are generally disorganised and scruffy; they do not provide a good enough resource for revision. Many contain mistakes in algorithms and code entries that could cause problems during further study.
115. The quality of teaching and the learning that it promotes are satisfactory. The best feature of the teaching is the very good knowledge and understanding of teachers. A good atmosphere for learning is established in most lessons. In the best lessons students are well supported because the teacher shares the aims so that students understand what they are going to achieve and how they will do it. Subject content is accurate and teachers explain principles well. Occasionally, the teaching is not as effective because too much time is devoted to one practical activity and students produce work at their own pace, which is often too slow. Teachers do not break these sessions up with additional information or evaluations of how well students are doing, although some helpful feedback is given. Marking of work is not consistent and rarely gives enough information to help the students to understand how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve. Teachers do not check the students' files to see if they are organised in a helpful way and that information is correct. Consequently some students' notes contain errors and are not useful as a source of revision.
116. Students are attentive in lessons and show a keen interest in using computers. They enjoy using the up-to-date computers and Internet facilities. However, students are frequently late for lessons, some arriving up to 12 minutes late. This is having a negative effect on their learning and results in wasted time, with teachers having to repeat instructions.
117. Leadership and management are satisfactory and have resulted in sound progress since the last inspection. The head of department has a clear vision for the future but has taken too long in realising the unsuitability of the current course. Documentation is comprehensive. The department is provided with a great deal of detailed assessment information but is not using it to ensure students make enough progress.

Accurate records of students' progress are not kept and teachers do not have any written evaluation of how students are doing. Students have clear targets but they do not know how well they are progressing towards them because they are given only verbal feedback. This is not enough for them to ensure they are covering all aspects of the course as well as possible.

118. Students are generally happy with the course but it is not the one that is most appropriate to their needs; it is far too theory-based with an over-emphasis on programming, which they find very difficult to understand. The department is reviewing this and intends to introduce ICT courses from next year.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus for the inspection was on sports/physical education studies.

Sports/physical education studies

Overall, the quality of provision for sports/physical education studies is **good**.

Strengths

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good; teachers have very good knowledge and good expectations of their students and students achieve well.
- The subject is well led and standards are rising.
- Good relationships together with students' good attitudes contribute to a purposeful learning environment.

Areas for improvement

- Greater consistency in marking and improved monitoring of students' work are needed in order to improve examination results.
- The monitoring of teaching takes place within the department; however, regular, consistent and focused observation of teaching is needed to share good practice.
- There are insufficient timetabled opportunities for physical recreation in the sixth form.

119. The school offers sports/physical education studies at AS-level and A-level. Retention rates are good and it is very rare for a student not to complete the course. In the current sixth form, 28 students study the subject of whom nine students are studying it at A-level. Over the last four years similar numbers of students, predominantly male students, have studied A-level sports/physical education studies with the majority of students passing the subject. About a quarter of sixth form students are involved with extra-curricular activities, and inter-school, district and county sports.
120. In 2001, standards in A-level sports studies were below the national average. The A-level results in 2002 were much better than those in 2001 with all students gaining a pass; however, few students gained the higher grades. In 2002, data shows students achieved well in terms of their transition from GCSE work and students' performance was in line with their other subjects.
121. In the work seen during the inspection the standards that students attain by the end of Year 12 are above average and this represents a good level of achievement for those students. Students show a good knowledge of warm-up prior to physical activity and cool-down after taking part. The majority of Year 12 students show a good understanding of the anatomy of the heart and how different parts operate when undergoing physical exercise. They successfully use technical words, like pulmonary vein and tricuspid valves, in their correct context. Most students successfully take

pulse rates and plot graphs in order to analyse heart rates before, during and after activity; they analyse fit and less fit colleagues from the data. Higher attaining students understand oxygen debt is related to recovery rates.

122. In the work seen during the inspection the standards that students attain by the end of Year 13 are above average and this represents a good level of achievement for those students. Students show a good understanding of biomechanics. They relate this knowledge to different sports. For example, in high jumping when good technicians use the Fosbury Flop, the performer's centre of gravity passes under the bar whilst the jumper successfully clears the bar. Most are able to give examples of techniques in long jump, triple jumping, throwing and striking activities where the laws of gravity can be used to advantage. Year 13 students, when studying American Sport begin to understand the different culture of the 'Lombardian Ethic' that winning is everything and of the 'American Dream' that success regardless of race or class is all consuming. They successfully compare and contrast the American experience with their own Liverpool and UK experience.
123. Teaching is consistently good and students learn well as a result. One of the best features of the teaching is the very good subject knowledge of teachers. This is used effectively when questioning the students, but is even more evident when the teacher answers questions asked by the students, as seen in a Year 13 lesson on American Sport. Teachers have a genuine enthusiasm for their subject; they have high expectations of their students. Relationships are good between staff and students, which creates a good atmosphere for learning. Student management is very good. Teachers motivate students well and they respond well to the challenges that are given. For example, in a Year 12 lesson students successfully engaged in a practical activity locating the different veins, arteries and chambers of the heart. Teaching methods overall are very good and they are among the strengths of the programme. Methods involve students in their learning, such as a class mind-mapping exercise, small group work and student presentations. Good use is made by teachers and students of a range of ICT, for instance, heart rate monitors and computers. Use of computers, both at home and at school, enhances lesson presentations and students' work.
124. Students are interested in their lessons; they concentrate well and work hard. Teachers regularly make effective comments on students' written work; however, marking is often inconsistent, with limited targets given. As a consequence students, at times, are unsure how they can improve their work.
125. The leadership and management of sixth form physical education are good. There are good and effective procedures for assessment of students' progress. Good improvements were made to the tracking and regular monitoring of students' progress; this was a consequence of the below average A-level results in 2001. However, the tracking of progress is, as yet, not in sufficient depth to impact on raising examination results. Teachers are observed teaching as part of performance management. However, regular, consistent and focused observation of teaching is needed to extend teaching expertise in the different modules. Documentation and schemes of work are well produced and ensure lessons are well planned. Extra-curricular activities are strong beyond the inter-school level especially in basketball, football and cricket. The school cricket team is successful and travels afar to play their fixtures against both state and private schools.
126. A few references were made in the last report about sixth form physical education. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Teaching, assessment and

teaching methods have improved; the positive features reported have been maintained.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus for the inspection was on art and design.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- The very good quality of teaching challenges and extends students, helping them to develop their own style with confidence.
- Students reach a high standard in drawing and painting skills.
- The sensitive and expert assessment of students' work effectively supports their learning and progress throughout the sixth form

Areas for improvement

- Cramped and unsatisfactory accommodation constrains the range of students' work and prevents access to studios outside timetabled lessons.
- The study of artists should be expanded to include non-western cultures and contexts.

127. The school offers course at AS-level and A-level in art and design. Numbers opting for AS-level and A-level courses are relatively small. It is rare for a student not to complete the course of study. Results in the A-level examination in 2001 were below average but improved significantly in 2002 and were the highest results for some years. When 2001 students' A-level results are seen in relation to their GCSE results, they achieved well and many students achieved very well. Standards at the last inspection were below the national average and this was a period of time when results at A-level remained low. This trend has been reversed and standards are rising fast. Results in AS-level are supporting this upward trend of improvement. There are a few female students who join the school at sixth form level and their results represent very good achievement.
128. The standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average in both Years 12 and 13. Achievement is particularly strong in Year 12 where a high proportion of students are making very good progress in lessons. Most students can confidently communicate ideas in visual form. Students reach a particularly high standard in drawing and painting. One Year 13 student has made a series of dynamically formed paintings full of life and vigour. This work is of exceptional quality and the actual painting process had an unusually personal and reflective intensity. The student used paint trailing techniques and, while referring to portraits, these images were very mature responses to Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionism. Drawing is used expressively and powerfully and there are bold, large-scale examples of tonal portraits after the work of Chuck Close. Students use paint with courage and fluency; they also use collage in personal studies but three-dimensional work is less confident. The department's cramped and unsatisfactory accommodation has a direct impact on the development of three-dimensional work.
129. Good, informed connections are made with artists both past and present and students have made personal and reflective records of visits to the Tate Modern and the Liverpool Biennale. Students are highly responsive to artists' ideas and particularly the expressive and emotional content of artists' work. They are encouraged to make a

personal connection with artists; one student's folio, for example, included powerful responses to the work of Leon Kossof and German expressionism. Students are able to take responsibility for their learning and their individual enquiry can lead to very independent work. Many students display confident use of vocabulary and critical language. When questioned about their work students show maturity and clarity about their ideas. Work journals indicate that most students are able to critically evaluate their work both orally and in writing. While the study of contemporary art forms is good, students would benefit from broadening their knowledge by a greater opportunity to explore art from non-western cultures and traditions.

130. Standards in Year 12 are well above average and these students are building effectively on the skills that they acquired last year. Their painting is exciting, free and full of feeling. Several students use materials in a loose and fluent way and synthesise and adapt artists' styles with sensitivity. Skills in the use of acrylic paint are developing well and there are good examples of thickly applied textural works and others where the use of thin washes and glazes creates layers of rich colour. Students are able to acknowledge influences and talk technically about their research and investigation. There is growing use of ICT to help develop visual ideas. One student has used digital photography and 'cut and paste' effects to create complex collage works. Others use the scanner to digitise their work and develop this further using appropriate software.
131. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Subject staff are experienced and skilled and there is a good level of craft teaching. The teaching of drawing and painting is particularly strong. High expectations clearly challenge students and encourage an intense pace, which is particularly brisk in Year 12. Teachers give confidence to students to explore and experiment freely so that they develop their own ideas and style; for example, the student whose series of dynamic spattered portrait works showed an exceptional level of personal engagement. The pressure of AS-level and A-level unit creation is carefully managed by teachers' good planning. The quality of teachers' assessment is a strength of the department. Students are well supported in their understanding of assessment requirements and all students are aware of their progress or otherwise. Teachers provide direct and sensitive oral feedback to individual students and this has the form of personal mentoring. Teachers carefully apply the assessment matrix together with students so that they understand where they are and what they have to do to improve. Students are challenged to experiment and to discover their own personal response to artists. Teachers are very good at developing students' ability to engage with feelings and ideas in art and design. By exposure to contemporary art forms in galleries and museums students are extended and challenged effectively. Work journals are conscientiously developed with clear guidance from teachers, although some weaker students need more help to develop imaginative and divergent ways of presenting their work journals. Relationships are warm and productive.
132. There has been good improvement in standards and teaching since the last inspection, but art and design accommodation has not improved. Teachers manage their unsatisfactory accommodation with remarkable efficiency but the cramped conditions do affect the quality of sixth formers' learning. Four students in Year 12 have to work in a crowded stairwell. The lack of hot water makes cleaning difficult, particularly with the widespread use of acrylic paint. Teachers do their best to accommodate students outside of the timetable but generally they are unable to support students' independent study time because of pressure on studio space. Cramped studios, separated rooms, and lack of storage severely limit the extension of ICT, three-dimensional, photographic and installation forms of art at sixth form level.

HUMANITIES

The focus for the inspection was on geography and psychology.

Geography

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

Strengths

- The quality and range of the curriculum are very well enhanced by opportunities for fieldwork.
- The subject makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and helps them broaden their knowledge and understanding of global environments.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the standards attained at A-level by making more demands on students in learning and improve the guidance given in assessment of extended work.
- Develop the schemes of work to improve the coherence of curriculum planning and guidance to teachers.

133. The school offers courses at AS-level and A-level geography. The A-level results in 2001 were well below average and students did less well in geography than they did in the other subjects that they studied. The most recent results, however, are an improvement with students averaging a much higher points score than in 2001. Female students attained higher grades than males did with half of the male students failing to gain the lowest grade. Most students completed the course.

134. The standards of work seen during the inspection are average. This represents satisfactory achievement overall, given students' standards on entry to the course. They are achieving well in fieldwork but less so in their ongoing work. In Year 13, for example, students achieved above average standards in work on beach profiles of Llandudno, with higher attaining students able to research and apply information very well in order to reach conclusions. In work on industrial location, however, standards are lower than expected because students do not make sufficient use of examples or analyse information enough. Students have good knowledge of physical geography and are able to apply theoretical study to places such as Holderness and the Dorset coast. They know an appropriate range of technical terms such as 'longshore drift' in studies about the changing shape of coasts and of the methods used to protect it from erosion. Students usually incorporate maps and diagrams in assignments but they do not consistently link written and illustrative aspects of the work, and attainment is lower as a result. Students have a sound level of knowledge of global topics such as population growth in contrasting areas and understand the challenge that this brings to countries. In other work students are insecure in their understanding about the composition and effect on the atmosphere in producing climate change as a result of the emission of 'greenhouse' gases, and do not readily recall work previously covered. In oral work many students lack self-confidence and do not engage well in discussion to show their understanding of topics.

135. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers are well qualified and have substantial experience and this is having a positive impact on learning because students are attentive and listen carefully to explanations. As a result, they improve

their knowledge and understanding of topics. In a study of coastal protection measures at New Brighton, for example, students made gains in knowledge of the measures to protect the beach from erosion because the teacher explained points clearly and illustrated developments with video film. The learning objectives of lessons are fully shared with students and homework is well used to extend learning. The planning of lessons is sound because teachers consolidate and build on work previously covered but they do not make effective use of a summary session to engage students to explain what they have learned. The methods used to promote learning in lessons, however, lack variety and students are not actively involved enough. Learning is very teacher centred; teachers talk for lengthy periods of time and do not make sufficient demands on students to support learning. Consequently students are not always making enough progress.

136. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The curriculum is broad and extended through first-hand study of places such as Chester and Llandudno. Links with Liverpool University help consolidate learning and inform students about opportunities available through higher education. The subject also makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness through topics such as the differences of development in countries like Japan and Mexico. Teachers plan their own programmes of study but consistency and appropriateness of study are not assured because there is no central planning and direction of teaching and learning. The procedures for assessing progress are good, but there is insufficient guidance given in extended pieces of work about how to improve standards.
137. Satisfactory progress has been made since the previous inspection. Standards continue to be average and teaching has been maintained at a satisfactory level, but the over-reliance on teacher-directed learning continues.

Psychology

Overall, the quality of provision for psychology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Good teacher knowledge supports students' learning through clear guidance.
- Positive student/teacher relationships create a very good learning environment.

Areas for improvement

- Effectiveness of the subject is not best served by the shared management role.
- Unsatisfactory attendance by some students hinders achievement and therefore attainment.
- Lack of variety and challenge in teaching strategies does not encourage independent learning.

138. The school offers courses at AS-level and A-level psychology and the number of students taking up the course is rising. There are 38 students in Year 12 with an equal number of males and females. Almost all students complete the course and the retention rate into A-level is high.
139. The A-level results in 2001 were average, and this represented an improvement on 2000 results, but results were not sustained in 2002. The main reason cited as to why students did not do as well as expected, compared to their GCSE results, was incomplete coursework and unsatisfactory attendance.

140. The standards of work seen during the inspection are average in both Years 12 and 13; this represents a satisfactory level of achievement. Students are able to summarise a psychological theory succinctly and compare it to others. They have a good grasp of the methodology of a psychological investigation and use terminology with understanding, for example, ecological validity and the function of the null hypothesis. They are becoming more proficient in analysing the implications of experimentation, for example, the ethical consequences. Skills in developing an argument, however, are weak and often written work is minimal and shallow, indicating a lack of research and real intellectual effort. Students are proficient in using ICT to present their own experiments and coursework, using spreadsheets and graphs very effectively to illustrate their results.
141. Year 12 work seen includes examples of extended writing and the growing ability to marshal arguments coherently and quote from literature to support a point of view. Students' grasp of methodology is becoming more secure although there is still misunderstanding of the function of variables and control groups. Research skills are still underdeveloped.
142. Teaching is satisfactory overall with some good examples where it effectively reinforces previous learning through frequent testing of students' understanding. Teachers have both good subject knowledge and a good relationship with students which encourages them to seek help and receive good oral feedback from their assignments. Where teaching is good there is a good pace in lessons which creates a purposeful working atmosphere and a variety of strategies where the students become involved. For example, a very good role-play of Milgram's experiment was stimulating and helped all the students to appreciate what his hypotheses were. Group work and discussion encourage self-learning but there are many opportunities missed when the lesson is too teacher-dominated or the style of questioning is not searching enough to challenge the students to think further and deeper. Teachers' expectations of the students' contribution to their own learning are low with the result that many opportunities to challenge the students to carry out a significant amount of research of their own are not made use of.
143. Students are interested in the subject, seeing it as useful for their own personal development as well as an academic option. They are attentive in class and engage readily in discussion, with the higher attaining students taking the lead. Year 12 students are generally enthusiastic and work well but there are less than satisfactory attitudes in Year 13, where the level of non-attendance at lessons is high and the pace and productivity of students' work lack intellectual effort. Students are aware of their progress and know what level they are working at and what targets they are to aim for. Assessment procedures are beginning to have a very positive effect on progress and achievement in Year 12 and these are regularly reviewed with the students individually.
144. There is a lack of access to computers within the department, particularly the facility to present information using computers. There is not enough use of ICT to support and encourage independent research and learning. Most reference books are kept in the department rather than the library
145. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory but there is a lack of a clear sense of direction and vision for future development. The role is a crucial one if standards are to be raised but there is some role confusion in the shared responsibility of the subject at present. The development plan is generic in many of its targets (for example, 'make the delivery of the subject more attractive' – with no

indication of how this is to be done or any indication of results). Monitoring of learning is now in place and making a significant impact but sharing of good practice has yet to be implemented. Schemes of work are based on the modules and aims of the syllabus but are lacking in any detail, for instance, how the topics are to be delivered in the actual lessons.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus for the inspection was on English literature and French.

English literature

Overall, the quality of provision for English literature is **good**.

Strengths

- Students' achievement is good and they attain standards that are above the national average for the subject; the quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Students have a good understanding of the requirements of the course.

Areas for improvement

- On occasions, some lessons are so fully led by the teacher that students can become passive.
- Some students do not develop independent learning skills to the extent that might be expected.

146. In 2001, results in the A-level examination were well above the national average. Results have fluctuated over the past four years. In 1998 they were well above the national average, in 1999 they were in line with it and in 2000 they were below it. In 2002 results were similar to those obtained in 2001. Currently, attainment is above average. When students' prior attainment is taken into account, their achievement is good.

147. The subject is a popular choice at A-level and a high proportion of students who start the course finish it, whether to AS-level or A-level.

148. By the time they reach the end of Year 13 students are articulate, accustomed to working in groups and ready to advance their understanding by sharing their views with others. This was seen, for example, in a Year 12 lesson on a poem by John Donne, in which students presented different views as to exactly what certain lines might mean; then they went on to discuss, in fine detail, just what the correct version was most likely to be. In this work, lower attainers were able to present a coherent paraphrase of the poem, whilst higher attainers could offer an evaluation of the techniques that the poet had used. Students listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others and make a note of any matters they feel are important. Most of the written work seen was of a high standard. Students are able to write effectively on a good range of topics including, for example, providing an explanation of why a soliloquy from one of Shakespeare's plays is effective in analysing the main themes presented in a major twentieth century novel such as *Catch 22*. Essays are well structured and evaluative. Students have a good understanding of the requirements of the course and understand the assessment criteria they are expected to meet. In some lessons seen, students tended to rely too heavily upon the teachers to produce ideas and were less active in developing independent learning skills than might be expected.

149. The quality of teaching and learning is good; some of it is very good. When teaching is most effective, teachers possess very good subject knowledge. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson on the significance of the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. The teacher's skilled questioning and her ability to draw parallels between different passages from the text ensured that students better understood the play's intellectual and artistic complexity. Teachers also possess a very good understanding of the course's requirements and frequently remind students of what is needed of them if they are to attain high standards. Students particularly value their work being marked against the relevant assessment objectives. This enables them to set themselves precise targets to improve their standards further. Students' interest is aroused and their involvement in the lessons is all the greater when the teacher introduces stimulating resources. This was seen, for example, in a Year 13 lesson introducing students to a play by Samuel Beckett. Students were able to study a review of a production of the play. This helped them to enjoy the play when they started reading it and not to feel confused by some of its more unusual features. When the pace of the lesson is good and a variety of tasks is introduced, students concentrate well and learn quickly. When the lesson is too much led by the teacher, students can become passive and their learning is relatively slow. Some opportunities are missed to require students to develop their independent learning skills.
150. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. Students' standards and the quality of teaching both have improved. Leadership and management of the department are good.

French

Overall, the quality of provision for French is **very good**.

Strengths

- Levels of attainment in work seen are well above average, and examination results, which are equally high, have shown steady improvement since the previous inspection.
- The teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are fluent speakers of French.
- The students are well motivated and work hard.
- Leadership of the A-level team is very strong, giving clear educational and strategic direction for teaching French at this level.

Areas for improvement

- The students' higher order speaking skills develop less surely than their skills in listening, reading and writing.
- The teachers' marking of the students' work is only satisfactory: insufficient use is made of A-level grading and of comment that would help the students to improve the quality of their work.
- Procedures for assessing the students' work are very good, but better use could be made of the data gathered to give the department and the students a clearer basis for tracking progress and discussing improvement.

151. The school offers courses in French at AS-level and A-level. There are five students currently in Year 12, and 13 students in Year 13; the majority are male. To date, all students who have begun the AS-level course have proceeded to the A-level course and have successfully taken the examination.
152. Results attained by the students in the 2001 A-level examination were well above average for both females and males; the candidates achieved more highly in A-level French than in the other subjects they took. Results in 2002 were similarly high. Since

1998 nearly all the males have achieved the highest grades, A or B; the females' results have been more mixed, largely reflecting a difference in attainment on entry between males and females. Over recent years a clear rising trend in students gaining the highest grades emerges, against a largely static national trend.

153. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average. Levels of understanding of spoken and written French are very good, and the students show very good knowledge of the topics they are studying. At the beginning of Year 12, they build rapidly on their GCSE level French, acquiring a good knowledge of more complex grammar, and of a wide range of vocabulary and idiom. By the end of Year 13 most are able to write convincingly and relatively accurately in French, and the highest attainers are attempting with some success to vary their written language with a degree of style and sophistication. This represents a very good level of achievement for these students over the two years of the course. Speaking skills are less well developed. The students speak French accurately, and a few have excellent accents and intonation. Some are able to discuss and disagree effectively in French, but the majority do not develop the confidence to speak out clearly and fluently, to initiate language, and to speak in more extended, idiomatic French.
154. The students have very good attitudes to learning and are developing some independence in their approach to work. They work well on their own and prepare effectively for lessons. They expect to speak French in lessons, and respond appropriately when asked questions by the teacher. Some are more forthcoming, and are able to sustain a simple argument in the foreign language. Relationships are very positive, both between students and with the teacher, and are a significant factor in the development of very good attitudes to the learning of French and an appreciation of French culture.
155. Teaching is very good overall, and as a result the students learn very well and make very good progress. The teachers are fluent speakers of French and have very good knowledge of the topics that form an important part of study at this level. They have all recently undertaken training in using computers, and their ICT skills are used to good effect in their teaching, particularly in using authentic, up-to-date sources of information. For example, in a very good Year 12 lesson on differences between the French and English education systems, the students were able to benefit from the views of current French students, as expressed in on-line discussion forums. Since all the messages had been posted within the previous fortnight, this lent significant immediacy and authenticity to their work. All the teachers use French consistently as a medium of teaching and expect the students to use it too. In a good Year 13 lesson on the French media the teacher engaged the students well through the foreign language, asking plenty of questions to ensure they understood the new vocabulary and ideas, prompting them to remember vocabulary and ideas they had learned previously, and challenging them by introducing more complex language.
156. The teachers plan very carefully for their lessons, choosing strategies and carefully constructed language tasks, which ensure that each stage of the lesson prepares very well for the next. For example, in another good Year 13 lesson the students worked in pairs on a French text in which they had been asked to find specific examples of crimes against humanity; this meant that they were well equipped with the ideas and vocabulary to enable them to contribute to a subsequent discussion. The teaching is not wholly successful in developing the students' ability to speak French fluently, independently and spontaneously, largely because the teachers give them more opportunities to listen than to speak. For example, during the inspection the students were not challenged to give extended answers, to initiate conversation,

or to use more complex structures in their oral contributions. All students, including those with special educational needs, are given very good support in lessons, which helps them to develop confidence and a good understanding of what they are doing. Pace is brisk, and the teachers ensure the work offers plenty of variety and intellectual challenge so that the students are well engaged and work hard. Good use is made of homework to consolidate and extend work done in the lesson, and to offer opportunities for independent study. Marking is broadly satisfactory, but the students are not given a clear picture of how well they are progressing towards their A-level goal, because A-level grading is not used frequently enough, and there is only occasional use made of critical comment explaining in specific, helpful terms how students might improve the quality of their work.

157. The leadership of French in the sixth form is very good. There are some excellent features, particularly the very strong educational direction for the work of the team of A-level teachers and the French assistante, and the ethos and teamwork in the department. These are significant factors in the students' success and very positive attitudes to their work. Management is also very good overall, and teachers are very well deployed and supported. Although monitoring of teaching and learning in the classroom takes place regularly, it is not done sufficiently frequently, so the department does not yet have a clear basis for review and for setting targets for continuous improvement. Examination results are analysed critically and accurately, and there are very good procedures for assessing the students' work, although fuller use could be made of the data gathered to track students' progress and set realistic targets. There are very good additional opportunities outside the classroom for students to deepen their understanding of French culture and to improve their language skills, such as master classes at universities, theatre visits to see French plays, and work experience in France. At the time of the last inspection, provision for A-level French was effective, and the department has continued to make good progress since then.