

INSPECTION REPORT

ORMSKIRK SCHOOL

Ormskirk, Lancashire

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique reference number: 132834

Headteacher: Mr John Doyle

Reporting inspector: Mr Tony Byrne
2561

Dates of inspection: 9th – 13th December 2002

Inspection number: 249862

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of pupils:	11 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Wigan Road Ormskirk Lancashire
Postcode:	L39 2AT
Telephone number:	01695 572625
Fax number:	01695 572348
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C. R. Baily
Date of previous inspection:	n/a

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2561	Tony Byrne	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? Attainment and achievement How well are pupils and students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What sort of school is it?
10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector	Inclusion	Attitudes, behaviour, personal development/relationships and attendance How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
1475	Val Lynch	Team inspector		
30597	Robina Howells	Team inspector	Mathematics	
32289	Tony Lydon	Team inspector	Science	
12568	Christopher Morris	Team inspector	English	
1578	Maureen Sinclair	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Religious education	
18854	Malcolm McGregor	Team inspector	Art and design Information and communication technology – 6 th form	
30215	Helen Feasey	Team inspector	Geography	
31525	Sue O'Sullivan	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
10361	Frank Evans	Team inspector	History	
32225	Christine Hough	Team inspector	Physical education	
18670	Peter Tidmarsh	Team inspector	Music	
10010	George Wallace	Team inspector	Business studies	
24453	Gordan Jackson	Team inspector	Science	
10209	Vincent Gormally	Team inspector	Design and technology	
13217	Malcolm Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs	
2866	Robert Battey	Team inspector	Psychology	
31660	Marianne Young	Team inspector	Citizenship	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
19056	Graham Leech	Team inspector	English support	

The inspection contractor was:

TWA Inspections Ltd
102 Bath Road, Cheltenham
Gloucestershire. GL53 7JZ

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

With more than 1600 pupils, Ormskirk is a very large school, much bigger than average. It is a new school, formed in September 2001 by the amalgamation of Cross Hall High and Ormskirk Grammar. It is a mixed 11 - 19 comprehensive. Pupils in Years 9 to 13 are housed on the Ruff Lane site; Years 7 and 8 are at Wigan Road, where work has begun on a new building that is planned to accommodate the whole school by 2004. The area from which pupils are drawn is becoming more focused on Ormskirk, Aughton and surrounding rural districts. Previously, Cross Hall had taken pupils from a wider area. The socio-economic background of pupils balances out at average. Ten percent are entitled to free school meals, which is in line with the national average. Attainment on entry shows a rising trend, being higher for pupils in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 to 13. Attainment on entry is now above average, but was average for the pupils who obtained the school's first set of results. Fifteen percent of pupils have special educational needs, in line with the national average. About half of these pupils have difficulties with particular learning skills and a quarter have problems associated with behaviour. There are very few pupils who come from ethnic groups other than white, or have a mother tongue other than English. The inspection team was aware of the recent history of the formerly separate schools and of the plans for the new building, but the inspection focused on the school as it is now.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Ormskirk is a good school. Standards of work seen were above average and better than was reflected in the school's first set of results at GCSE and A levels. Teaching is very good. The headteacher and governors lead the school very well. They have implemented effective procedures of monitoring to improve continuously the quality of education offered. The staff are united in support of the school's aims and the present and future matter more to them than the past. Most difficulties associated with amalgamation have been overcome, although some inconveniences, associated with timetabling and accommodation, remain. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Above average standards and good progress in work currently done in all year groups and very high standards attained in national tests at the end of Year 9.
- Very good relationships that enhance very good teaching and learning.
- Motivating reluctant learners, especially in the Achievement Centre and through the Raising Attainment project.
- Very good leadership by the headteacher and governors and robust systems of monitoring and evaluation.
- Staff are united by very good professional relationships that foster a very good capacity to improve.
- Very good extra-curricular provision and links with the community.
- Good or very good provision in the sixth form.

What could be improved

- Use of information and communication technology in most subjects.
- Provision of clear, accurate information about progress for all pupils and parents.
- The impact of accommodation on timetabling, which results in teachers having to share some classes, or reduced time in some subjects.
- The curriculum for less academic pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Standards in design and technology (resistant materials) and short course GCSE religious education.

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

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			Key
	all schools		similar schools	
	2002		2002	
GCSE examinations	C		C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	Grade not available			

With only one set of results in the new school, standards achieved in lessons and in pupils' work over time have special importance.

Standards are above average in half of lessons seen in Years 7 to 9. In two thirds of lessons standards are average or better. According to the results of national tests, pupils had made very good progress by the end of Year 9 in 2002. Standards were high compared with national results and results in similar schools in English and science. In mathematics, while not so far above national average, standards were high compared with similar schools.

Pupils are doing even better in Years 10 and 11, especially when taking account of overall lower levels of attainment when these pupils entered the school. They attain very high standards in almost a fifth of lessons and above average in over half of lessons. Taken alongside the good standards in work seen, this encourages the view that, whilst results were lower than anticipated, the school is likely in the future to improve upon its first set of GCSE results. In GCSE 2002 examinations, pupils matched the national average for five or more grades A* - C passes, but performed below the average for similar schools. In terms of the full range of A* -G passes, pupils performed above average, nationally and for similar schools. The average points score per pupil indicates a significant number of passes towards the high end of the D – G range. This supports the view that the cohort suffered somewhat from the disruption associated with the amalgamation of two schools. Pupils achieved particularly good results in art, drama, music and full GCSE religious studies. Results in design and technology (resistant materials) were below average. Standards were well below average in the short course GCSE in religious studies taken by most pupils.

In work seen, standards are above average in English and science in all year groups and in mathematics in Years 7 to 9, with average standards in Years 10 and 11. Although specialist teaching helps pupils to reach average standards in information and communication technology, they are held back by lack of contact with ICT in other subjects. Standards of work in other subjects are average or above, except in design and technology and in history and geography in Year 9 only, where the subjects are taught for less time.

Pupils with special educational needs attain standards that represent good progress. Gifted and talented pupils are challenged well by some teachers, but an inconsistent approach leads to variable progress. Standards of literacy are good and particularly good in speaking and listening. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils are keen to learn and have good attitudes towards their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils behave well at both sites. They often behave very well in lessons, responding to the clear expectations set for them.
Personal development and relationships	Good. A remarkable strength of the school is the very good quality of relationships with all teachers and other staff.
Attendance	Good. Attendance at the school was about average for secondary schools in England last year. It is at a higher level so far this year.

Pupils behave well at both sites. They often behave very well in lessons, responding to the clear expectations set for them. Pupils socialise well together. A remarkable strength of the school is the very good relationships throughout the community. A particular strength is the ease with which all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are included in school life. Pupils care for others who have particular challenges because of their individual circumstances. Pupils' personal development is good. They try hard to manage their own behaviour and busy lives in school by conforming to the school's systems and making allowances for any temporary arrangements. Offering a helping hand comes naturally to these youngsters. Attendance at the school was about average last year. The improvement in attendance this year is commendable. Figures are currently much better than in the equivalent period last year. However, too many older pupils arrive late for school in the morning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is very good. High quality teaching occurs most regularly with Years 10 and 11. In more than two thirds of lessons learning is good or better. The amount of unsatisfactory learning is very small. The outstanding feature in teaching is the very good relationships with pupils, based on high expectations of behaviour and achievement, alongside good humour and mutual respect. Pupils learn well when they engage with ideas and develop them independently. Very good learning, including learning by pupils with special educational needs, occurs in a supportive and reassuring atmosphere. There are a lot of opportunities for active, memorable learning, backed up by effective use of resources. In most lessons and over time, in most subjects, pupils make progress at a very good rate. Teachers use assessment to guide their planning and approach to pupils, but do not share information about achievement clearly and consistently with pupils, even though individual targets are set. In basic skills, literacy is taught well, numeracy satisfactorily, but teaching of information and communication technology, except in specialist lessons, is unsatisfactory. Whether or not gifted and talented pupils are challenged enough depends upon individual teachers and is not supported by a specific policy. The school is taking steps to address this. Support for pupils with special educational needs, particularly for behavioural problems, is good. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching occurs when the school policy is not followed. Occasionally, less motivated pupils detract from quality with off-task talk. Sometimes the lesson objectives or the ground rules for a task are not made clear. The accommodation, though not inspiring, is made as adequate as possible by the efforts of teachers, but difficulty of access to information and communication technology is hampering learning to some extent.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory in respect of provision for information and communication technology and limited in range for less academic pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good and very good in the work done in the Achievement Centre.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	No direct evidence available at the time of inspection, but the successful integration of the few to whom this applies indicates that their induction was well managed.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good in many respects and very good in terms of relationships and extra-curricular activities, both of which strongly support learning but are not clearly planned and monitored. Multicultural education is not well developed.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Pupils feel safe and secure and that they always have someone to turn to. Assessment has more strengths than weaknesses, but the school has recognised the need for greater precision and clarity in communicating to pupils and parents.

The partnership between the school and parents is good in most respects. From the returned questionnaires it is clear that the majority of parents has confidence in the school, despite some fears about the consequences of amalgamation. Some parents wrote very thoughtful letters about the new school's development and the school should find ways to avail itself of their opinions. The school for its part tries to communicate clearly and does so well in individual matters of concern, but has not always been clear in informing about achievement and progress. Preoccupation with the amalgamation probably reduced initiatives to involve parents.

A good variety of learning experiences are available, but the curriculum is unsatisfactory in respect of the issues identified above. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, are well supported in their learning and in their personal development.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good leadership by the headteacher, supported by good leadership by a senior team set up to play to its strengths. Management is good at all levels with many areas of promising development.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Effectiveness is very good. Governors have played a major role in establishing the new school. However, there are a few oversights in respect of statutory requirements.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Well-designed and robust procedures have already had a good impact, but it is early days and the potential impact is not fully developed.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Except in respect of unsatisfactory information and communication technology provision, the school is avoiding the trap of deferring improvement until it can make the move into the new building.

The headteacher is calm and unswerving in the face of complex challenges, as he steers the development of the school towards a bright future. Good management in all areas is applying robust procedures of monitoring and evaluation to good effect to improve the school for its present pupils. Staff are highly committed and there are few concerns about staffing, except that there are still too many split classes arising from teachers having to teach on two sites. Governors' constructive involvement is very good and they benefit from strong leadership. However, in two important respects, reporting and information and communication technology, the school does not meet statutory requirements. Reports to parents have been unsatisfactory. Requirements for studying information and communication technology are not fully met. The improvement of reports is in hand. The principles of best value are applied well with the support of good data gathering, good communications, well structured reviews and a competitive spirit. Resources are adequate, except for information and communication technology. The present accommodation is unsatisfactory, but staff do their best to minimise this disadvantage.

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 high expectations which the school promotes. • The school helps their children become mature and responsible young citizens. • School events and productions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework procedures. • The information they receive about progress in the annual report. • The uninviting aspect of the school buildings. • Additional closures associated with amalgamation arrangements.

Most parents are supportive and recognise that this is a good school. The inspection team agrees with them. A number of parents wrote long and thoughtful letters about the school and the team would like to acknowledge this additional contribution to the inspection.

The team endorses the views summarised above, except that the inspection evidence shows that teachers try to be clear about homework setting. Reports were at fault and a new system has been instigated to rectify this. The team understands concerns about extra closures, but at the same time recognises the disruption caused by amalgamation. Things have now settled down. It has been a challenge to unite the aspirations of the parent populations of different schools, but the school is making good headway.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

ORMSKIRK SCHOOL

The sixth form of this large school has 221 students. The proportion of students choosing the sixth form is a little lower than the average rate, given the size of the school, but recruitment dipped in the year of amalgamation. The courses provided are mainly academic with an emphasis on progression to higher education, with about 95 percent of students gaining university or college places. However, entry requirements for the sixth form are not high and the attainment of students at the start of Year 12 is about average. A small proportion of students follow courses with a vocational emphasis. Numbers of boys and girls are almost equal in Year 12 and there are more girls than boys in Year 13. In line with the composition of the main school there are very few students from ethnic minority groups. No students are identified as having special educational needs.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very good. The quality of teaching is almost always good and often very good. Students make very good progress in many subjects. Standards are generally above average and examination results are improving in many subjects. The sixth form offers a good range of courses leading to AS and A level qualifications. However, it does not offer courses for lower-attaining pupils and for most of those with special educational needs. Nor does it offer vocational courses for higher-attaining students. The enrichment programme provides a very good extension to the curriculum and is well supported by students. Students' attitudes to their work are very good and they enjoy the life of the sixth form, which offers very good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The sixth form is well led and managed and this ensures that routines and work run smoothly. Strategic planning is good.

Strengths

- Students reach good standards in most subjects and very good standards in physics, chemistry, mathematics, drama and theatre studies, art, economics, psychology, theology and business studies.
- Teaching is very good.
- Students have very good attitudes towards their work and the school.
- Students receive very good guidance on the academic progress they are making and on procedures for university entrance.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are dedicated and increasingly effective.
- The governors, the headteacher and staff support the development of the sixth form.

What could be improved

- Access to facilities for information and communication technology.
- Provision of a broader range of courses to meet the needs of all pupils in the school.

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 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	Provision is good. Teaching is good in both years. Relationships between teachers and students are strong. Students would benefit from more opportunities for independent learning.
Chemistry	Provision is good. Results were above average in 2002. There are high standards in lessons that feature a good range of teaching and learning styles.
Biology	Provision is good. Standards in A Level and AS courses are above average. Staff have good subject knowledge and teaching is good.
Business studies	Provision is very good. Students are working well above average. Students are supported by good, and sometimes very good, teaching. Students' attitudes and attendance are very good. Accommodation and resources for information and communication technology are unsatisfactory.
Information and communication technology	Provision is satisfactory. Standards in computing are below average. Those in information and communication technology are in line with national averages. In both areas students' achievement is satisfactory. Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and communicate this very well. Systems and regularity of assessment require improvement.
Physical education	Provision is good. The examination results in 2002 at A level and AS level were below average but in line with prior attainment. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are better deployed this year. Students participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities in sport.
Art	Provision is very good. Standards in 2002 were uncharacteristically lower than previously. Current students are achieving above average standards. Teaching is very good and supports very good independent learning.
Music	Provision is very good. Standards are very high. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. Extra-curricular music making is outstanding.
Geography	Provision is good. Standards are in line with the national average and teaching is very good overall. The very good relationships between students and teachers and opportunities for residential fieldwork make a significant contribution to students' good achievement.
History	Provision is very good. Students work hard and as a result of very good teaching are achieving high standards.
Psychology	Provision is very good. Students are achieving well above average standards in examinations. Standards are supported by very good teaching. Students have very good attitudes to their work. The accommodation and provision of information and communication technology resources for the subject are unsatisfactory.
English	Provision is very good. Standards in English literature are above average and for English language they are broadly in line. Teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and relationships between students and teachers are good. Students are enthusiastic and enjoy the subject.
French	Provision is good. Standards in 2002 at A level were below average and average or above at AS level. Standards of current students are average or above average. Teaching is at least satisfactory and often good. Students are keen to learn and make good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are well cared for. There are good procedures for assessing the work of students who receive detailed, individual guidance. Tutors provide good support with regular, informal contact and half-termly reviews of progress. Attendance is well monitored. Careers guidance in relation to university entrance is good. It is less effective in terms of guidance about future career choices.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership provides clear direction and guidance for staff and students. Routines and procedures are very well managed by all staff. The enrichment programme has been much improved as a result of action by the leadership team. It is well supported by students. Strategic planning for the future is good. Financial management of the sixth form is good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of courses that meet their needs and interests. • The good and very good teaching in many subjects. • The thorough assessment of their work. • The printed information about the sixth form. • The social and personal development the sixth form offers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice and guidance on future careers. • The inadequate access to computer facilities for private study.

Students have very good attitudes towards the school and the sixth form. Opportunities for participation, leadership and students' trust in their teachers offer very good personal development. Inspectors agree with their views as expressed. Inspectors recognise the difficulties in providing a fuller careers education and guidance programme but endorse students' views that this would be of value to them. Students understand that information and communication technology facilities will improve in the new building, but that will not benefit them.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. In the case of a new school like this one, little can be said about trends over time. In this inspection, standards of work seen in lessons and in pupils' work over time have special importance.
2. There is a difference in attainment on entry at age 11 between pupils currently in Years 7 to 9 and pupils in Years 10 to 11. The younger groups had higher attainment overall (above the national average), judging by tests taken at the end of Year 6 and standardised ability tests applied by the school. Older pupils entered with an overall level of attainment in line with the national average for pupils aged 11.
3. According to national tests, pupils had made very good progress by the end of Year 9 in 2002. English test results were high in comparison to national results and to results in similar schools. The same high attainment was reached in science. In mathematics, results were not so far above the national average, but were still high in relation to similar schools. The overall average points score per pupil was high; on the basis of one set of results, attainment is well above average. If maintained over time, this would represent good progress from the level at which pupils begin Year 7, as is confirmed by value-added data compiled by the school.
4. In GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* - C grades was in line with the national average in 2002, but below average for similar schools. On the other hand, in terms of the proportions gaining five or more A* - G grades and at least one pass grade, the school performed better than the national average and above similar schools. Taking into account that the points score per pupil matched the average nationally and in similar schools, it can be deduced that a significant proportion of pupils scoring D grade or lower was at the high end of the D - G range, just missing grade C. This interpretation supports the view of some parents and staff that this cohort of pupils suffered somewhat from the disruption associated with the amalgamation of two schools.
5. Comparison with the results these pupils achieved at the end of Year 9 is difficult because the cohort was based at two schools. It is fair to say that pupils from Cross Hall made better progress than expected and pupils from Ormskirk Grammar made less progress than expected at the end of Year 11.
6. Pupils obtained particularly good results in art, drama and music and in the full GCSE religious studies course. Higher ability pupils did well in business studies. In design and technology, pupils did well in child development and graphics, averagely well in food technology, but attained below average in resistant materials. Of the pupils who followed the short, half-GCSE religious education course most performed poorly in the final examination.
7. During the inspection, pupils in Years 7 to 9 attained standards well above average in half of the lessons seen and standards were at least average in over two thirds of lessons. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 did even better, attaining very high standards in almost a fifth of lessons, above average in over half the lessons and at least average in over two thirds of lessons. This augurs well for the future, given the rising levels of attainment on entry, and encourages a view that the school is likely to improve upon its first set of GCSE results.

8. Standards in work seen in English were above average in all year groups. Mathematics has good standards in Years 7 to 9 and average standards in Years 10 and 11. Pupils attain above average in science in all year groups. Specialist teaching secures satisfactory standards in information and communication technology (ICT) at an average level, but lack of contact with ICT in other subjects prevents many pupils achieving as much as they should. Standards in most subjects were seen to be above average, except in design and technology (resistant materials) in all years and short course GCSE religious education in Years 10 and 11. In history and geography, standards are mainly above average, except in Year 9 where reduced curriculum time is reducing standards to average.
9. Girls do better than boys, especially in Years 7 to 9, though not to an exceptional degree in comparison with the national picture. However, given that boys enter with similar levels of attainment at the beginning of Year 7, this does indicate that some boys are not working hard enough. Pupils with special educational needs receive good levels of attention and support and make good progress in keeping with their abilities. In terms of their prior attainments most special educational needs pupils make good progress, with a substantial minority making very good progress. Boys and girls improve handwriting, spelling and numeracy skills. Most make significant improvements in literacy during Year 7 and Year 8. Many pupils with special educational needs communicate easily when asked about their work and many have good speaking and reading skills. In 2002 every pupil on the Year 11 special educational needs register gained at least one pass at GCSE. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is low and no pupil was receiving additional help during the inspection; but there is evidence that on arrival they receive appropriate help and quickly achieve the same rate of progress as other pupils. Gifted and talented pupils are identified by subject teachers and are challenged in line with their capabilities, particularly in music.
10. Standards of literacy are of a sufficient standard to support and enhance learning across the curriculum. Speaking and listening skills are well developed and allow discussions to take place at a level that extends understanding of the topic. Reading skills are good and accordingly enable pupils to read a variety of types of text and locate and use information from different sources. The technical competency in writing demonstrated by most pupils is such that they are well able to cope with the writing demands of assignments in the different curriculum areas.
11. Standards of numeracy are at least average and often above average. The pupils' skills in number are sufficient to enhance their learning in a variety of subjects across the curriculum.

Sixth form

12. At the end of Year 13 in A level examinations in 2002 the overall pass rate, at 96 per cent, was above the national average. The proportion of passes at the higher grades, A or B, was below average, but the proportion passing at the lower grades, C to E, pushed the pass rate above average overall. The predominance of lower grades led to the average points score matching the national figure. Boys recorded a higher average score than girls. High grades represented one third of all passes (excluding general studies results). The highest proportions of grades A and B were obtained in sciences, economics, German and theology. There was a significant proportion of ungraded entries in history. Taking into account general studies, the pass rate was 93 per cent.

13. At the end of Year 12 in AS level examinations over 40 per cent of students obtained the higher grades, A or B, with high proportions of passes at this level in economics, psychology, theatre studies and theology. Less successful subjects with significant proportions of ungraded entries were history, mathematics, physical education and Spanish. The pass rate was about 86 per cent, there being no significant variation whether general studies is taken into account or not.
14. In the sixth form, standards in Year 12 are very good in chemistry and excellent in theology. In Year 13, standards are very good in physics, mathematics, drama and theatre studies, art and business studies and are excellent in economics. In these subjects, students make very good progress. Students attain good standards and make very good progress in Year 12 in German and in both years in music and history. Overall, students are learning very well in just under half their lessons and well in most. There are no significant differences between boys and girls in the work seen in all subjects. The good progress made by the majority of students enables them to continue their studies in higher education.

STANDARDS IN KEY SKILLS

15. Communication is currently the only key skill taught as a discrete unit of work. This is part of the general studies course. The standards of work seen are good. Students use acquired skills in numeracy and information and communication technology when working in other subjects. Insufficient access to computers constrains their ability to use the latter in school. The school is planning to introduce the teaching of the full range of key skills in the next year.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

16. Pupils like their school and enjoy talking about it with visitors. They eagerly describe their busy lives at the school. Year 7 pupils relish their freedom to establish a school newspaper. An older Year 10 student conscientiously devotes a weekly lunchtime to teaching Romanian to other classmates. The pupils engagingly recall their involvement with recent music and drama performances. Over 200 pupils participated in the production of *The Little Shop of Horrors*. Pupils are keen to learn and have good attitudes towards their work. Pupils settle quickly and concentrate well throughout the lessons. They continue working until the bell goes for the next lesson and sometimes beyond. Cries of disappointment followed the bell as some Year 7 actors realised they would not have time to perform.
17. A few parents expressed concerns about behaviour both in lessons and around the school. Pupils behave well, on the whole, at both sites. They often behave very well in lessons, responding to the clear expectations set for them. This response stimulates hard work and leaves very little time for inappropriate behaviour. Very occasionally a few pupils, usually boys, are unsettled in class. Teachers usually manage to persuade these pupils to settle so these negative attitudes rarely affect the progress of the whole class. The sites, with labyrinths of small corridors, alleyways and courtyards could lead to chaotic movement during breaks. However, most pupils move carefully around the school, paying attention to the needs of others. This reflects the generally good social development that pupils demonstrate. Some pupils, particularly in the afternoons on the Wigan Road site, are sometimes boisterous and noisy at lesson changeovers. Pupils behave exceptionally well in assemblies. Their calm and composed demeanour adds significantly to the dignity of these occasions and contributes well to the spiritual potential of assemblies. Pupils

socialise well together; for instance, lunchtime in the Year 11 common room is a pleasant occasion.

18. Most parents and pupils comment that bullying seldom occurs. The school does not tolerate violent or anti-social behaviour. The number of pupils excluded for a fixed period last year was just below average for similar schools and is significantly less this year. Only a few pupils, mainly boys, now behave badly. The school helps these pupils improve their behaviour and therefore very rarely excludes pupils permanently.
19. A remarkable strength of the school is the very good relationships throughout the community. These are particularly commendable considering the recent history of two separate schools on separate sites. Pupils, boys and girls, enjoy each other's company and support one another well in lessons. Staff constantly encourage pupils to work together in lessons. This means that pupils quickly settle to work in pairs and groups and benefit from the experiences and thoughts of others. They shared compassionately their observations of soldiers' possible reaction to trench warfare, for instance, in a Year 9 history lesson. Relaxed humour is a strong feature of relationships in the school. Gales of laughter greeted the visiting policeman's comments as he de-glamorised drug taking in an excellent personal and social education lesson for two Year 7 classes.
20. A particular strength of these very good relationships is the ease with which all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are included in school life. Pupils care for others who have particular challenges because of their individual circumstances. They accept that some pupils have particular disabilities, care very tenderly for their needs and make no fuss about these situations. They accept that a few pupils have difficulty behaving well and make allowances for them.
21. Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils respond well when given responsibility for their own work in lessons. They enjoy research and investigative work; Year 7 pupils talked animatedly about researching topics for homework. When teachers encourage them to evaluate their own work pupils do so in a mature and responsible way. Artists and musicians constantly assess their own creations and efforts and identify potential improvements. Pupils have a good understanding of their role in ensuring that the school is a civilised environment. These young citizens recognise the difficulties presented by the recent amalgamation. They try hard to manage their own behaviour and busy lives in school by conforming to the school's systems and making allowances for any temporary arrangements. They willingly accept tasks suggested, such as stacking chairs after assembly and many use their own initiative to help themselves and others. Offering a helping hand comes naturally to these youngsters.
22. Attendance at the school was about average for secondary schools in England last year. The improvement in attendance this year is commendable. Figures are currently much better than the equivalent period for last year. This improvement is because the school now has good procedures for promoting the importance of regular attendance. Regular attendance helps ensure that pupils' work continues with minimum disruption.
23. Too many older pupils in Years 9 to 11 arrive late for school in the morning. This lateness prevents some sessions beginning on time and interrupts others. It diverts the attention of staff and pupils from their work. Individual lessons, however, almost always begin on time despite staff having to move between the two sites.

Sixth form

24. Students' attitudes in the sixth form are very good. They enjoy the corporate life of the sixth form and the opportunities it offers for their academic and personal development. They contribute with maturity to the deliberations of the sixth form council and take seriously their position as senior members of the school. Students' relationships with teachers are very good. Students value the high quality of teaching they receive and the academic and personal advice they are given. They work hard, with a considerable degree of independence. Their behaviour is very good and they provide good role models for younger pupils. Students are enthusiastic about the enrichment programme offered and recognise that this has improved considerably this year.
25. The attendance of sixth form students is very good. Students are punctual to school and to lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS AND STUDENTS TAUGHT?

26. Teaching is very good and effectively matches the very worthwhile school policy. High quality teaching occurs most regularly in Years 10 and 11. Learning matches teaching, except that there is a small rise in the proportion of unsatisfactory learning in Years 10 and 11. This is associated with pupils of lower ability who do not always cope with the courses offered in the curriculum. Two thirds of lessons are good or better. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching and learning is very low overall, at a rate of about one lesson in 20. The most common feature of the effective teaching in this school is that teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievement, while maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect and good humour.

Engaging pupils in learning

27. A frequently observed feature of successful learning is that pupils engage with ideas introduced by the teacher. This occurred, for example, in an excellent religious education lesson on Liberation Theology when the pupils extended the range of the teacher's introduction, suggesting for themselves links with contemporary political situations. When pupils are as involved as this, they take their learning forward independently and more memorably, as happened in a Year 10 English lesson with a higher ability group. The teacher was able to chair the discussion about a poem, rather than leading it.

Learning in a reassuring environment

28. The teacher offered Year 11 pupils studying drama constructive criticism of a rehearsed piece. It was clear that the teacher was offering suggestions that might be rejected, not taking responsibility away from the group or overriding their creativity. On a one-to-one basis, a very shy pupil with special educational needs engaged with gradually increasing confidence with number work thanks to gentle and patient encouragement by the teacher. When Year 7 pupils became a little flustered in the course of solving a mathematical problem, the teacher's calm and reassuring expertise made sure they went on to achieve well. Many pupils in another Year 10 English lesson had special educational needs associated with behavioural problems. The teacher set tasks that promoted their enjoyment and confidence in reading and all of the class were eager to read tongue-twisters aloud.

Active learning and effective choice of resources reinforce ideas

29. This feature was frequently noticed. In business studies a Year 11 class gained insight into recruitment processes by role-playing candidates for interview. In Year 8

geography, low ability pupils who showed signs of being easily distracted soon became fascinated by the teacher's use of muddy water in a jar to demonstrate characteristic actions of rivers. Year 10 science saw the teacher making very effective use of an interactive whiteboard to cluster ideas around a central concept. In Year 10 history, pupils achieved better than expected levels when they actively engaged with an authentic source – death rates in Maidstone in 1879. They extrapolated wide-ranging ideas about social conditions in Britain in the 19th Century. Year 7 pupils in art gained from previous learning about collage work related to *The Beatles* by Peter Blake when evaluating their own work on images of the self. The depth of reflection in these lessons constitutes good development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural ideas.

Very good progress, over time and within lessons, through challenge

30. Through good lesson management, pupils with learning difficulties following a course below GCSE level progressed in the course of a French lesson from repeating one word answers to using phrases and finally to using entire sentences. Pupils in a Year 7 lesson responded well to the challenge of unaccompanied part-singing while rehearsing a lively version of the popular song *Scooby Doo* with considerable musical accuracy.

Assessment supporting progress

31. Sometimes, as in geography, the teacher's good knowledge of pupils' previous attainment and present targets is used to direct specific questions or tasks to individuals in order to stimulate progress. Sometimes, but not often enough, pupils are engaged in assessing themselves, as in a Year 7 lesson where a great deal was learned by reviewing a video recording of their own performance of a dance. In many lessons teachers' knowledge of individuals' special educational needs led to work being made accessible for these pupils.

The teaching of basic skills

32. The teaching of literacy in different subjects is good. Many subjects offer a range of types of writing to develop understanding of the subject. In geography, pupils write poetry and letters to MPs and there is good use of creative writing in science. Key words and subject specific vocabulary are displayed and regularly referred to in many classrooms. There is a growing use of writing frames to support pupils. Teaching of numeracy is satisfactory. In science the pupils' numeracy skills are used effectively to calculate and interpret data. In information and communication technology lessons pupils practised their skills in managing number using statistics and drawing graphs. In business studies, they prepared balance sheets and calculated percentages. While numeracy was good in geography when pupils worked out cloud cover and grid references, in another lesson an inaccurate graph caused confusion. Information and communication technology is unsatisfactorily taught, except in the specialist lessons.

Gifted and talented pupils, those with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs

33. A pilot project to investigate teaching of gifted and talented pupils is underway, but as yet there is no formal policy on teaching gifted and talented pupils. However, subject teachers keep good records of pupils' attainment and set appropriately challenging work for able pupils. No pupils currently require additional support because they are at an early stage of learning English. Those who have English as an additional language (EAL) were fully engaged in lessons. Teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good in all subjects, backed up by very good administrative procedures, particularly for the monitoring of pupils' attainment, progress and behaviour. There are a number of arrangements to help pupils. These include in-

class support and withdrawal from lessons to support developments in literacy and numeracy. Individual pupil withdrawal from lessons, used in English, mathematics and science and supervised by four specialist teachers, works particularly well. Support assistants are in most cases satisfactorily deployed, although weak co-ordination of timetabling between special educational needs and the Achievement Centre detracts a little from effectiveness.

Unsatisfactory teaching and learning

34. The small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching occurs when teachers do not adhere to school policy. Occasionally, less motivated pupils detract from the quality of learning with off-task talk. Sometimes lesson objectives or the ground rules for a task are not made clear to pupils. Marking, though good in many respects, is sometimes scarce or unhelpful and the use of different systems in different subjects is confusing. By and large, teachers overcome the problems presented by some of the accommodation presently available. However, access to information and communication technology is limited; this constrains planning and ICT does not support pupils' learning as often as it should.

Sixth form

35. In the sixth form, teaching is very good overall. Courses are taught by subject specialists who have very good knowledge of their subject and use this well in planning well-paced lessons. Teaching is authoritative and well focused on examinations, and in some subjects on wider issues. Students respond with lively interest to the enthusiasm of teachers. Relationships between students and teachers are very good. Students show responsibility and independence in managing their work. They build well on previous work, especially in Year 13.
36. Teachers know their students well and provide a great deal of individual advice and support. Marking is helpful in indicating to students how they can improve their work and students take heed. Assessment of academic progress is good.
37. The best teaching is marked by teachers' ability to lead students in exploring ideas through discussion and debate. This is especially so in English, geography, history, psychology, German and Spanish. In mathematics, students are encouraged to think logically and to explain their thinking clearly. Students seize the opportunities offered to express their ideas and to develop them through debate. This contributes well to their ability to organise and set out their views in writing, with clarity and well-marshalled evidence to support their points – skills that they will develop further in higher education.
38. In some subjects, such as physical education, French and some aspects of general studies, there are insufficient opportunities to develop thinking through discussion. The lack of adequate access to computers constrains teaching and opportunities for independent work by students in many subjects and this is a weakness in teaching and learning.

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

39. The school offers a wide, balanced range of subjects. However, the curriculum is unsatisfactory overall, mainly because of provision for information and communication technology. In addition to the National Curriculum, drama and a second foreign language are offered for some pupils in Years 8 and 9. All pupils study citizenship through personal, social and health education. Religious education requirements are met for pupils in Years 10 and 11, as all follow the GCSE short course. The cross curricular information and communication technology provision is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11, where statutory requirements are not met, because the full range of ICT is available only to those pupils who choose to study it for GCSE examination. The school recognises that it does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship.
40. Strengths of the curriculum planning include, since September this year, the implementation of a key skills course for less academic pupils in Years 8 and 9 who only study one modern foreign language. It provides extra support for some pupils in the areas of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology is designed to raise pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Planning for the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 has been hampered by the logistics of the school site and the constraints of a two-week timetable. The school recognises that the current time allocation for learning is lower than average. The timetabling difficulties have resulted in problems with split classes and reduced time for some subjects. Pupils in Year 9 only receive one lesson per week for history and geography; this is below the usual time allocated to these subjects. It is having a serious effect on attainment by these pupils as work has to be truncated in order to cover the syllabus. It also restricts the amount of historical visits and fieldwork that can be undertaken. The number of different teachers timetabled for the GCSE short course in religious education means that it is harder for pupils to make consistent progress, though organisation of the course is beginning to settle down. There are some shared classes timetabled in that way to reduce the need for staff travel between sites.
41. There is a lack of vocational courses for pupils in Years 10 and 11. At present there are 27 pupils in Year 10 who are disapplied from studying a modern foreign language. These pupils follow vocational courses in manufacturing and health and social care. Current Year 11 pupils study a modern foreign language working towards a certificate of achievement. The curriculum for pupils with special educational needs in Years 10 and 11, though modified and widened this year, is not yet sufficiently developed in terms of alternatives to GCSE or in the range of vocational subjects and awards. The school is reviewing provision for pupils in Years 10 and 11 in order to provide a broader range of alternatives.
42. Provision for gifted and talented pupils has some weaknesses, but is improving. The school has begun to identify pupils who are gifted and talented. Some departments have begun to re-examine what they offer to all pupils and improve provision accordingly. For example, the science department have identified more able pupils and these have been participating in a project connected with the local nature reserve. Talented pupils in music and drama have many opportunities to develop through the superb annual productions and concerts; others represent the school or county in sport. At present the provision is predominately subject-based and lacks a coherent approach from all subject areas.
43. Provision for literacy across the curriculum is good. Although the launch of the Key Stage 3 Strategy was delayed because of the merger between the two schools,

implementation has been successful. The initial training day was well focused for all subjects. An audit of provision has been followed up with training. The Literacy and Learning Group has been established with teachers from all faculties. Various subject areas are undertaking new literacy initiatives.

44. Some heads of departments have prepared a numeracy policy. The mathematics department has already completed a detailed audit of the application of numeracy in the curriculum. The improvement plan includes the preparation of a written guide to advise non-specialists of the preferred teaching methods and to achieve a consistent approach to the teaching of numeracy. The mathematics department's initiative is at an early stage of development. It is beginning to be effective in ensuring that pupils have opportunities to develop and apply their numerical skills.
45. The provision for extra curricular activities is very good. The range of activities at lunchtime and after school is varied with a high number of sports activities and music ensembles. Study support and homework clubs provide opportunities to catch up on work and teachers provide very effective revision classes for examinations. The programme of educational visits is good, especially for modern foreign languages. Pupils enjoy residential trips and visits to France, Germany and Spain. The school recently hosted a visit by a group of pupils and their teachers from the United States of America. Opportunities for performance enhance standards in drama and music, as well as pupils' self-confidence (for example, in a recent production of *Little Shop of Horrors* and music evenings).
46. The school has strong links with higher and further education establishments and also the West Lancashire Agency for Modern Apprenticeships. Careers evenings are well attended and there are other opportunities including a work experience programme for pupils in Year 11. At present the school has received insufficient funding to allow all pupils in Year 11 to have an individual careers interview. Priority is given to less academic pupils, but the need for the more academic to chart their future path is not met.
47. The contribution of and links with the community are very good. The school is fortunate to have an excellent community co-ordinator who liaises and directs many different aspects of the schools community links. Funding has been found to support many different projects including a heritage project to preserve aspects of the old school once the new buildings are complete. Artists in residence are to work with different groups of pupils in order to create a monument to celebrate and remember the school's past history. The eco-committee is working closely with the architects and builders. They meet regularly and run business-like meetings in order to discuss issues affecting the pupils. They have close links with the local newspaper allowing school events to be shared with citizens of Ormskirk.

Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

48. The overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The aims of the school clearly proclaim these features to be at the cornerstone of its mission. There is, however, no whole school policy and there are no plans to introduce one. While most subjects include features in their teaching and learning, the school does not monitor the success of what is provided.
49. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is good. Although the school does not meet the statutory requirements for a daily act of worship, the assemblies observed during the inspection were well planned and orderly. However, they missed

opportunities for pupils to be involved and share their thoughts and feelings with others. Some provided opportunities for reflection. Themes for assemblies are planned each term and available for use as thoughts for the day by those classes not having an assembly. The school has yet to monitor the effectiveness or otherwise of this procedure. There is much evidence elsewhere in the school of opportunities for pupils to reflect on the wider values of life. Older pupils attend an annual Ethics Conference. Provision in religious education is strong and there is a school Christian Union. In a Year 10 English lesson pupils reflected on the sadness of ageing through a poem they were studying. The performing of religious choral works is a strong feature in music.

50. Provision for pupils' moral development is good. The teaching of citizenship and personal, social and health education are now in place and perceived by the school as an important area to be developed. The new school has been quick to establish a new code of conduct. It is known and understood by all pupils and displayed everywhere. It concisely informs about expectations, rewards and sanctions and encourages personal responsibility. Pupils with special educational needs are particularly well looked after in their rewards system and their achievements are regularly monitored. A prefect system has been introduced for Year 8 pupils to help them share the responsibility for looking after the Wigan Road site. Moral issues are frequently addressed in subject lessons. Examples were observed in geography where global and ethical values were explored and in history where Year 9 pupils were writing about life as a slave.
51. Provision for pupils' social development is good. While some areas of the school site – particularly the Ruff Lane site – are socially drab, the school has ensured that relationships between pupils and with all staff remain very good. Pupils are encouraged to develop an understanding of living in a community. They respect their heads of year, for instance, whom they regard as good role models for support. The school has developed several initiatives to develop pupils' social awareness. There are year councils and an effective 'peer support' system. A school eco-committee plans to promote the new buildings as ecologically friendly. There is good provision for residential trips abroad as well as outdoor and adventure activities. The school has also enjoyed a recent visit by a group of pupils and their teachers from the United States of America.
52. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. School concerts and drama productions form a regular feature of school life and fulfil an important ambassadorial role in the life of the community. Year 9 pupils produced a large wall collage reflecting their impressions of the recent school production of *A Little Shop of Horrors*. There are opportunities for older pupils to visit concerts and art galleries. There is strong recognition in religious education of Christian and other traditions. While many subjects include some cultural aspects in their provision, there are fewer opportunities than might be expected for preparing pupils for life in a mixed society. For example, there is little multicultural literature available for pupils to read.

Sixth form

53. The school provides a good range of courses in the sixth form for students who wish to continue to higher education. Almost all courses offered lead to qualifications at Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced (A) levels. A general studies course is also offered at both levels. There is currently one course leading to a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ): a business studies course at Intermediate level.

54. The school has focused on provision for students wishing to continue into higher education and gives these students a very good route into doing so. It offers a wide range of courses at AS and A levels because a substantial number of students choose to continue into the sixth form while others join from other schools. However, the school does not cater for the needs of all its pupils, in particular for those of lower-attaining pupils and for most of those with special educational needs. The school maintains links with other local providers, including further education colleges, as well as maintaining good links with higher education institutions. At present, there are not clear routes for pupils who wish to continue their education through vocational or other courses.
55. The sixth form benefits very well from the provision for personal development outlined above. When added to the valuable enrichment programme, this provision becomes very good for sixth formers. They have opportunities for personal development and enterprise in programmes such as the Barnardo's Business Incentive Scheme and the CREST Award in science, as well as opportunities to extend personal interests in art appreciation, media studies and drama, among others. The enrichment programme provides a very good extension to the sixth form curriculum and is well supported by students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS AND STUDENTS?

56. The school takes good care of its pupils, a feature of school life recognised and appreciated by pupils and parents. For example, risk assessment arrangements are completed annually. The school also ensures that procedures for protecting children are regularly reviewed and communicated to staff. Systematic training for all staff, including support staff, is not yet a feature of these otherwise good arrangements.
57. The identification of individual need is a key feature. Parents and pupils say that staff, including support staff, know pupils very well and readily respond as required. This ensures that pupils feel safe and secure and always have someone to turn to for help and support. The school lacks suitable medical rooms on either site. This adversely affects the privacy offered to recovering pupils and the delivery of first aid. Support staff at all levels make a very good contribution to pupils' welfare.
58. Attendance at the school is improving to further above average because of the good arrangements for promoting regular attendance. The school, for instance, keeps charts of attendance levels matched to target levels for year groups and individual tutor groups. Careful analysis of this information enables staff to identify quickly any patterns or changes and take the appropriate action. The school follows up all absences immediately with parents.
59. Staff expect pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour in lessons and around the school. The code of conduct, describing rights and responsibilities, is displayed throughout the school. This succeeds with the vast majority of pupils. Staff are particularly good at managing those pupils who find it difficult to conform. They react very quickly to deteriorating behaviour. A raised eyebrow is often enough to avert a disturbance. The approach to behaviour management is very consistent and staff plan and provide the support needed to improve behaviour.
60. The impact of the work of the Achievement Centre for pupils experiencing difficulties is very significant. Staff help pupils to improve their behaviour, attendance and many other aspects of their development. Systematic monitoring of the behaviour of supported pupils is particularly well developed. It involves all curriculum subject areas and requires pupils to meet specific, negotiated targets each week. This

particular help supports some pupils who might not otherwise be able to remain at the school. The school very seldom uses permanent exclusion and is rapidly and significantly reducing its use of fixed term exclusion.

61. Parents and pupils comment that the school deals well with the occasional incidence of harassment or bullying.
62. Documentation of special educational needs is thoroughly up to date. Administrative procedures ensure that all teachers know pupils' needs and all are involved in monitoring progress and attainment. Links with primary schools are very good. Each pupil's progress is formally reviewed before the end of their first term in the school and continually throughout their school career.
63. The use of assessment to guide curricular planning is good. The Raising Achievement Project in Years 10 and 11 is of immense benefit to over 100 pupils who might otherwise underachieve. Pupils have their own action plan and their progress is discussed weekly by their mentors. Another positive feature of this support is the close partnership which the school has developed with the parents of these pupils.
64. Assessment procedures are well advanced in some subjects. For example, in geography and English the outcomes of assessment are carefully considered at departmental meetings and are used to adapt schemes of work. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good and steps are being taken to ensure consistency and accuracy in assessing pupils' work in Years 7 to 9. There is a coherent, central method of data management to provide statistics for every pupil about their attainment on entry to the school and their expected performance in every subject. Further information, for example on attendance records and special educational needs, provides teachers with vital background information to set target minimums for national tests and GCSE examinations. However, not enough has been done to share what the teacher knows about performance and what needs to improve with the pupil and the parent. The school has yet to use its assessment data to monitor the progress of different groups of pupils, for example those from ethnic minorities.
65. The school helps pupils learn very well by providing good support for their academic and personal development. Good work by pastoral staff minimises the impact of the split site arrangements on the welfare of pupils. Heads and assistant heads of year carefully divide and support the work of the tutor team. Some forms have three different tutors, which is not ideal. However, close contact with the head and assistant heads of year ensures the constancy that pupils require.
66. Last year's annual reports were unsatisfactory and not as helpful to pupils or their parents as they should have been. The school recognised the shortcomings and has significantly improved the format to include student's self-evaluation and a common grading scale.

Sixth Form

67. The school has good procedures for assessing the work of students in the sixth form. Departments have clear procedures that students understand. Teachers mark work regularly and give good individual guidance on how students can improve their work. Students value teachers' comments. They are confident that weakness in the quality of work will be identified and quickly followed up.

68. The school provides very good guidance for sixth form students. The daily contact with tutors ensures that students are well known and any changes in demeanour are quickly noticed. The school requires the students to register every day and absence is quickly followed up. This means that attendance is very good in the sixth form. Students benefit from having their own discrete area, which includes the head of sixth form office. Students are very confident that their individual needs will be recognised and are secure in their approach to staff. They recognise that any problems whether academic or personal will be quickly and sensitively addressed. The school carefully helps students to recognise their own effort and achievement during the half termly progress review checks. Students are clear about the improvement that is required and how to secure that improvement.
69. Careers guidance focuses on university application. Students comment that the school helps them to select courses carefully to match their aspirations. The school supports their applications well by organising visits to universities and mock interviews. Some students comment that the school is not as helpful in providing information about alternative career choices. The inspection team endorses these views.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

70. Parents are supportive and recognise that this is a good school. Most comment that their children like the school and the vast majority applaud the high expectations which the school promotes. They particularly praise the way the school helps their children become mature and responsible young citizens.
71. Parents enjoy attending the school when their children are involved in particular activities. Attendance is very high at consultation evenings. Year 7 parents appreciate the two early opportunities they have to meet teachers and form tutors. The school has support groups for parents whose children participate in sports and music and drama activities. Hundreds of parents attended the recent drama production at the school. It was reportedly standing room only on three consecutive nights in a very big school hall.
72. Some parents in the questionnaire responses and at the parents' meeting expressed concern about homework procedures. Staff give homework regularly and also encourage students to use their planners to record the details. These planners contain a wealth of information about school life and, if used correctly, help pupils to learn to manage their own work. They also help parents to appreciate their child's daily work. Most staff use these diaries well to communicate concerns or recognise improvements. Tutors check these diaries and planners weekly, thus providing regular contact with parents.
73. A significant majority of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of information they receive about progress. The inspection team endorses this viewpoint. Annual reports were unsatisfactory last year. They did not fulfil statutory requirements because they did not report information and communication technology as a separate subject. Some reports were incomplete due to the absence of the tutor or subject teacher. Some of the descriptions of the curriculum covered during the previous year were far too unspecific. The school recognises these shortcomings and has devised a new and improved format to address them this year. Although not a legal requirement, the school is sensitively and sensibly considering introducing a system of interim reports.

74. Liaison with parents when there are concerns about a pupil's progress or when pupils have special educational needs is very good. Parents are involved in reviewing processes and some express appreciation for the support and care given to their children.
75. Some parents are unhappy about the educational time lost when the school closed early before some holiday periods last year to allow staff to make arrangements for the amalgamation of the formerly separate schools. There are also some concerns about continuity when classes are shared.
76. The split site school, the very old buildings which have no obvious entrances for parents and visitors and the lack of easy car-parking do not help parents feel welcomed and at ease in the school. Nevertheless, staff try hard to include parents in the education partnership. They commit significant time and energy to communicating with parents. They ensure that parents have good information at transition points such as Year 9 to Year 10. They also organise meetings to support individual needs, for instance, with the targeted group of possible underachievers in Years 10 and 11. The inspection team recognises the difficulties of uniting the two parent populations - and hence aspirations - of the formerly separate schools. The team respect the considerable progress which the school has made in creating a reasonably united parent population.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

77. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He steers a clear course from the complexities of the amalgamation to the promise of a bright future for the school. He is calm and unswerving in pursuit of a vision of the development of the school. The large size of the school and the inconvenience of being on two sites present considerable challenges that are being steadfastly met. The headteacher is supported by the good leadership of an unusually large senior team with differing capabilities. This team is set up to play to its strengths and management is good. Robust procedures directed at improvement are operational, but it is early days and potential impact on practice and results is yet to be fully felt.
78. School aims and values are reflected well in the work of staff at all levels. This is a united staff to whom the present and future matter more than the past. It is noteworthy that new members of staff feel that previous divisions are no longer detectable. New staff also corroborated evidence of excellent induction and support. Further evidence of the united commitment of staff can be seen in the high levels of attendance this term. Only 12 staff days, attributable to pre-existing medical conditions, were lost during the week of inspection, in comparison with 41 days over the same week last year. Concerns about communications are allayed by evidence from a recent survey of institutional stress factors conducted by one of the professional associations. Zero complaints were recorded in this category. Staff turnover has stabilised and there are few significant deployment problems, except in design and technology and information and communication technology. Leadership of departments is generally good and at least satisfactory and several departments are very well led. Heads of year and their assistants give pupils effective support. The link with 'faculty advocates' in the leadership team is clearly established. Staff whose professional concerns are not resolved by this route have alternative routes by which matters can be raised. Performance management has been put back on track after a delay last year and arrangements are now satisfactory. Only in the deployment of some staff are some effects flowing from amalgamation still being felt. To some extent, split classes in some subjects arise because of the use of additional

staffing to minimise staff movements between sites. This temporary arrangement is understandable, but has potential disadvantages. This causes concern for some parents who are right to expect assurance that there is no loss of continuity for pupils.

79. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation are very well designed and the impact is already good. Review of subject departments' performance is particularly effective in requiring improvement strategies to be devised by subject leaders. The approved action plan is very much a 'live' document, regularly monitored by senior managers for interim deadlines and progress measures, with adjustments being pencilled in. Business meetings at appropriate levels are regular, efficiently run and produce clear minutes that contribute well to communications and monitoring. A full programme of self-evaluation is set out in a sensible time frame. In the light of inspection findings, the review of personal, social and health education and some non-subject aspects will have to be brought forward. All this feeds into an appropriately focused school improvement plan, supported by detailed action plans with suitable monitoring arrangements. The school has avoided the trap of deferring everything until removal into the new building and improvements are being made to the quality of education for pupils now going through school.
80. Governors have played a very strong role in establishing the new school. They are very effective. Communications with staff, particularly at senior level, are very good and there is strong support for other staff, for example from the governor with the special educational needs brief. Results analysis and self-evaluation reviews are considered regularly at meetings so that governors have a strong understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Committees make recommendations to the whole body. Policies are up to date as evidenced by the recently adopted race equality policy. Governors communicate clearly to parents and are appropriately involved in decisions about exclusions. There are some important respects in which the school is not fulfilling statutory requirements, particularly in the provision of ICT across the curriculum and in reporting to parents on their children's progress. These oversights mean that effectiveness cannot be rated as excellent. While GCSE results were not as high as anticipated last summer, governors are justified in anticipating improvement according to evidence gleaned from this inspection.
81. School accounts are kept well. The budget is in credit, without neglecting upkeep of present sites in favour of reserving funds for the new building. Plans for the new site give due consideration to the current pupil population. For example, Year 8 will remain at Wigan Road throughout Year 9, with the possibility of provision of some temporary buildings. Sensible steps have been taken to review the possibility of applying for specialist school status. This has been deferred so that sponsorship can be associated with the new building.
82. The principles of best value are applied well. Consultation between staff, governors and parents is supported by good communications. Senior staff check a wealth of data and qualitative information to compare output against internal and external measures. Challenge is secured through well-structured reviews with heads of department and the school is keen to compete with the very best in results and curricular and extra-curricular provision. Grants are used effectively. For instance, the Raising Achievement funding motivates participating pupils in Years 10 and 11 very well.
83. Resources are generally adequate, except for information and communication technology. The school has some good provision of computers, for instance in business studies, but overall access is insufficient to the detriment of learning.

Proper provision of information and communication technology is difficult for the school at present. Governors are understandably reluctant to invest heavily on installations that will have a brief life. Investment in laptops, which would be able to be transferred, was not in evidence. The school's administrative systems are adequately resourced and modern technology is used effectively. The library on the Ruff Lane site is good. The one at Wigan Road is less well supplied, but just about adequate.

84. Accommodation is unsatisfactory currently. Disadvantages associated with staff movement are a reality. There are areas of good provision, but, on the whole, inconvenient design, ugly developments behind the hall and dilapidation make the Ruff Lane site, despite the sense of history, uninspiring. Staff do their best to minimise the impact of this inside classrooms.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

85. The sixth form is very ably led and managed by the head of sixth form and the two assistant heads. Since the opening of the new school much work has been done and much solid improvement achieved, especially this term. Work in some subjects has already been monitored and evaluated and action deriving from the findings is planned. Good procedures for tutors have been established and set out in clear guidance for all who work in the sixth form, including pupils. The attendance of pupils is regularly monitored and good procedures for checking on reasons for absence ensure that attendance is above average. Tutors and teachers contribute well to the sense of purpose and enjoyment which is evident in pupils' attitudes. The sixth form is making a substantial contribution to the success of its pupils.
86. The role of the headteacher and the leadership team, together with the governing body, has been crucial in ensuring the success of the current sixth form. However, the governing body is not fulfilling its statutory duty of providing religious education and a daily act of collective worship for all students in the sixth form.
87. The headteacher and the head of sixth form have included in the strategic plan for the sixth form a review of the curriculum and its costs in relation to the whole school. Currently, the sixth form is partly subsidised by the main school but is likely to be self-financing in the near future. Financial management in the sixth form is good.

Resources

88. The sixth form has benefited from the renovation of a block on the Ruff Lane site, which serves as a self-contained social and teaching centre. The head of sixth form and his assistants are based there. There is a lack of information and technology facilities. Some science lessons take place out of specialist laboratories, though teachers are very adept at overcoming ensuing disadvantages. Staffing for the sixth form is very good, with expert subject teachers able to present their subjects well to students. Some class sizes are small, for example in modern languages and music. The budget from the 11 - 16 part of the school partly subsidises the sixth form. However, overall it is cost effective and provides a valuable example for younger pupils.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

89. To improve further the good standards being achieved, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

- (1) Provide greater availability of information and communication technology. Encourage all subjects to use it to support teaching and learning in all years. Make sure that all pupils in Years 10 and 11 get the experiences specified in the National Curriculum. As far as possible, improved resources should be designed to be transferable to the new building. (*paragraphs 8, 34, 39, 80, 83*)
- (2) Issue reports in the improved format that has been devised and evaluate how parents and pupils receive them. Devise a marking system to be used consistently by all subjects. Share clear and accurate information about performance and what needs to improve with pupils and parents. (*paragraphs 34, 64, 66, 73, 80*)
- (3) Reassess the curriculum model and timetable to ensure that they fully meet the educational aims of the school for all pupils in all subjects. Continue to monitor closely the quality of liaison between teachers sharing classes. (*paragraphs 39-42, 48*)
- (4) Improve standards in design and technology (resistant materials) and in the short course GCSE in religious education. (*paragraphs 127-129, 177, 179, 180*)

Other areas for improvement:

- more consistent planning and monitoring of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is required to fully realise all the opportunities, already good in some respects, that the school can offer. In particular, there is insufficient emphasis on understanding other cultures; (*paragraphs 48, 52*)
- continue to encourage older pupils to be punctual; (*paragraph 23*)
- attend to the health and safety matter of demarcation lines in workshops. (*paragraph 133*)

Sixth form

To improve provision further in the sixth form, take the following steps:

- (1) encourage wider use of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning and make sure all pupils have easy access to good facilities; (*paragraphs 15, 88*)
- (2) reduce the proportion of ungraded entries at A and A/S levels and attract a broader range of pupils of different abilities into the sixth form by offering a wider range of suitable courses; (*paragraphs 12, 13, 53, 54*)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	144
	Sixth form	60
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		69

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	5	52	41	39	6	1	0
Percentage	3.4	36.1	28.4	27	4.1	0.6	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	25	26	5	1	0	0
Percentage	5	41.6	43.3	8.3	1.6	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for the sixth form as each lesson represents 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	1431	222
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	97	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs	49	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	103	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	53

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2%
National comparative data	7.8%

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9%
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	153	160	313

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	108	110	118
	Girls	136	126	130
	Total	244	236	248
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	78 (n/a)	75 (n/a)	79 (n/a)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	51 (n/a)	54 (n/a)	49 (n/a)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	83	118	94
	Girls	124	134	97
	Total	207	252	191
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	67 (n/a)	80 (n/a)	61 (n/a)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	29 (n/a)	50 (n/a)	23 (n/a)
	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	158	179	337

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	66	153	159
	Girls	85	167	176
	Total	151	320	335
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	44 (n/a)	94 (n/a)	98 (n/a)
	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	37.5
	National	39.8

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	23	74
	National	No information	

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	58	59	117
	Average point score per candidate	21.8 (n/a)	19.7 (n/a)	20.75 (n/a)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	0	0	0	0	0	0
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	0
	National		81.0

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
1,611	118	5
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
7	4	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	2	0
0	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
3	0	0
0	0	0
28	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	108.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	59
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1607

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

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

Key Stage 2	N/a
Key Stage 3	23.8
Key Stage 4	22.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001 - 2002
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	£
Total income	3,090,619
Total expenditure	3,013,055
Expenditure per pupil	1,672
Balance brought forward from previous year	1,183
Balance carried forward to next year	78,745

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27.16
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	24.74
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
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)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

21.5%

Number of questionnaires sent out

1652

Number of questionnaires returned

355

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	24	60	12	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	28	60	6	2	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	23	49	15	2	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	58	14	6	3
The teaching is good.	14	63	10	2	11
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	15	46	28	6	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	33	53	9	4	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	45	51	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	13	49	27	5	6
The school is well led and managed.	22	52	13	3	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	25	61	7	1	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	24	49	14	3	10

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- The high levels of attainment at the end of Year 9.
- The very good quality of teaching that ensures that all pupils are fully involved in lessons.
- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils, which allow pupils to feel confident about expressing new ideas.
- The commitment to equal opportunities which has resulted in all groups of pupils making good progress.
- The very good leadership and management that produce a corporate approach from a very large department.

Areas for improvement

- The very good quality of many plenary sessions needs to be more consistently applied.
- Literature from other cultures and traditions is under-represented.

90. Overall standards of attainment in English are above the national average. In 2002 the Key Stage 3 test results in English were well above the national average both in terms of average points score and the percentage of pupils gaining Level 6. They were also well above the average for similar schools. Work seen during the inspection reflected this high attainment. In 2002, GCSE English language results were broadly similar to national averages while GCSE English literature results were below the national average. The English literature results should be viewed in the context of a much higher cohort entering for the subject than is typical in terms of national averages. Work seen during the inspection suggests that standards of attainment in English language this year are above national expectations. Girls perform better than boys at both key stages to an extent that is similar to the national pattern. High quality teaching, very good relationships between staff and pupils and very good leadership and management of the department all contribute to the positive results.
91. In speaking and listening, by Year 9 the highest attaining pupils participate confidently in discussions and ask questions to develop their ideas. Lower attaining pupils are more repetitive in their contributions. In reading, by the end of Year 9 the highest attaining pupils refer closely to the text when discussing characters and themes and are adept at identifying underlying issues. Lower attaining pupils tend to comment on the plot and main incidents. In writing, the highest attaining pupils by the end of Year 9 write successfully in a range of forms for different purposes and audiences and are also able to adopt the style of novels they are reading. One pupil wrote a chapter that was an excellent pastiche of *Stone Cold* by Robert Swindells. Lower attaining pupils demonstrate a significantly smaller repertoire of style and are less skilled at editing and revising their work.
92. In speaking and listening by Year 11, most pupils are keen to participate in discussions and build on each other's contributions. Only a few pupils are reticent and make little contribution to debates and discussions. In reading, by Year 11 the highest attaining pupils are able to set key incidents and events in a wider context, identify ambiguity and offer both critical and personal responses. One girl wrote of

Romeo and Juliet, 'If he be married/ My grave is to be my wedding bed' shows some irony and provides a possible glimpse of the tragic end of the play'.

93. Lower attaining pupils have far more difficulty identifying authors' intentions. In writing, by the end of Year 11 the most successful pupils are able to vary register and style for an increasingly varied range of purposes. Lower attaining pupils, while competent in basic punctuation, still experience difficulty with internal sentence punctuation. Achievement in speaking and listening, reading and writing is good in all years and all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress.
94. The quality of teaching is very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed, virtually all lessons being of good or very good quality. It is significant in such a large department that the many real strengths in teaching occurred consistently in so many classrooms. Lessons are usually well structured with a range of different activities that ensure that pupils are engaged and interested. Opening explanations of objectives are clear and enable pupils to understand from the outset what is expected of them. Questioning is skilled and is another major reason why such a high proportion of pupils actively participate in lessons. All teachers know the pupils exceptionally well and make good use of this knowledge in allocating time for extra support during lessons. Most lessons end with good plenary sessions which reflect upon and reinforce the learning that has taken place, but on occasions these are not fully realised and are too rushed. All the above strengths are closely allied to the very good relationships between teachers and pupils in all lessons.
95. It is not surprising that pupils respond so well to the teaching that they receive. Behaviour is always good and frequently very good. Pupils are enthusiastic and very keen to participate. They collaborate well and support each other. When the work is challenging they persevere and show independence of thought. Lessons are clearly enjoyed by both pupils and teachers.
96. The provision for the social and moral development of pupils is good with many opportunities taken for discussion and writing on important issues. A Year 9 class writing self-help brochures on bullying demonstrated good insight into the nature of the problem. Provision for spiritual development is less frequent, although when it is addressed it is handled well, as occurred when pupils' sensitive response to a poem about ageing was encouraged. The department caters well for the cultural development of pupils, but there is an urgent need to provide more literature from other cultures and traditions. There are good examples of information and communication technology used in the subject, but use is restricted by problems of access to facilities.
97. Drama is taught as a discrete subject, but very effectively enhances all aspects of pupils' language development. The quality of teaching of drama is very good with frequent opportunities for pupils to make decisions, work collaboratively and develop the ability to evaluate their own work and that of others. Standards of attainment are very good. School productions and theatre trips contribute significantly to pupils' social and cultural development.
98. Leadership and management of the English department are very good. It is a notable achievement in a department of 17 teachers that there is such a corporate approach to the subject and that morale is so high. The English strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy has been successfully implemented. Throughout the department there is an overt commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities with considerable care taken to ensure that all pupils have equal access to the curriculum and feel

equally valued in lessons. Many lessons are taught in a suite of rooms that from the outside appears extremely bleak and depressing. It is a major achievement, therefore, that the ethos within these rooms is so positive.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good overall, motivating pupils to learn.
- Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11.
- The teacher-pupil relationships are strong, resulting in a positive work ethos.
- Leadership and management are good, focusing on improving standards.

Areas for improvement

- Medium term planning for teaching and learning.
- Reporting of pupils' achievement of learning objectives.

99. Standards of attainment for pupils at age 14 are well above the average for similar schools and above the national average for all schools. The standards of attainment for pupils aged 16 are broadly similar to the national average in terms of the number of pupils achieving grades A*-C. The number of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-G is above the national average.
100. The standard of attainment seen in lessons and in books of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils show increasing confidence and competence in all areas of mathematics. They become adept at managing fractions, decimals and percentages and understand the relationship between them. They learn how to solve algebraic equations and to plot and interpret graphs, using them to solve problems. The pupils do a variety of practical exercises to help them understand geometry. Some of the pupils' work is proudly displayed to celebrate their success.
101. The good achievement during Years 7 to 9 is a result of good teaching. Most lessons begin with imaginative mental starters, which allow pupils to reinforce basic skills or to focus on the skills needed for each lesson. In one lesson, pupils used write on/wipe off boards to record answers to questions on averages quickly. The teacher was able to assess their understanding quickly to help pupils who were struggling or who needed to be challenged. A class of Year 8 pupils played a game of bingo, the questions involving demanding mental arithmetic. Pupils who have experienced difficulties with mathematics are taught in smaller groups with the additional support of teaching assistants.
102. The standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 matches the national average and by the age of 16 pupils have covered all the topics of the GCSE syllabus and are sufficiently prepared for the examination. Higher attaining pupils confidently tackle quadratic and cubic equations and graphs to solve problems. They are challenged and display a mature attitude toward the examination course in both years.
103. The standard of teaching in Years 10 to 11 is very good and pupils make very good progress. Teachers plan well and are skilled in explaining new concepts. A group of higher attaining Year 10 pupils displayed the ability to work independently and to confer with each other to resolve challenging higher-level mathematical problems based on number sequences and algebra. However, there are presently too few

opportunities for pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning or to work collaboratively. The middle attaining pupils are not sufficiently challenged and do not have as great an opportunity to achieve the higher grades of which some are capable.

104. Mathematical investigations are a feature of the schemes of work for each year group. A class of Year 7 pupils successfully investigated 'probability'. A Year 11 group displayed a high level of maturity and skill as they began an investigation of a pattern to try to explain it in mathematical terms. In other pupils' work, there were some good examples of the use of information and communication technology such as tables and graphs.
105. The mathematics department contributes to the pupils' literacy development, particularly their speaking and listening skills, because the teachers encourage them to explain how they have solved problems. Being conscientious and kind, most teachers are excellent role models, which contributes to the pupils' personal development. Pupils' behaviour is consequently very good and there is a strong sense of mutual respect between teachers and pupils which helps raise pupils' self esteem to support their learning.
106. There are plans in place to ensure the mathematics department's contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Elements of citizenship are addressed to some extent, with further contributions planned. For example, a class has investigated the issue of young people smoking by carrying out a survey and producing facts, figures and graphs; topics such as 'percentages' include the calculation of interest and of VAT.
107. Teachers' lesson planning is good or better overall and they assess pupils' progress in lessons, adjusting their teaching accordingly. The standard of marking is very good and thorough and includes comments of encouragement and advice which help pupils improve. End of module tests and end of year testing inform teachers of what each pupil has achieved over time and allows long term target setting. The assessment and recording of pupils' achievement of each lesson's learning objectives are not yet established and there is no explanation of how under-achieving pupils may be helped to achieve the set learning objectives.
108. The leadership and management of the mathematics department are very good. The National Numeracy Strategy has been adopted for pupils aged 11 to 14 and GCSE courses at three levels for pupils aged 14 to 16. Long-term schemes of work at three levels are in place, but are not yet written in terms of specific learning objectives to be achieved within stated time limits. This results in varying coverage and varying emphasis on topics so that some similar classes move further forward in their learning than others. Better plans would better inform the teachers of the pupils' learning objectives. Data analysis and target setting are strong features of the department's work. The subject improvement plan is thorough and addresses most priorities, which contributes to the raising of standards. It does not yet include a staff development programme plan and there is no time-line for checking the implementation of the various elements of the plan. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning is firmly in place and the head of faculty has a clear vision for the mathematics department's development, which focuses on improving standards.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good in both key stages, with lessons that are well prepared, with a variety of teaching styles taught by a team of well-qualified staff.
- Progress and attainment by the end of Year 9.
- The very good relationships between pupils and teachers.
- Management of the department is good.

Areas for improvement

- The attainment at GCSE of some pupils.
- Course provision for average GCSE pupils.
- Develop further the consistent use of individual targets.

109. Standards of work at the end of Year 9 are above the national average. Pupils' results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well above the national average and well above similar schools. There is no significant difference in the results of boys and girls. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress. Although teachers' assessment of progress has been a little below the final test results, observations in lessons and scrutiny of work reflect the standards produced in tests. The work of pupils currently in Years 7 to 9 is above average. Good teaching in these years has enabled pupils to make good gains in understanding in relation to their prior attainment. For example, in Year 8, lower ability pupils understand how the seasons occur on Earth and higher ability pupils in Year 9 are able to use the law of moments to calculate turning forces.
110. Standards of work of pupils at the end of Year 11 are above average. In 2002, pupils entered for GCSE took double science certification. Their examination results were in line with the national average but below the level of similar schools. Results for boys and girls showed little variation. The attainment of pupils currently in Years 10 and 11 is above average. Pupils in Year 10 who are likely to achieve a grade C at GCSE can use the reactivity series to predict and describe new reactions of metals. By the end of Year 11, pupils are able to perform all aspects of scientific investigations at a sound level of attainment.
111. Pupils' learning is good in Years 7 to 11 because teaching is good. Pupils that have special educational needs are well supported in science with additional staffing and make good progress. Pupils develop their literacy and mathematical skills, both in written work and class discussions. Gifted and talented youngsters are well supported in Years 7 to 9 with extension material. For example, some gifted children in Year 8 were challenged to investigate the relationship between the seasons and the Earth's axial tilt using a computer model and simulation. A new course in Year 10 has been successfully introduced and it is designed to make science more appealing. One very successful activity was an organised trip to Blackburn Rovers for lower attaining youngsters who carried out investigative work into friction. They improved their scientific knowledge and understanding, as well as their motivation and self-confidence. However, analysis of examination results and conversations with pupils indicates that the current courses may not always be the most suitable for middle attaining pupils in GCSE. For example, some average and below average attaining pupils in Year 11 found difficulty in recalling work they had covered in the

previous year. The department is considering extending modular provision in order to raise attainment in science still further.

112. The teaching of science is good. The teachers have incorporated many of the techniques identified nationally as good practice. Work is well planned and taught by suitably qualified and enthusiastic staff. The teacher outlines the aims of the lesson then follows with a snappy starter activity. This often involves literacy skills; for example, in a Year 8 lesson pupils enjoyed unscrambling anagrams of key scientific terms. As a result, their spelling of these words improved. In the most successful lessons planning ensures the lesson has sufficient pace and challenge. One excellent lesson in Year 10 saw three pupils taking over as 'guest teachers'. They demonstrated a series of chemical reactions and confidently fielded questions from the other pupils. All the pupils were actively involved and learnt a significant amount of chemistry, while at the same time developing good communication skills and growing in self-confidence. Lessons generally finish with a brief review. Homework is used as a means of reinforcing learning. Some pupils are offered extra support during lessons. In a Year 9 lesson the teacher and the teaching assistant had effectively planned how this could best be arranged. Despite the difficulties in moving staff from one site to the other most lessons start punctually. On the rare occasions where teaching is less than satisfactory there is insufficient class control or challenge and pupils do not participate fully in the lesson.
113. There are good relationships between the pupils and staff in lessons. Most pupils behave very well and work hard in science. Pupils are keen to enter into class discussions and develop their language skills. They work in a safe and enthusiastic manner when performing practical work. A good example was a Year 9 lesson in which pupils worked enthusiastically and safely to make and purify copper sulphate. As a result, they develop a range of practical skills. Pupils in all years produce work that is complete and well presented. Unsatisfactory attitudes occur only when classroom control is not strong, where there is insufficient pace to lessons, or where inappropriate tasks are set.
114. The assessment of pupils' progress and attainment is satisfactory. The marking of books is not always rigorous and some have only brief narrative comments. Pupils are aware of their progress from the assessments made on end of topic tests. Targets are set, but in some classes the pupils are unaware of these. There is a need for a more consistent approach using existing target setting to promote learning.
115. The department is well led, and planning for effective teaching and learning is a strength. Sensitive leadership and a very professional approach by all staff involved have ensured that the merger of two large departments has been very successful. Each subject area has well qualified teachers and efficient support staff. Resources are generally adequate; however, accommodation for the science department is unsatisfactory in a few areas with some rooms in poor condition. The use of information and communication technology is growing, but is still not widespread in science and easier access to whole class facilities, as well as classroom-based resources, is needed to allow this to increase.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Standards at GCSE are above average.
- Drawing and observational skills are very well developed.
- Achievement is good across all year groups.
- Teaching and the management of pupils are very good.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to their work.

Areas for improvement

- The use of assessment to guide pupils and inform parents about progress.
- Opportunities to use information and communication technology.

116. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average overall. Standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with the national expectation and by the end of Year 11 standards are above the national average for boys and girls. These standards are achieved because the teaching is very good overall and well matched to the needs of the pupils. Pupils' achievements in art from Years 7 to 11 in relation to their standards at the start of Year 7 are good.
117. In the 2002 GCSE examinations, standards overall were above the national average. The percentage of boys and girls gaining A* and A grades was high in comparison to the national figure. While boys' results overall were average, those for girls were above the national average. Girls' and boys' achievement in terms of their average points score was good in relation to their performance in most other subjects.
118. Teacher assessments of pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicate pupils' attainment as broadly average with girls doing better than boys. However, in lessons seen current Year 9 standards for boys and girls are broadly in line with the national average, but with above average work in observational drawing. Boys and girls demonstrate good knowledge of the style and work of artists such as Van Gogh and Year 9 pupils used this well in compositions. In one lesson, for example, the teacher involved the pupils very effectively through well targeted questioning and pupils demonstrated good recall of their learning and consolidation of their knowledge and understanding. Teachers plan to ensure pupils tackle a range of subject matter and use materials and equipment confidently and safely. Pupils are encouraged to use a sketchbook to record images and develop ideas. Teachers' resources and clear explanations and help all pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, to achieve well. Pupils develop their knowledge of other cultures through research and practical activities. Year 8, for example, develop their own compositions based on studies of Aboriginal art and show good understanding of some of the conventions and symbolism. Pupils use direct observation, secondary sources and their imagination to develop images and can interpret ideas in two and sometimes three dimensions. The structure of lessons with clear aims and a closing review helps all pupils to consolidate their knowledge and understanding. The use of pupil evaluation at the end of units of work is good and enables pupils to reflect on what they have achieved, but the assessment system gives them insufficient information during their units of work.
119. Standards overall continue to improve in Years 10 and 11 and progress with learning is good. The strong focus on developing observational skills and two-dimensional work is sustained with pupils working on images at a variety of scales. Painting and

drawing is of a high quality in many cases, with the most able pupils developing original compositions that make clear reference to the work of artists. Written research sometimes suffers from being too descriptive rather than evaluating and responding to artists work. Teachers encourage pupils to explore a range of subject matter and build upon their knowledge and skills from earlier years. Some pupils make very good use of computers to gather research materials and to develop their images and compositions. Access to computers is limited, but teachers encourage pupils to use them at home, alongside other research methods, to support their work.

120. Teaching is very good across all year groups. Teachers have between them a range of art and design skills and use these effectively to plan lessons, which have a clear structure and support good learning. Displays of work are used very well in classrooms and around the school to celebrate pupils' achievements and set high standards at both school sites. Teachers are working hard to develop lessons in line with the whole school policy on teaching and learning. In the best lessons they encourage discussion and sustain very good pace through regular interjections and review. However, talking by teachers and the heavy focus upon the task set sometimes means opportunities for pupils to talk about their work and the work of others are missed. Assessment systems are used well in Years 10 and 11 to guide pupils about syllabus requirements in preparation for the GCSE examination.
121. Leadership and management of the department are very good and supportive of staff on both school sites. Departmental documentation and planning are clear and concise and support a strong team spirit with a focus on sustained improvement. The schemes of work are evaluated and the department has identified the need to increase the use of computers to support work in art. The department uses assessment effectively in Year 7 to establish pupils' attainment on entry to the school. This enables teachers to ensure work is matched to pupils' needs and the current Year 7 have made very good progress with their drawing skills as a result. Assessment systems to track individual progress through Years 7 to 9 require development to provide better information for parents about progress and ensure pupils have a clear understanding of their standards and how to improve.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- The understanding, commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated by the subject leader.
- The contribution made by history, geography and music departments to pupils' understanding of citizenship.
- Some very good teaching provides a model that can be used by the school to improve the quality of provision overall.

Areas for improvement

- Inconsistent approach by many departments to incorporate citizenship into their subject planning.
- Training to ensure that all teachers feel confident to deliver the new materials.
- Monitoring and assessing progress made in lessons.
- Ensuring that the quality of teaching is monitored carefully.

122. Currently pupils are on course to reach average standards by the end of Years 9 and 11 in knowledge about becoming informed citizens and in developing skills of enquiry

and communication. They are generally interested in their lessons, especially during presentations from outside speakers. The local Member of Parliament is a regular visitor and lessons are planned to enable pupils to question him on a range of national and local issues. Pupils then synthesise the replies and feed back the information to their peers.

123. Pupils achieve well when the work is challenging and their minds are fully engaged. This was evident in a lesson for Year 11 pupils concerned with managing personal finances. Tasks were appropriate, building on pupils' personal understanding as they had recently completed their work experience. Working in groups, discussion was focused and all views were welcomed and valued. In a very good lesson for Year 9 pupils, boys and girls were able to discuss sexual issues openly and without embarrassment. The aims of the lesson were clearly understood and the varied tasks explained in detail. This meant that pupils were clear about what was expected of them and how to discuss sensitive issues in a mature way. Through excellent debate and reflection of issues, pupils were shocked to realise how prejudice can affect some sections of society. However, some boys were reluctant to express views and took refuge in stereotypical responses. The teacher picked up on this and steered the debate skilfully to enable boys to express their opinions and as a result there was very good learning by both boys and girls.
124. Citizenship, as a subject, is new to the school with many pupils just starting to develop their grasp of rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. At present, departments have completed an audit to demonstrate how elements of citizenship can be taught through various subjects. However, there is inconsistency in delivery, with several departments not yet addressing citizenship issues in their lessons. Within the English department there are some good examples in lessons; for example, Year 9 pupils produce information for a booklet on how to deal with the effects of bullying. However, the department does not as yet plan coherently for the subject. Planning and delivery is good in history where Year 9 pupils learn about life in the trenches during World War I. Other examples are when pupils explore the diversity in the British population in geography and when ensembles and concerts provide opportunities for pupils to take part in music activities.
125. Teaching is satisfactory overall. The quality of teaching seen during the inspection varied from very good to satisfactory. In the best lessons, planning is very good; teachers have good subject knowledge, manage pupils well and encourage lively debate. Where teaching is only satisfactory the range of materials provided are insufficient to support the teachers and the lessons are not planned sufficiently to challenge all pupils. This means that pupils do not make sufficient progress as they do not always understand what is expected of them and do not always appreciate the importance of their lessons.
126. Through good leadership, the subject co-ordinator has developed a good citizenship programme for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Work is now being undertaken to ensure a programme of equal quality for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Research has been thorough and, as a result, the programme is enhanced by visits from a varied range of outside speakers. At present, however, too little is done to monitor weak teaching and bring about improvement and teachers have not yet had training to help them. Plans are in hand for newly qualified teachers to receive training next year; however, all staff would benefit from the training. Good work is celebrated through internal certificates; however, currently there is a limited approach by teachers to monitoring pupil progress in their lessons.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- Provision for information and communication technology.
- Attainment and progress of pupils with special educational needs.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards in resistant materials.
- Planning for the development of the work of the faculty.

127. In work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Year 9 are at an average level generally, but are variable between the different areas which constitute design and technology. In food technology, many pupils show above average knowledge, skill and understanding of ways of preparing food and are aware of attendant factors, such as hygiene and economy. Work in textiles is imaginative and well finished. In resistant materials, however, standards are lower. In teacher-graded assessments, pupils gained results in line with the national average but standards are lower than that in resistant materials. Progress is satisfactory through good guidance from teachers on the requirements of their course and helpful individual support ensures all pupils understand how to improve. Literacy and numeracy are enhanced on the one hand by the display of subject specialist terms and on the other by measuring and calculation in technology projects. Information and communication technology is used effectively and quite frequently and pupils are given experience of computer aided design as well as computer aided manufacture. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress due to the nature of the work in design and technology, which allows success at a wide range of levels.
128. In Years 10 and 11, standards in work seen are again around the level of the national average but with variations between courses. Attainment in child development and graphics is above average and it is average in food technology. Attainment in resistant materials, however, is below average. Similar variations are reflected in GCSE examinations. Results are below average overall, but with significant differences between examination options, child development being above average and resistant materials and textiles well below. Taken together, these results show satisfactory, though patchy, achievement, taking into account the prior attainment of pupils. A notable instance is the very good progress made by pupils with special educational needs taking the GNVQ manufacturing course in which standards reached represent very good achievement. Progress in textiles is poor in relation to the level reached at the earlier stage and is limited by a lack of suitable accommodation and learning resources. This results in an excessively theoretical and unstimulating approach. In food technology in Years 7 to 9, progress is held back by staffing difficulties.
129. The quality of teaching in the faculty is satisfactory overall with a significant proportion of good teaching. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Work is planned well and sensitively supervised with a good range of teaching strategies, ranging from formal instruction in the safe use of tools and equipment, to demonstration and individual tuition. Pupils are given help appropriate to their needs and a strength, which supports teaching and learning, is the quality of teacher-pupil relationships. Very good use is made of the school policy for teaching and learning, in particular the review of progress at the end of lessons. Although no unsatisfactory

teaching was seen in inspection week, teaching in resistant materials must regularly provide greater rigour and challenge if standards are to improve.

130. The use of display within the faculty is in need of development as an aid to learning. Most displays currently in place are commercially produced information sheets. These, in many cases, are old, badly sited and difficult to read. Too little use is made of pupils' work in display as an illustration of pupil progress and as a spur to improvement. Assessment procedures are now in place at both stages, to Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11. These are detailed and designed to facilitate the tracking of pupil progress throughout the school. These measures are accurate as indicators of attainment, but are not yet fully in use as an aid to curriculum development.
131. The overall quality of management is satisfactory against a difficult background created by the very recent merging of two schools to form the present institution. This has caused staffing and accommodation problems which have had an adverse impact on the work of the faculty. Recent appointments, however, are bringing increased energy and ambition to the work of the department. It is important that all within the department are involved in planning for the future development of courses in order to make maximum use of the innovatory talent available.
132. The faculty documents are in need of some revision. The development plan states broad aims, but is lacking in detail relating to ways in which the aims are to be fulfilled. Course material used is not presented in a consistent form across the faculty and would benefit from rationalisation. Resources for learning are adequate and provision for information and communication technology is good. The accommodation provided is temporary during the completion of new buildings and is mostly unsuitable with many small rooms which, in some cases, house obsolete machinery not currently in use.
133. Where machinery is in use, a health and safety hazard is present due to the lack of demarcation boundary lines to prevent dangerous crowding around lathes, bandsaws and pillar drills. This is in need of urgent attention.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management set ambitious targets for improvement.
- New schemes of work in Years 7 - 9 extend pupils' understanding.
- Very good teamwork within the department is helping to raise standards.
- Excellent displays make the best of the unsatisfactory accommodation.

Areas for improvement

- Curriculum time in Year 9 is unsatisfactory.
- Provision of information and communication technology in Years 7 to 9 is inadequate.
- Assessment procedures do not give pupils enough information on how to improve their work.

134. At the end of Year 9, standards are similar to the national average. Girls achieve higher standards than boys, as is the case nationally. Standards in the GCSE examination in 2002 were just below the national average. Boys, who formed a large proportion of the entries, achieved results that were well above the average for boys

nationally. However, the results for girls were well below the national average for girls. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 during the inspection have improved and are now above average for both girls and boys.

135. Achievement in Years 7 and 8 is good because schemes of work are very well planned and teaching is good overall. However, in Year 9 the current curriculum organisation has reduced the allocation of lesson time for geography by half. In order to complete the syllabus, topics cannot be covered in depth and there are few opportunities to broaden pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the subject, through, for example, fieldwork. Achievement is therefore unsatisfactory at the end of Year 9 overall, particularly for less capable pupils who have difficulty in recalling previous learning and in working at the required speed. Some unimaginative teaching methods, which do not hold more capable pupils' attention, also contribute to this unsatisfactory achievement.
136. Although pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above average, most have had very little direct experience of geography in lessons. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 rapidly improve their use of map skills, their knowledge of landscape evolution and their understanding of the impact of human activity on the environment. For example, they write creatively about different areas of the world in an imaginary journey round the equator and identify with the suffering of communities afflicted by disasters such as flooding in less developed countries. Pupils with special educational needs often receive individual help from their teachers who know them very well. They therefore achieve as well as other pupils in the group, particularly when learning support assistants are available. Analysis of work in Year 9 shows that highly capable and well-motivated pupils write accurately about factors affecting climate and can compare ecosystems in detail. However, although less capable pupils understand basic climatic patterns, they find extended writing very difficult. Their work often shows a lack of continuity because they cannot complete enough of it in the restricted teaching time available.
137. The department welcomes all pupils who wish to study geography in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is good. Pupils are keen to do well and show good attitudes to their work in lessons. These factors, together with pupils' very good relationships with their teachers, enable most lessons to proceed at a rapid pace with no loss of time for learning. In a good lesson in Year 10, support by the teacher to all who needed extra help enabled the whole class to achieve very well as they examined patterns of world population. Challenging work for the most capable is often provided, enabling them to develop more sophisticated responses. Fieldwork undertaken on local river systems enables pupils to produce worthwhile investigations using information and communication technology that make a positive contribution to their final examination grade.
138. Teaching and learning are good overall. All lessons observed during the inspection were at least satisfactory and three-quarters were good or better. Two lessons that were seen were very good. Common features of the best lessons are the teachers' expert subject knowledge and their meticulous planning, making use of a wide range of activities and techniques. Pupils enjoy these lessons and respond with enthusiasm, as in a very good lesson with less capable pupils in Year 8. These pupils made very good progress in their understanding of river processes because of the teacher's excellent planning of stimulating activities. Skilful teaching in another very good lesson in Year 11 produced thoughtful responses and quiet reflection from very capable pupils on aspects of industrial location. In the small number of lessons where teaching was satisfactory rather than good, the resources provided were too few or insufficiently accurate to ensure good learning by all pupils. In Years 7 to 9,

pupils do not have enough opportunities to extend their understanding through the use of computers in lessons. Most teachers mark pupils' work regularly, sometimes with helpful comments for improvement. However, pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not understand enough about the national curriculum levels which they have reached and how to improve, even though they know their target levels.

139. The department is very well led and managed. Many new policies are now in place and are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Opportunities for including new directions, such as aspects of citizenship, are seized with enthusiasm. Sensitive management is creating a supportive team of teachers who are now keen to share their expertise and ideas. High quality displays of pupils' work and of geographical issues in the news raise pupils' awareness of the world outside their own environment. Completion of all schemes of work, together with the development of assessment procedures that involve pupils in charting their own progress towards achievable targets, will ensure continued improvement in this department.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and sometimes excellent.
- Pupils achieve above average standards at Key Stage 4.
- Teachers have very secure subject knowledge.
- Pupils enjoy the subject, particularly when they are involved in their own learning.

Areas for improvement

- Curriculum time in Year 9.
- Resolve the unsatisfactory teaching and develop greater consistency in teaching.
- Provision for information and communication technology.

140. At the end of Year 9, teacher assessments in history for 2002 show that pupils are attaining above the national expectation. Girls achieve better than boys do. GCSE results for 2002 at grades A* to C are satisfactory. Those at grades A* to G are just above the national average. The GCSE results for girls are much better than the results for girls nationally. The GCSE results for boys are slightly better than the boys' results nationally.
141. In the work seen and the lessons observed in the present Years 7 and 8, pupils achieve standards that are satisfactory. But in the present Year 9 only the higher attaining pupils are achieving above average standards. Pupils of average and of lower attainment in Year 9, including those with special educational needs, achieve standards that are below average and this represents significant underachievement. This is because the curriculum time allotted to history is below national averages. Teachers and pupils work hard in the one history period a week, but this is insufficient time for the National Curriculum to be covered adequately. There is also an element of unsatisfactory teaching in Year 9, where there is too much teacher direction, lack of connection with written work that pupils are completing and not enough opportunity for pupils to be actively involved in their own learning.
142. In Years 10 and 11, the work seen and the lessons observed show that pupils are achieving above average standards. For example, in an outstanding lesson on statistics about death rates in the nineteenth century, a group of mainly lower

attaining Year 10 pupils made excellent progress because they learnt to understand and interpret a graph and later to analyse results presented in a table. The teacher not only skilfully built on the pupils' mathematical learning to achieve this but also kept their interest by actively involving them in their own learning. In Year 11, pupils are being very well prepared for the GCSE examination. They are developing secure historical knowledge and understanding, as well as learning how to select and present information for a GCSE question. The strong emphasis on teaching analytical and thinking skills throughout both key stages develops a sense of intellectual curiosity in pupils. History, a strong subject in both the previous schools, continues to attract a good number of pupils, who work hard and enjoy the subject.

143. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers work hard and are committed to raising standards. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and lessons are generally well planned. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Just over half the lessons are very good or outstanding. These lessons are characterised by innovative and imaginative teaching, which involves pupils actively in their own learning by using a variety of teaching and learning styles. In the lesson judged unsatisfactory, pupils worked obediently but were passive learners and marking was poor. Throughout the department there is a strong emphasis on knowledge, understanding and skills. This, combined with the quality of the teaching observed, is raising standards.
144. In two thirds of the lessons observed, the quality of pupils' learning is above average, sometimes outstandingly so. Such learning takes place because the quality of engagement between teachers and pupils is so good. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on life in the trenches, a class of higher attaining pupils made very good progress because animated and challenging teaching was sustained throughout the lesson. At the conclusion of the lesson the teacher read a passage from a contemporary novel which described the horror of trench warfare. The pupils found this gripping. This outstanding teaching involves and engages pupils, challenges them to think and develops them as independent learners.
145. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department has a clear vision for the future and a determination to raise standards. Staff work well together as an increasingly effective team. The scheme of work sets out the key questions through which the programmes of study are addressed and lists the policies and procedures of the department. There is a very good policy on literacy and language development in history and some very effective links to citizenship. There is a good assessment and evaluation policy and national curriculum levels are being used. There is a very good departmental self-evaluation, which accurately diagnoses the areas for future development. Teachers, although working well together, are not yet being consistent in their approach to marking, use of levels and to using activity based methods in their teaching. The provision for information and communication technology is unsatisfactory.
146. This is a good department with many strengths and much has been achieved since the school re-organised just over a year ago. The department faces the challenge of improving standards further. It certainly has the capacity to do so.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY and BUSINESS STUDIES

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management are good.
- Good subject knowledge of specialist teachers.
- Good one to one relationships between staff and pupils.
- The very good contribution to extra curricula activities.
- The number of new initiatives that are now occurring.
- Good contributions to numeracy.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that all pupils in Years 10 and 11 are taught the National Curriculum.
- Improve the cross curricula delivery of information and communication technology throughout the school.
- Improve assessment at end of Year 9.
- Improve monitoring and evaluation.
- Improve accommodation and the quality and quantity of resources.

147. Standards attained in the 2002 GCSE examinations were broadly in line with the national average. This was the first group to have taken this course and the department had experienced staffing difficulties. The pupils had encountered problems as computer systems were incompatible between the two sites. The work of the current pupils on this course indicates that their attainment remains similar. In 2002 less than a fifth of the school were entered for the GCSE examination. All other pupils were dependent on the subjects that they were taking to teach the National Curriculum information and communication technology (ICT) programmes of study. This was not done as cross curricula ICT was an under developed area, as recognised by senior management. There is now a well-conceived plan to develop cross-curricular ICT that was put into effect in the autumn of 2002. It has not yet had an impact on achievement and attainment for the majority of 16 year-olds remains unsatisfactory.
148. Years 7 to 9 had been taught ICT intermittently as part of design and technology. They had been taught by a number of supply teachers and teacher assessment of their attainment was not secure. Learning had been variable, although progress in some aspects of ICT, such as control, had been good. The current Year 9 are now benefiting from discrete teaching and overall their attainment is in line with national expectations. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, encouraged by the practical problem solving activities. Work in pupils' computer files indicates sound use of text and graphics and an awareness of publishing on the Web. A Year 8 class was making satisfactory progress using spreadsheets. The teacher's clear explanation resulted in a good understanding of the ideas underpinning the use of formulae. A scrutiny of their work over time indicated that some had made good progress in their ICT studies last year and that the rate of progress of many Year 8 pupils was better than that of Year 9. Year 7 pupils made satisfactory progress in understanding some simple functions of a desktop publishing package.
149. Pupils studying for the GCSE examination achieved well in the majority of the lessons. All gained from the teachers' good subject knowledge and ability to explain things simply. Teachers ensure that coursework focuses on real life situations such

as using ICT to help an archery club or a relative's transport firm. Pupils frequently made good progress when involved in a one to one dialogue with the teacher. However, an examination of the previous work from all GCSE classes, and a range of coursework, indicates that many pupils only make satisfactory progress over time. The lack of a structured and organised approach to the completion of coursework and other tasks results in overall achievement that is broadly satisfactory but less than it could be. The department is well aware of this and is now taking appropriate action to remedy the situation. For example, a basic approach to coursework and assignments, with mini targets being set and recorded, is now being taught in Year 9 classes.

150. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Overall, it is better in GCSE classes, with teaching in two thirds of the lessons being good or better. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and are good at supporting and sometimes challenging pupils, especially the more able. Teachers' introductions are clear and they are effective at helping pupils to clarify their thought patterns, especially in the examination classes. However, the management of coursework and assignments has on occasions lacked rigour and throughout the school, but especially in Year 7 to 9, there is not always a sense of strong pupil involvement in the learning process. Pupils complete the task but without persistent concentration. The department makes a helpful contribution to studies out of school hours by allowing access to pupils. In classes throughout the school, ICT lessons are not always marked by a strong work ethic. Overall, behaviour is not unsatisfactory but there were a number of minor incidents that detracted from a sense of purposeful learning. Behaviour is best when teachers have high expectations of pupils' capabilities.
151. The provision of ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. Planned use of ICT is embedded in all subjects but its successful execution differs from subject to subject and within departments. Not all teachers have completed their individual training and access to scarce computers is a problem. Departments such as special educational needs do not have use of appropriate software. There are instances of some good practice. For example, Year 7 historians use the Internet to research Pompeii and a Year 8 art class used a software package to explore patterns. However, ICT is not extensively used to support the teaching of all subjects and its co-ordination is at best embryonic.
152. The school has identified that the development of ICT across the curriculum has been tardy and has recently taken remedial action. An appropriate strategic plan has been written and gives details of measures to be taken. The school is receiving extra support as part of the ICT Key Stage 3 strand and an external consultant is supporting teachers. An experienced member of staff has been given an additional allowance to co-ordinate cross-curricular work in Years 7 to 9 and an audit has recently taken place.
153. The department is well led by an experienced and well-qualified teacher, with vision and administrative skills. This new appointment was made in September 2001 during a period of staffing turbulence. Accommodation and resources were unsatisfactory and remain so. For example, the computer to pupil ratio is lower than the national average. Network incompatibility between the sites and ill-ventilated rooms are still problems. Staff from varying disciplines teach ICT, often for only one or two lessons a week. It has been difficult to build teams in these circumstances, especially as a number of roles overlap. Nevertheless, progress has been made. A new, good handbook forms the basis for a shared understanding of the way forward. A number of developments have taken place. A more structured assessment system

is being introduced that pinpoints pupils' achievement and enables their results to inform planning. A pupil self-evaluation sheet has been extended, thereby increasing pupil involvement in their learning. The number of pupils opting for the GCSE examination has increased. However, the scheme of work has not been updated to refer to, for example, citizenship, literacy and details of assessment opportunities. The subject contributes well to numeracy. There is not a detailed monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning so that good practice can be shared, but all pupils are encouraged towards a more positive attitude to the subject.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving and pupils make good progress in some key aspects of language learning
- Teaching is good in all three languages taught.
- The heads of each language department are working increasingly closely within the faculty and provide good leadership.
- The faculty evaluates its own performance and analyses test and examination data thoroughly and is making effective use of its findings.

Areas for improvement

- Encourage pupils to use language more independently, especially in speaking and writing.
- Broaden the curriculum with a wider range of materials for learning in order to encourage more creative use of language.
- Use ongoing assessment to identify more clearly pupils' progress and needs.

154. Standards of work seen during the inspection generally reached the national average. These standards are achieved because teaching is good overall. Pupils' good attitudes and behaviour also contribute to good learning in all three languages. Pupils make a good start to learning a second foreign language in Year 8, but in Year 9 overall progress slows in French and German. In Spanish, pupils continue to make good progress.
155. In the national tests and teacher assessments in French taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002 the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected level was below the 2001 national average. Girls performed significantly better than boys. In Years 10 and 11 standards are average. In the 2002 GCSE examinations, standards in French and Spanish were below average and in German were average. In French and Spanish a little over a third of pupils gained an A* to C grade, while in German just over half achieved these grades.
156. The better standards seen during the inspection are partly due to a more stable atmosphere in the school which is helping pupils to settle better to their work. They are also the result of the actions already taken by the faculty to raise the quality of teaching. Overall, the achievement of higher-attaining pupils is good. Some lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, are making sound progress as a result of dedicated teaching. However, there are some pupils, particularly in Year 9 and Year 11, who are making poor progress in French and German. Their lack of progress contributes to their negative attitudes and to lower standards. In part, this is because teachers' expectations of average and lower attaining pupils are too low.

157. Specialist teachers, including two native speakers, teach all three languages. This provides a rich resource for learning. The faculty has worked well to achieve greater consistency in teaching and pupils respond well. They enjoy the lively starter activities and the variety of tasks, including games, which teachers use skilfully to develop all four language skills. When teachers use the foreign language as the medium of teaching, pupils of all abilities rise to the challenge and listen well. Sometimes they lack enough opportunities to hear the foreign language and to use it for their own purposes, especially in speaking, and in these lessons language learning becomes task-focused rather than increasing mastery of communicating in another language. The teaching of grammar is good and pupils successfully apply their learning within well-defined topics. They find it difficult to do so in independent speaking and writing because they do not have enough practice in these to express their own views or to write imaginatively and creatively. Overall, the teaching of modern foreign languages makes a good contribution to the development of literacy and to the implementation of the school's Key Stage 3 strategy. Marking and assessment are regular, but teachers do not always pick up through ongoing assessment exactly what pupils have learned in a lesson and what they still need to learn and consolidate. This is partly because plenary sessions at the end of lessons are too brief.
158. This issue and that of the under-performance of boys are areas for future work that the faculty has already identified through the school's monitoring procedures. This self-evaluation is a valuable tool for development which the faculty is well placed to use. The head of faculty and of French, and the heads of German and Spanish, are working closely together and are leading on improvements in teaching and learning across all three languages. They make good use of analysis of test and examination data in order to set targets for pupils and to monitor their overall progress. Leadership and management of all three languages and of the faculty are good.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Very positive teaching that promotes enthusiasm for music.
- Above average standards in class music making.
- Very good extra-curricula provision.
- High standards in concerts.
- Strong leadership and efficient management.

Areas for improvement

- Make more use of computers.
- Provide a broader range of musical tasks that meet the needs of all younger pupils.

159. Music is a thriving and popular subject in the school. This is substantially due to very good standards of teaching, positive attitudes of pupils and enthusiasm for performing music in public. Over 100 pupils participate in choral and instrumental activities each week. A significant number of these also have extra instrumental lessons from visiting specialists. A strong tradition of high standards in concerts and productions that enrich the life of the community is being maintained.
160. Standards by the end of Year 9 in 2002 were judged by the school to be in line with national expectations. From evidence seen in lessons during the inspection,

however, standards are above average. Pupils achieve well at this stage. Girls do better than boys – similar to the national pattern. Boys, however, are as enthusiastic as girls. From the start of Year 7 all pupils sing and play keyboards with increasing confidence. They learn to read and understand musical notation. Most pupils become perceptive listeners and achieve an above average level of musical literacy. For example, pupils in Year 9 were observed playing keyboards, some using both hands confidently, while others worked co-operatively in pairs. They were fitting chords to the tune of *Pachelbel's Canon* and then proceeding to compose their own variations.

161. Standards by the end of Year 11 are above average. GCSE results in 2002 were close to the national subject average for A* to C grades and all of the 15 pupils entered achieved an A* to G grade. These particular results were deemed by the school to have been slightly lower than expected. Work seen and heard in lessons and musical activities during the inspection confirms that current standards are above average. As many boys as girls are involved and there is no significant difference in the standards achieved. Performing standards are commensurate with individual skills and range from elementary to the higher grades in Associated Board examinations. Pupils' composing skills are above average. All compositions are written in musical notation and pupils show a good level of creativity in their individually chosen styles. Pupils' listening skills and their cumulative understanding of music are distinctly above average. They have a good knowledge of a range of musical styles that they describe in the correct musical terms. They are frequently exposed to a high level of detailed listening in lessons, as in a Year 11 class where pupils were studying extracts from Handel's *Messiah*.
162. Standards achieved by the significant numbers of pupils who perform in the various choirs and orchestras in the school are high. Several inspectors enjoyed the unaccompanied choral singing heard in a rehearsal of Christmas music that included demanding pieces like Tavener's *The Lamb*. Recordings were heard of school concerts that revealed the department's commitment to pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development. The school choir and orchestra were heard in an accomplished performance of Vivaldi's *Gloria* and in a remarkable and mature composition by an AS level student. The expressive sincerity of the choirs singing in the school's Christmas service was most noticeable.
163. The quality of teaching is very good. All the teachers in the department are skilled performers. They provide a range of musical experiences and pupils develop a broad outlook on music as a worthwhile practical activity for themselves and for the benefit of the community in general. They generate positive enthusiasm for both music making and perceptive listening. Lessons are meticulously planned. Much of the successful learning is due to the very well written topic books produced by the department to accompany each musical project. These enable pupils to know exactly what is expected of them. They respect the efficiency with which lessons are taught and correspond by working hard. Discipline is very good and self-discipline is encouraged. Pupils enjoy working in pairs and on their own, concentrate well and are keen to play what they have practised. All pupils in Years 7 to 9 follow the same course of musical instruction. For a few, the intellectual demands do not sufficiently match individual needs. The department is aware of this and plans to review its units of work to provide a broader range of musical tasks that will meet specific needs. A greater application of information and communication technology is also being considered as one possible way of achieving this.
164. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There are plans to make music an important part of the celebrations for the move to new purpose

built accommodation and for the opening of the new school buildings currently under construction. The present accommodation is barely satisfactory. There is plenty of space and a good number of teaching rooms - most of them well equipped. All of them, however, are poorly sited in relation to each other with the result that a large proportion of facilities and instruments, keyboards in particular, lie idle. Staffing is very good. Much of the successful induction of two newly qualified teachers is due to the efficient management of the department. The work of the department is further complemented by the employment of 12 visiting instrumental teachers.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- There is a wide-ranging extra-curricula programme that incorporates both a full team fixture list and a number of recreational activities.
- Pupils throughout the school have a strong and positive attitude towards physical education.
- The department enjoys confident leadership.

Areas for improvement

- Use of assessment data by staff to inform lesson planning and match this to pupils' levels of attainment.
- Full involvement of the department in the proposed self-evaluation programme in order to share and promote the existing good practice in teaching and learning.

165. The number of pupils gaining A*-G grades in 2002 was broadly in line with the national average, but the number gaining A*-C was below the national average. Results were undoubtedly affected by the recent amalgamation of the two schools and the subsequent loss of two experienced teachers.
166. The intake of pupils in Year 7 shows levels of attainment that are above national expectations. By the time they are 14 years old, evidence shows that these levels are maintained. In games activities, pupils show good knowledge of the basic rules and the ability to play to these independently as well as when under supervision. They are developing their skills at varying rates of progress, with some showing levels of attainment above national expectations, particularly in football. Others fall below because their basic skills are not sufficiently secure. In dance, pupils' movements show clarity of shape and good body extension. They are able to compose sequences using basic choreography and show qualities of expression through their movements.
167. In most lessons, pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own performance and that of others, which enables them to understand how to improve their skills. Some do not have sufficient opportunity to engage in this. Non-participants in lessons are encouraged to complete relevant worksheets and to contribute answers to questions connected with teaching and learning.
168. Through Years 10 and 11, pupils progress at varying rates. By the time they are 16 years old most are attaining levels that are in line with national expectations. They are able to play in a full game with knowledge and understanding of rules and tactics and can apply their skills effectively in competitive situations. A small group of girls in Year 11 demonstrates a negative attitude towards participating in lessons and this

hinders the enjoyment and progress of classmates. In health related education pupils understand how to plan and evaluate an exercise programme and the principles of fitness involved. Pupils can undertake different roles such as umpire and scorer. Pupils in the examination groups show a clear understanding of the more advanced techniques and skills and are working steadily towards linking these successfully with their theory work. Folders are neatly presented and assessment contributes towards consistent progress.

169. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated. They were observed to achieve their best in lessons with one exception, which was due to a shortfall in effective class management. Mostly teachers are sensitive towards and patient with these pupils, encouraging them to be successful.
170. School teams take part in inter-school and local league competitions and have been particularly successful in athletics, netball and swimming. Last season the girls' and boys' junior teams gained second and third places in the English Schools' Athletics Regional Finals. Netball teams and badminton players were winners in West Lancashire District competitions and a number of individual pupils gained representative honours in a range of sports and activities.
171. Teaching is at least satisfactory or good and in one lesson was very good. In only one instance was the standard judged to be unsatisfactory, which was the result of inappropriate lesson material for the group concerned. Lessons are well planned, with an effective use of resources, and there is evidence of appropriate differentiation. Where pupils learn best, the teaching style is lively and exciting, the pace well judged and there is active encouragement of social and moral development.
172. Pupils are consistently smartly turned out and it is to their credit that they are prepared to participate readily in outside lessons in all weathers.
173. The curriculum meets the statutory requirements of the national curriculum and gives pupils the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities across the year groups. As a result of timetabling constraints, the department is not able to make the full range of recreational activities accessible to Year 11 on a weekly basis. This works against motivating pupils who are not motivated towards team games.
174. A new, electronic assessment recording system has recently been installed that enables staff to enter assessment grades for pupils in Years 7 to 9 in all physical education activities. In future they will be able to monitor pupil progress regularly and use this information to inform their planning of lesson material.
175. Staff give freely of their time to provide the wide range of extra-curricula opportunities that are supported by a growing and enthusiastic number of pupils throughout the school. The programme of these activities is currently under review, with the aim of improving the overall efficiency of staff deployment. There are also plans in hand to take pupils away on residential activity weekends.
176. There is confident leadership from both the head of department and the head of girls' physical education. This has undoubtedly been a significant factor in establishing the strong and positive culture of physical education in the school. Documentation adequately covers all aspects of the department's work. Resources are good and used effectively by teachers. There is evidence of good display material to celebrate team and individual achievements and reinforce aspects of teaching and learning.

Religious education

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

Strengths

- The very good examination results for the full GCSE course.
- The vision and expectations of the new head of department.
- The recent and rapid implementation of positive changes and initiatives.
- The development of a team understanding of how to improve.
- Very good contribution to personal development.

Areas for improvement

- Improve results for pupils studying the short course GCSE examination.
- Marking and homework are not always effectively used to raise standards.
- Resources and accommodation are unsatisfactory.
- The curriculum model does not promote learning for all.
- More rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning.

177. Standards attained in the 2002 GCSE short course followed by some pupils were well below the results obtained nationally, partly reflecting staffing turbulence and difficulties with timetabling. Standards in the GCSE full course were very high when compared to the national average. There was a 100 per cent pass rate. Nearly three quarters of the entrants obtained an A* - C grade with an exceptionally high number gaining an A*. No boys took the examination. The majority of pupils did better in religious education than in their other examinations.
178. The attainment of pupils who are currently taking this examination is equally high. They have been well taught to write reasoned answers that indicate a very good understanding of the effects of Christianity on life. For example, well-presented essays consider how The Sermon on the Mount influences the daily life of Christians. Pupils benefit from their teachers' very good subject knowledge and can, for instance, refer to a range of views when studying environmental ethics. Their work is consistently enhanced by detailed references to religious beliefs and scriptural sources. Excellent progress is made in lessons, the result of the teachers' expectations that high academic standards will prevail. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils learnt about Liberation Theology when studying a unit on the Christian response to poverty. Very skilful prompting resulted in a good discussion about the concept of praxis and the validity of action as opposed to words and theory. There are many opportunities for higher achievers to be challenged.
179. The vast majority of pupils study for the GCSE short course in religious education, where overall attainment is unsatisfactory. Achievement in lessons is satisfactory and very good in a third, broadly reflecting the quality of the teaching. In the good lessons pupils react well to the teachers' high expectations of academic potential. For example, one class, although not a top set, responded well to poetry that explored the issue of fundamentalism and sexism. In other lessons, progress was satisfactory.
180. Over time, however, most pupils make unsatisfactory progress. Pupils are taught by a rota of five teachers who each teach a different topic. Teachers and pupils have to continually establish relationships and pupils are faced with inconsistent approaches. Written work lacks depth and evidence of a progressive and holistic understanding of

underpinning concepts. Year 10 pupils, who have just started the course, are making better progress.

181. At the age of 14 the attainment of the majority of the pupils is in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils know about the principal religions and have had some opportunity to consider personal responses to questions such as whether God exists. The achievement of pupils in Years 7 and 8 is better than that of Year 9 pupils. There is some very good learning occurring in Years 7 and 8 classes. Highly skilled teaching in a Year 7 class resulted in a brisk pace of learning and pupils easily increased their knowledge of Jewish food laws. Year 8 pupils benefited from very good teaching that highlighted the basic tenets of Judaism as outlined in the Shema. Detailed lesson planning reflected an understanding of the pupils' individual learning needs. All pupils, but especially the more able, reacted positively to tasks that required the use of analytical skills. Pupils in most Year 9 classes also make good progress and acquire a good knowledge of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. However, in other classes that required pupils to consider the wider question of how Muslims come close to God, there was insufficient awareness of the main teachings of Islam. Overall, attainment at the end of Year 9 is satisfactory but not good. Many Year 9 pupils have been taught by a range of teachers and some have two teachers who they see on alternative weeks, which makes it difficult for pupils to build on prior learning and make good progress.
182. The good or better teaching was characterised by expert subject knowledge and high expectations for behaviour and academic standards. Teaching and learning strategies successfully involve the pupils as active learners as exemplified by the use of brainstorming and flow diagrams for pupils in Years 7 to 9. However, these good practices are not consistently used by all teachers and the quality and quantity of the pupils' written work over time is variable.
183. A particular strength of the department is its very good teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. For example, pupils' spiritual development is enhanced as a result of stilling exercises and the teachers' ability to promote empathy with the feelings of others. Multicultural education is promoted through the continuing emphasis on the influence of belief on the real life experiences of United Kingdom citizens from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Pupils respond positively.
184. The management of the subject is now good. The school has been without a permanent head of department and a recent appointment has been made. A very good handbook has been produced, encompassing vision, high expectations and administrative detail. It is forming the basis of a new approach to teaching and is an aid to the new team that is being developed. Issues relating to a lack of rigorous assessment and monitoring of teaching and learning have been recognised and addressed. An analysis of the effects of the poor curriculum model, resources and accommodation has been completed. Good initiatives such as a stress on greater pupil participation in lessons and a focus on literacy and information and communication technology have been introduced.

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 2002.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	44	75		43			
Chemistry	31	81		23			
Biology	35	83		43			
Design technology	1	0		0			
Business studies	28	96		36			
Economics	17	100		100			
ICT	6	100		0			
Physical education	24	75		13			
Art	24	96		54			
Music	4	100		100			
Drama and theatre studies	20	100		75			
Geography	19	89		37			
History	50	70		22			
Theology	18	94		67			
Psychology	48	96		52			
English language	14	100		36			
English literature	44	98		36			
French	15	100		47			
German	4	75		50			
Spanish	11	45		9			

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	23	97		43		79.1	
Chemistry	22	100		45		85.5	
Biology	36	94		44		74.4	
Design technology	3	100		0		60	
Business studies	24	96		13		64.2	
Economics	12	100		58		93.3	
Computing	6	100		17		73.3	
Physical education	14	93		7		58.6	
Art	13	100		38		84.6	
Drama and theatre studies	18	100		28		81.1	
Geography	12	83		25		68.3	
History	30	87		7		52	
Theology	8	100		75		100	
Psychology	37	89		24		66.5	
English language	20	100		30		79	
English literature	15	100		47		93.3	
French	11	100		27		60	
German	4	100		100		110	
Spanish	9	100		0		53.3	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good in both year groups.
- Relationships between teachers and students enhance learning.

Areas for improvement

- More opportunities for pupils to develop strategies for independent learning, so as to help them when they progress to higher education.

185. The standards of attainment at the end of 2002 were above the national average in respect of the percentage of students achieving 'A' levels grades A - E but were below average in terms of the number of students achieving higher grades.
186. The mathematics department offers three courses: mathematics with statistics, mathematics with mechanics, and further mathematics.
187. The standards of attainment seen in lessons and in students' books are good. One group of students beginning their A level study of mathematics have met with early 'differentiation' and are now looking at 'general motion' and problem solving using travel graphs. The teacher and students discussed homework assignments in detail and during the course of the lesson the teacher gave valuable advice on how students should tackle examination questions so that they develop essential examination techniques. Another group of AS level students were confidently studying statistics. In both groups the students displayed their ability to deal with abstract mathematics. In a final year class students were developing and extending earlier work on trigonometry. The dialogue between the teacher and the students illustrated the students' familiarity with the language of mathematics and their higher level thinking skills.
188. Teaching is good overall resulting in students' making good progress. All teachers are skilled in eliciting the students' logical thought process, which has resulted in students making good progress. The relationship between teachers and students is mature. The teachers are very knowledgeable and clearly enjoy sharing their love of mathematics with the pupils. Students are aware of their present standard of attainment and target grades so that they remain mindful of the need to work hard.
189. Classes are taught by pairs of teachers who liaise well about students' progress and needs. The use of information and communication technology for teaching and learning is limited because access to the schools' computer suite is restricted.
190. The leadership and management of the department are very good and focus on improving standards. Teaching and learning is being carefully monitored to ensure that students are thoroughly prepared for examinations.

Sciences in the sixth form

191. The focus was on chemistry and biology, but physics was also sampled.
192. In physics, examination results were above average in 2002 with a 100 per cent pass rate overall. The AS results were above average and most students did as well or better than expected from their GCSE grades. Lessons were sampled in both Years 12 and 13. The overall quality of teaching is good. Students are taught by experienced staff who ensure that all make appropriate progress. Information and communication technology, including use of the interactive white board and data logging equipment, is used well to enhance the teaching and learning process. Good working relationships exist and there is a positive response to the high expectations set. Students enjoy the subject, which they find interesting. This was clearly evident in a Year 13 lesson on relativity and time frames.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge.
- Quality of relationships and time spent giving individual advice.
- Preparation for examinations and tests.
- Leadership and management of the subject.

Areas for development

- The range of learning activities, including opportunities for independent study.
- Use of ICT to support learning.

193. In 2002, GCSE A level results in biology were average overall. Compared with the national average a lower proportion of students gained A to C grades. In general, female students obtained higher grades than male students. Students made satisfactory progress overall from their GCSE scores. Three quarters of the group made expected or better progress. Some middle ability students made less progress than expected. Results in AS level examinations at the end of Year 12 were average in the number passing at A to C grades and in the number passing overall.
194. The standard of students' work is above average. In Year 13 they are achieving at a level above national expectations. In lessons seen students were making good progress in developing biological ideas. This is because the teachers have a good understanding of the subject and are able to communicate well. The lesson structure often includes clear teacher exposition supplemented by focused question and answer sessions. This leads to students having a sound understanding of the basic facts required. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on the nervous system a good discussion developed in which students became progressively more confident in using the appropriate scientific terms.
195. Students' learning is good. They are attentive, work well together and respond well in individual conversation with the teacher. The highest attaining students meet the challenge of the work set confidently and are able to apply their understanding in new situations. The lowest attaining students are well supported and cover all the required material. For example, in particular units of work students are given outlines

of the requirements together with sets of examination questions. Students who have English as a second language are well supported. For example, in a lesson on the cell cycle a German student was able to make good progress as a result of clear lesson materials and direct support from the teacher and other students.

196. Learning is above average because teaching is consistently good. In a good lesson on the function of the kidney the teacher was able to use quick-fire questions to establish the students' level of understanding and then develop this further through a series of activities. For example, a Year 13 field trip to Wales resulted in students producing a variety of good ecological investigations. Practical work assessed for examinations is of a good quality and reflects the high quality guidance they are given. Evidence from lesson observations, student interviews and work scrutiny indicate that, particularly in Year 12, there are only limited opportunities for independent work by students.
197. Students develop good relationships with one another and with teachers. Written work is good and the feedback given to students on coursework is very good. Limited use is currently made of information and communication technology within teaching, although students have made use of the Internet for research and in a good lesson on DNA replication an interactive test was effectively used to help students identify gaps in their understanding.
198. Leadership and management of the department are good and it is very well placed to make further progress. Students value the approachability of the staff. Resources are satisfactory and good use is made of the departmental library.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in lessons.
- Teaching, with a wide range of methods used.
- Quality of relationships between pupils and staff.
- Good subject leadership and a team approach to further improvement.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results at AS level.
- Use of information and communication technology to support learning.

199. In 2002, GCSE A level results in chemistry were above average in the number passing overall, with all students passing. Compared with the national average a similar proportion of students gained A to C grades. There was no significant difference between the performance of male and female students. Students made satisfactory progress overall from their GCSE grades. Three quarters of the number made expected or better progress. Results in AS level examinations at the end of Year 12 were below average in the number passing overall and in the number passing at higher grades. The proportion of students who did not continue with chemistry in Year 13 was higher than in many other subjects.
200. Standards of work are currently above average. Students reach good standards in lessons because teachers have good subject knowledge and use a wide range of styles of teaching. In practical investigations they reach good standards. One class

made a great deal of progress in investigating the properties of a range of oxides and were able to explain the results by referring to patterns of chemical bonding. Another group in Year 13 were able to use their understanding of the general principles of organic chemistry to explain how aspirin is made.

201. Students learn very well because teaching is always good and sometimes excellent; this enables students to make good progress in lessons. Teachers ask pertinent questions and expect students to offer scientific explanations in return. They ensure individuals have understood and challenge students to develop their knowledge further, sometimes beyond the requirements of the examination. In an excellent Year 12 lesson students learnt a great deal about what determines the shape of molecules as a result of some very creative teaching. The students actively developed their own understanding through a wide variety of approaches including manipulating physical models, using scientific data and as a result making predictions. In another lesson practical titration skills were developed in tandem with very good probing questions to develop further their understanding of the scientific concepts underlying qualitative analysis.
202. Students develop mature relationships with each other and with teachers. Because of this their confidence improves in talking about the subject. Male and female students contribute equally effectively, with no distinct differences in performance. They work productively together, supporting each other's learning. Teacher guidance is good and particularly so in conversations with individual students. They have a good capacity for working independently. Learning resources are of a good quality; A level textbooks are permanently available to all students. They use computers at home and for private study. Although there are some examples of their use in the curriculum, such as monitoring the progress of neutralisation reactions, more planned use within lessons is deficient.
203. Subject leadership and management are good, with effective co-ordination of the team of teachers. The curriculum is well planned and pupil progress is effectively monitored. Resources are well managed and have a positive impact on the quality of teaching, but access to resources for information and communication technology is inadequate. Technician support for teaching is good. At the present time accommodation limitations mean that some lessons are taught in non-specialist rooms; however, as a result of good planning, teaching and learning have not suffered.

BUSINESS

Business studies and economics

204. The focus of the inspection was on business studies courses, but economics was also sampled. In economics, examination results over the past two years have been well above average and through lesson observation and assessment of students' work it is clear that teaching is of a high quality. In one lesson students produced a corporate oral answer to the question of government intervention in the market. The students worked quickly to show the level of their understanding of traffic congestion as an example of market failure and successfully identified ways in which several policies may be used to bring about a more efficient system of transport. The students recognised and understood most of the issues and realised that there are no easy solutions.

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

Strengths

- Standards in all courses are above average.
- Teaching is of a consistently high standard.
- The courses followed and how the subject is taught provide an interesting range of activities and topics.
- Students work conscientiously and relationships are very good.
- The department is led and managed very well.

Areas for improvement

- Widen the range of courses in vocational business studies
- Written feedback to students through teachers' marking varies and is not of a uniformly high quality
- The department's programme of using the real world of business through visits, visitors and attending conferences is too narrow, especially at AS and A Level.

205. Current standards in the GNVQ (the Intermediate course), AS and A Level courses are above average. This is in keeping with the examination results for the A level courses in 2001 and 2002¹ and an improvement over the 2002 results for students of the GNVQ Intermediate course. Students perform at higher standards in business studies than the average standards reached in subjects in the school.
206. The overall pass rate for AS level students is very high and the proportion of students gaining the highest grades (A/B) was 50 per cent in 2001, but dropped to 34 per cent this year. Equally, the overall pass rate for A Level is very high, although the proportion of students gaining the highest grades is slightly below the national average. Girls' attainment is higher than boys.
207. The department has set appropriately challenging targets for 2003, which if achieved will result in improvements over the past two years. The standards of work of current students are above average. AS and A level students are comfortable with the language of business and, for example, talk easily about the way in which a company establishes and markets its branded product. They refer to the reasons that some companies re-launch well known products to bring about an increase in their market share. Other examples demonstrating students' understanding of their subject included the reasons for and against price discrimination; the structure of the core costs of a business; the advantages of businesses using a standard way of working out their break-even point; and the use of business formulas to guide students' thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of business adding a new type of activity to the services that it already offers.
208. Students respond to their GNVQ course positively. Although different students are making progress at different rates, they all enjoy their work. They are also experiencing a wide range of activities, which is building the confidence of students. For example, students are involved in setting up a company and have started to experience the successes, failures, responsibilities and anxieties of doing so. They have also had to identify real businesses to research and set up appointments. Their results show a good understanding of the structure of a small business.
209. In all lessons, students' concentrate on their work, show an interest and respond to their teachers' questioning and the tasks set in a very positive way. Students' learning is managed very well because teachers' planning is of a high quality, teaching is carefully managed and relationships in classes are excellent. This

¹ The national results for 2002 A Level and AS Level examinations are currently provisional only.

produces a really good atmosphere for learning and students respond positively. At the end of each lesson teachers successfully draw the key points of learning together to ensure that students have understood the original aim of the lesson. The GNVQ students use information and communication technology much more frequently than other students of business. Homework is frequently set and while all work is marked, the quality of written feedback from teachers varies enormously and therefore the best practice is not used throughout the department.

210. The teachers work very well as a team. Teachers meet, plan and talk about teaching and students achievements on a frequent basis. This appears to have ensured that the teachers work co-operatively as a good and effective team. They are confident, have good subject knowledge, pay attention to details as well as getting students to apply their knowledge in such a way that they can see the big picture as well. Teachers in all courses successfully introduce and encourage students to evaluate their findings arising from topics they are covering. For example, a lesson that followed up case study work as a result of students attending a recent conference on the airline business allowed them to work out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a 'no frills' business against a conventional operator. The clarity of the first part of the lesson allowed students to work efficiently on this task in pairs.
211. The head of department leads and manages the department very well and most systems of an effective department are in place. Each specialist business studies classroom has a variety of good quality displays including a massive display of words and phrases showing the language of business which is used to provide a constant reminder to students to use specialist language. Teachers provide a wide range of helpful resources to support their teaching, as well as specific writing or illustrations from the students' up-to-date textbooks.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and Communication technology (ICT)

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good specialist knowledge.
- Students make satisfactory progress often from a low starting point in Year 12.

Areas for improvement

- Make more regular and systematic use of assessment to monitor the progress of students.
- Develop consistent use of questioning and discussion in lessons to actively involve and challenge students.

212. The school offers courses in computer studies and information and communication technology at both A and AS level. Take up of the two ICT courses is relatively low and a few students opt to follow both courses. In 2002 six students took the A level computer studies examination and all achieved a grade with one student gaining an A grade. Overall, these students achieved satisfactorily. The results for AS level computer studies were more disappointing with only half the students achieving satisfactorily. A significant number of students were ungraded, some of whom did

not complete the course. AS level ICT results in 2002 were low but all students achieved a grade. Many students begin courses in the sixth form with a limited experience of ICT from Year 11 and this has impacted upon the progress and the standards they achieve.

213. Standards seen in current Year 13 computer studies lessons are below average. Achievement in this area is only satisfactory because students' understanding of fundamental principles is weak overall and limits their ability to independently develop solutions to set tasks. For example, in a lesson on programming their lack of understanding of binary code and truth tables slowed progress and made the students very dependent upon the teacher to develop their programming solutions. The teacher used specialist knowledge very well and provided clear and stimulating examples that helped students understand and promoted good learning. As a result, they devised their own solutions to the questions in the textbook.
214. In Year 12 computer studies students are making good progress and standards seen in a lesson were in line with course expectations. Students' understanding of relational databases was appropriately developed and enabled them to use look up tables and validation techniques correctly in the construction of a student database. The very good illustration and worked examples of similar database design provided by the teacher helped students make connections with their own database problem and refine their solutions accordingly.
215. Standards seen in Year 13 ICT are in line with course expectations. In the lesson seen students' knowledge meant they were able to make comparisons between flat file and relational database methods and identify ways in which to refine systems to avoid the creation of redundant data. Levels of independence are good. The excellent examples provided by the teacher and clear explanations ensured very good progress with learning. In Year 12, standards are in line with course expectations and students' learning is good as a result of the good specialist teaching. In the lesson seen students developed and broadened their knowledge of employment opportunities and skill requirements for a range of ICT careers. They responded well to the initial discussions led by the teacher and then worked independently using the Internet to research employment opportunities. The teacher used specialist knowledge well to stimulate and lead discussion and ensure that the essential qualities of a range of ICT employment opportunities were identified. A range of teaching methods ensured students were fully involved and a good pace was sustained over the lesson.
216. The majority of students on both the ICT courses have good attitudes but a minority, particularly those studying five AS subjects, have found the courses more demanding than expected and would have welcomed more information about the content and demands of the course when making their choices.
217. Teaching is good overall. Teaching of the two courses is shared between two members of staff, one of whom has extensive experience in industry. Both teachers have good specialist knowledge that they use well to provide lively and stimulating examples to illustrate complex concepts. Sometimes teaching relies too heavily on directed tasks and misses opportunities to question students and challenge their understanding. Where well targeted questioning and discussion are used the pace of learning is good and students consolidate their understanding of the basics very well.
218. The leadership and management of ICT are good. There is clear understanding of examination requirements. Progress has been made developing the teaching of ICT across the school against a background of limited resources. Rooms used for sixth

form lessons are heavily in demand and sometimes shared with other teachers. Their function as a corridor between other rooms also makes teaching difficult because the movement of other classes interrupts lesson atmosphere. Evaluation of examination results has highlighted the need for much closer monitoring of project work. In computer studies in particular, assessment is not sufficiently regular and rigorous to provide students with a clear understanding of where their weaknesses lie and what they need to do to improve. Schemes of work for ICT provide much clearer and more regularly identified opportunities for assessment than those for computer studies. There is an urgent need to review schemes of work and ensure consistency in assessment and marking routines to ensure students are well informed about their progress. The development of teaching and learning styles has been slow, but there is an understanding of the value of discussion and questioning within lessons alongside the use of textbooks and the scope to increase its use as a tool to consolidate and improve learning.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education/sports studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers demonstrate good knowledge of their subject.
- Good teaching promotes clear progress amongst students.
- Good relationships exist between teachers and students.

Areas for improvement

- Consistent provision and promotion of good quality teaching throughout both sixth form year groups.
- Challenging students further through discussion and encouraging them to think independently.

219. In 2001 14 students took the A level examination and the number gaining A – E grades was just above national expectations. However, the number gaining the higher grades was well below national expectations. Twenty-four students took the AS examination, with the overall pass rate and those gaining the higher grades also below national expectations.

220. During last year's amalgamation of the two schools, the department lost two experienced teachers. This disruption resulted in a lack of continuity in the teaching of the current Year 13 students. Since then, changes have been made to staffing arrangements that are beginning to show evidence of improved standards in written work. Files are neatly presented. However, there is evidence of inconsistency in the marking of work across the different aspects of the subject and in the amount of homework set. From work observed, the standard of attainment of the Year 13 students is good. In lessons they are responsive to teaching points and arrive well prepared. In one lesson, students showed good background knowledge and understanding of the measurement of maximum aerobic power. They had completed homework set in preparation for the lesson, during which they were to carry out a practical test to measure aerobic fitness. Students are articulate and give answers confidently, using appropriate technical terms and vocabulary. They are increasingly encouraged to use a variety of presentations for their written work and to use the Internet for relevant research. Students were observed showing good recall of work

previously completed on social factors influencing the development of rational recreation in sport. In the same lesson they showed they were able to draw successfully on this and new information from their handouts to produce short, accurate presentations on different aspects of the topic.

221. There is evidence that students in Year 12 are making good progress towards linking theoretical aspects of the course to their practical work. In one lesson they successfully applied the theoretical aspect of reaction time to a specific, conditioned game situation. When questioned, they were able to recall the definition of Hick's Law and correctly explain its implications for the work they were doing. Using this information, they progressed to applying the new, learned skill successfully in a competitive game. Students were attentive and enthusiastic throughout the lesson and gave intelligent, considered responses to the self-evaluation questions at the end. They asked questions confidently and – when challenged – demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the course work to date. Work folders are very well presented and show consistency in the standard of work achieved by students of all abilities. There is also evidence of very effective, formative marking by teachers and this has undoubtedly enabled students to make the progress they have. Written work shows a variety of different presentations and evidence of students being extended through their homework and encouraged to work independently. The use by staff of action plans in work files provides further direction and incentive to individual student progress.
222. Students are learning well as a result of good teaching. The pace of lessons observed was well judged and understanding was established at appropriate stages. Teachers use a range of resources and present material effectively to enhance the learning process. Where self-evaluation is encouraged, students respond thoughtfully. Their questions and answers show they are interested in and committed to their subject. However, they are not regularly challenged and extended through group-led discussions. This limits their analytical and thinking skills and experience of constructing arguments. Teachers have good subject and background knowledge and use this to make teaching points understandable and interesting. They also have good relations with their students and their mutual respect is apparent.
223. Students are clearly enthusiastic about the subject and are keen to do well. There is now evidence of greater consistency of teaching styles, which will help to increase their self-confidence and levels of aspiration. Evidence of good, formative marking has also clearly made a valuable contribution to students' continued good progress, particularly in Year 12. Efforts made by the department to stabilise the teaching provision for both year groups has led to promising prospects.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and music were fully inspected. Drama and theatre studies were sampled and very good work and standards were seen in these subjects.

Art

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

Strengths

- A level results in 2002 were sustained at the national average.
- AS results in 2002 were very good with over half the students attaining A and B grades.
- Students have very good attitudes and achieve well.
- Teaching is very good and supports high levels of independence.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of research and analysis in sketchbooks to support coursework.
- Develop opportunities for group discussion and evaluation of work.

224. The school offers AS and A level examination courses in Art. These are well subscribed and retention rates are good. Students are advised about career pathways in art and some opt to study art at the local college after Year 11. Some students proceed to foundation courses after completing two years of art in the sixth form.
225. Overall standards are above average, with improving standards at AS level. Work by current Year 13 students confirms these good standards. Students are fortunate to have individual work areas in one of the older school buildings and this enables them to work on large-scale pieces and to display and evaluate their work in progress. Current work is of a highly individual nature and varied in its use of media and reference to artists' work. Students have good levels of independence in most cases and apply well-developed drawing and painting skills in the development of their personal work. Teachers advise them effectively through individual tutorials and assessment and this supports good achievement. Visits to galleries have enabled students to have first hand experience of works of art and make a personal response to them. Although the department lacks computer resources, students are encouraged to use a variety of sources including the Internet for their research.
226. Current Year 12 students are making very good progress developing their independent learning skills. As in Year 13, they have their own workspace and this promotes a sense of independence, while surrounding students with each other's work offers the opportunity to learn from each other. They are broadening their knowledge and use of media from Year 11 and developing as independent learners. Their use of a sketchbook to develop ideas and thinking shows a more systematic approach than the current Year 13, as a result of greater focus by teachers on this aspect of their work. Standards are in line with course expectations overall, with a real strength in observational work. Students have very positive attitudes to their art and attendance at lessons is generally very good, both of which support good achievement.
227. Teaching is very good because it encourages students to experiment and make reference to a wide variety of source material as they develop their personal responses. There is clear guidance on the requirements of examination courses. Teachers use their specialist skills and knowledge well to guide and support students. The strong focus on independent working does, however, mean that a limited range of strategies is evident in lessons and, while teachers respond effectively to student demands, planned opportunities for group discussion to integrate and consolidate theory work are sometimes missed. Students are encouraged to make use of computers and the Internet for research purposes but the department lacks sufficient suitable resources.

228. The quality of leadership and management is very good. Examination results are increasingly used to review and analyse departmental performance. A good example of this evaluation is the more rigorous approach to the development of sketchbooks. Monitoring systems ensure that, while students benefit from several teachers, they have a single point of contact for personal support.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Well above average AS level results.
- Very positive and enthusiastic teaching.
- High commitment to the course and to other musical activities.
- Strong leadership and efficient management.

Area for improvement

- Increase facilities and use of information and communication technology.

229. This new school entered its first AS level group for examination in 2002. Results are well above average. All four students gained a grade A. Three of them are now completing their first term preparing for A level and a small group in Year 12 has started the AS level course this term.
230. The observation of lessons and other work during the inspection confirmed that standards in music are distinctly above average. Students have built effectively on the above average GCSE results with which they started the course. This represents good progress. They have a good knowledge and understanding of a broad range of musical styles and much demanding listening is expected of them. They demonstrate high levels of musicianship when tackling works by composers such as Tavener and Shostakovich. Their knowledge of contemporary and religious music is particularly impressive and this enables them to enjoy a good level of technical discourse in lessons when studying and evaluating such works. The current A level group of students perform to high standards on more than one instrument.
231. Students learn well because the quality of teaching is very good. Their teachers provide in depth information for them based on their own experience as practising musicians. Lessons are meticulously planned. The department has produced its own course books to give a broad focus to each area of study in lessons and also to provide an effective framework within which students pursue and research topics independently. Their extensive understanding of music was seen in one lesson that tested their musical perception. Students were given only the words of a religious choral piece. After listening to a twentieth century musical setting of these, they were particularly astute in discerning musical characteristics and details of its structure and stylistic features. They drew on their own experiences to compare and contrast the piece with others of the same genre that they knew. When working independently, some students use computers to find information they need and to help them compose. The department is aware of the need to make greater use of ICT in its provision for teaching and learning at this level.
232. All the students are well motivated and enthusiastic about the music they play and study. They make valuable contributions to the choral and orchestral activities of the

school. They are closely involved with the production of a full annual programme of concerts and musical events. These regularly include large-scale choral and orchestral works. Standards are high. Students sing well in parts and frequently unaccompanied. One of the performances heard was of a particularly impressive and mature work for full choir and orchestra composed in Baroque style by one of the AS level music students. This was a major achievement. The school makes its own CDs of these occasions. One of these included an accomplished recent performance of Vivaldi's *Gloria*.

233. The department is well led and managed. A very good range of instruments, music, recordings and books suitable for AS and A level courses has been accumulated and brought together into one area pending the move to the new buildings. This creates a particularly extensive library of resources within the department that is permanently accessible for students' use.

HUMANITIES

234. Geography and history were inspected, as was the psychology course which attracts high numbers of students. Religious studies was sampled.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Very good relationships between students and teachers enhance achievement.
- Fieldwork and course work make a significant contribution to students' experience.

Areas for improvement

- Over-dependence on note taking in some lessons neglects independent learning skills.
- Students need more guidance in extended, accurate writing.
- Schemes of work are incomplete.

235. Standards in A level examinations are close to the national average. In the examination at the end of Year 13 in 2002, standards were in line with the national average. Half of the group achieved grades that were above those predicted by their prior attainment, although a small proportion of students did not achieve a pass grade. Boys accounted for all but one of this group.
236. In the AS examination in 2002, standards were in line with the national average. Only two students from a large group did not obtain a pass grade. One third of this group did not reach their estimated grade, but a small proportion achieved well above expected levels. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys compared with girls. Most of these students have continued their studies into Year 13.
237. The work seen during the inspection of the sixth form shows that standards in Year 13 reach nationally expected levels. Achievement is good for most students in relation to their prior attainment. A very small number of students, all boys, have chosen to study geography in the current Year 12. They are working at average standards, but their achievement during the first term of their A level work has been good.

238. In the current Year 13, students show extremely positive attitudes to their work and are keen to succeed. They are courteous and co-operative, listening attentively to their teachers and contributing thoughtfully when appropriate. They work well together and are prepared to acknowledge and consider different points of view, exemplified by a lively debate on the impact of global marketing techniques. Some students enjoy independent research and have used the Internet effectively to extend their understanding of population policies. Although their folders show evidence of good progress in their knowledge and understanding, many need more precise help in structuring accurate essays and in understanding exactly how to improve answers to examination questions. Students in Year 12 have already benefited from a residential fieldwork course that has introduced them to a wide range of techniques that they will use in their own investigations. They cope well with practical exercises and with help from their teachers they are beginning to understand how to produce written answers at A level standard. First attempts at PowerPoint presentations on aspects of coastal erosion show very good progress in the use of ICT.
239. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Learning is enhanced by the very good relationships between students and their teachers and by the generous individual help afforded to students both in lessons and at other times of the school day. Two lessons observed were very good and one was good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and are experienced in sixth form teaching. They work hard to overcome the difficulties that arise when they are obliged to use rooms that are too small or are ill equipped for the work in hand. Detailed lesson plans and challenging activities characterise the best lessons. Discussions with students revealed that they are less enthusiastic about lessons where teachers rely on note taking and the continual use of photocopied material. Work is marked regularly and all students are aware of their expected and potential final grade, which helps them to take responsibility for their own progress. Analysis of completed work shows that some students make very good use of teachers' comments in order to improve the standard of their answers.
240. Geography in the sixth form is very well organised and managed. Rigorous analysis of examination and test results is used to adapt the curriculum and to refine individual lessons. Although units of work are planned in logical sequences, detailed schemes of work are not yet in place. The department is determined to raise the profile of the subject and has strategies in place in order to secure its successful continuation in the sixth form in future.

History

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good.
- Standards are very high.
- Students are committed to learning.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Provision for information and communication technology.

241. Standards at A Level are below average. Only two students obtained grade B; 19 students achieved grades D and E; four students did not achieve a grade. At AS level 11 students obtained grades A/B, but 15 students failed to achieve a grade. These results were below the expected level of achievement.
242. However, lesson observation and scrutiny of samples of work of the present Years 12 and 13 are much better than these results. Students are reaching high standards and their achievement is generally very good. Students in Year 12 are enjoying the course, although some are finding the challenge of AS level work difficult. In both Years 12 and 13, students are very well informed about the topics studied and the discussions, whether about the support for Adolf Hitler or the situation in the USA in the 1920s, are mature and intelligent. Students bring a secure grasp of the topic supported by detailed knowledge, which reflects very good research skills and a growing maturity of thought. For example, in a very good lesson on Tsarist Russia students quickly see a comparison between the position of the serfs in Russia with that of Black Americans in the USA at that time. The detailed grasp of a topic following their own research is illustrated in a Year 13 lesson on the USA in the period 1919-1939. Discussing the effect of American cinema on British perceptions of the USA, they not only know how many cinemas there are at the time but also can evaluate, with good examples, how British opinion is affected. In their oral and written work, students demonstrate a growing confidence in analysis, planning and communication.
243. The quality of history teaching in the present sixth form is very good and leads to very good learning. Three-quarters of the lessons observed are very good. There are no unsatisfactory lessons. Teachers know their subject very well. Students enjoy analysing complex issues in lessons, which are teacher led but not teacher directed. Teachers value what their students say and learning becomes a shared and challenging experience in which teacher and student share views, opinions and evidence. Students are challenged to think rigorously and this they do. Teachers draw on the students' research to widen or deepen the discussion.
244. Students are achieving high standards because the teaching is challenging and stimulating. They enjoy the course and retention rates so far are encouraging. Teachers are relaxed but purposeful with their students. Assessment procedures are good and students are encouraged to reflect on their own work. Marking is well done and helps students to understand where they can improve. Students' files are well organised and show evidence of detailed research. Students are encouraged to attend academic lectures.
245. The department is very well led and managed. Specialist historians take all classes. Planning and organisation is very good and the staff work together as an effective and stimulating team. Despite the problems of the re-organisation, the history department is establishing highly academic standards. It is forward looking and innovative and is raising standards already. Students are encouraged to use information and communication technology, but the overall provision for ICT remains unsatisfactory.

Psychology

Overall, the provision for psychology is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are high and well above average.
- Students make very good progress and achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good.
- Planning and the preparation of resources to support students' learning are very good.
- Students' work is thoroughly assessed so students know their strengths and what they need to do to improve.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning and show a very strong commitment to the subject. The course is very popular and numbers taking it have greatly increased.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation and resources, in particular for the use of information and communication technology, are unsatisfactory.

246. As the numbers of students taking the course has increased, a high number of students have attained the higher A and B grades. Evidence from samples of previous work, lessons seen and examination results, indicates that standards of attainment are now well above average. A much higher number of girls study the subject and girls attain better than boys.
247. In Year 12, students show a very good awareness of the main authorities that have written on developmental psychology, individual differences, disorders and the influence our upbringing has on the way we function. In a Year 12 lesson students used very well their 'A' level textbook, the very comprehensive range of notes provided by the teacher and their own detailed notes to illustrate their very good awareness of how memory influences and changes what we observe. Their awareness was greatly heightened with the very good range of illustrations the teacher provided.
248. In Year 13, students achieve very well in relation to predictions based on their previous AS examination results. In lessons they are highly motivated to do well and work effectively in pairs or larger groups to complete taxing and challenging tasks. For example, students are effectively examining the biological and medical model of behaviour and how our attitude to our lifestyle can affect our health. In an observed lesson they showed a very good application of their studies on sleep and how its deprivation influences the way we function.
249. When limited opportunities occur for the students to use computers they effectively translate their awareness from their wide range of studies word processing their answers with confidence into well thought out, written descriptions. They show a good application of their attained literacy and numeracy skills. The students willingly re-draft their work adding more detail as necessary to attain higher standards. Under the very good guidance of the teacher most are starting to appropriately reference their answers. The students do not have access to computers in the two rooms, separated across the school site, where psychology is at present taught. They have to use facilities in the library or the teacher has to book a computer suite, which is not always available at suitable times. This provision is unsatisfactory as many studies are based on experimental psychology and need easier access to computers for word processing and data handling.
250. Teaching is very good overall. The teachers apply their very good expertise and subject knowledge in both courses. They make very good use of the limited range of existing resources preparing detailed handouts to aid the students' understanding.

The students' learning is further supported with the very good use of searching questions and detailed explanations to aid understanding. They very well support students with their understanding and application of appropriate research methods. Relationships are excellent, lessons proceed at a brisk pace and high levels of support are given to develop students' independent learning and questioning skills.

251. Students respond very positively to the high quality help they receive. They use their time very well, showing independence and maturity in their approach. They show very high levels of enthusiasm and motivation to learn. When asked, they speak very highly of the teaching and support they get to further their psychological knowledge. Some past students are successfully following careers that involve psychology. There is no specialist room for the teaching of psychology. This means that the opportunities to use inter-active displays to celebrate and to further inform the students' learning is limited. Considering the increasing popularity of the subject and the rapidly increasing numbers, the present level of funding for the subject is unsatisfactory. Most goes to purchase examination textbooks and a few other supportive materials, such as CD ROMs, further textbooks, audio and videotapes and a subscription to a good psychology magazine.

Religious Studies was also sampled.

252. Excellent teaching and learning was seen in a Year 12 AS theology class who were studying euthanasia as part of their unit on ethics. The apt use of video extracts focused the students' attention on matters of relevant and meaningful interest. Authoritative teaching ensured that they had very good academic knowledge and understood the ideas surrounding ethical naturalism and emotivism. Consequently, the quality of the discussion was very high; with skilful teacher intervention to ensure that all participated and benefited
253. The excellent teaching and learning in this lessons mirror the excellent results obtained in the 2002 AS course where almost half of the candidates obtained an A grade and the great majority an A - C grade

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The provision in English caters for 92 students. GCSE AS and A2 courses are offered in English Language and English Literature. Retention rates are high.

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good; teachers know the subject very well and convey their enthusiasm to the students.
- Students learn very well; they collaborate and discuss together very successfully and are keen to express opinions.
- Students in English literature develop the ability to use the terminology and register of literary criticism effectively.
- The subject is led and managed very well.

Areas for improvement

- Although much marking is very good at giving guidance for improvement, there are some inconsistencies between teachers.
- Students taking English Language experience difficulties at the start of the course as it is so different from GCSE courses.

254. Standards achieved are good. They are above the national average in English literature and broadly in line for English language. Progress is good and pupils achieve well considering their standards on entry. Work seen during the inspection confirms the pattern of results in 2002.

255. In English Literature, students produce extended critical writing of a high standard that embraces the terminology and register of literary criticism. They are well able to develop views of their own and justify these with apt quotations and textual references. Thus a student writing about *The Handmaid's Tale* states 'the lives of the handmaids are completely controlled like dolls for little girls that would talk if you pulled a string'. Another student writing of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona used selective quotation to build up a picture of a relationship that was doomed for many reasons. In many instances such as these, students are able to show initiative in forming opinions but use evidence objectively to substantiate such opinions. By Year 13, students demonstrate the capacity to set their views securely in the context of the times in which the texts concerned were written or set. Students also become increasingly adept at comparing different texts both in terms of theme and structure but also in the way in which the authors approached their subjects.

256. In English Language, students in Year 12 develop an understanding of language varieties and the salient features of language used in different social contexts. They are initially less sure of the underlying linguistic concepts and models required for the study of spoken and written English. By Year 13 most students are able to demonstrate good knowledge of different genres and also how, for example, spoken and written English differ.

257. The teaching of English in the sixth form is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and this, combined with considerable enthusiasm for the subject, clearly inspires the students. Thus a Year 13 class studying Keats benefited from and were galvanised by the teacher's own enjoyment of the text. Teachers are also very skilled at giving students scope to discuss and debate amongst themselves in order to refine their views. In a Year 12 lesson on *The Handmaid's Tale* the teacher managed a situation where students made presentations to the whole class so that

after each presentation a whole class discussion ensued in which there was a vigorous exchange of views while the teacher took a back-seat. All teachers have a very good knowledge of their students' strengths and weaknesses and are skilled in engaging individual students in discussions that relate to their particular levels of attainment. Marking of students' work is generally very focused with good guidance on ways to improve, but there is some inconsistency with some instances where, although achievement is recognised, there is less written guidance on areas for future attention. In all lessons students are encouraged to venture opinions even if they are unsure of their views or answers. A culture of using language to learn permeates much of the teaching. Background material and supplementary notes provided by teachers for students are usually very informative and add to the students' knowledge and understanding of the relevant parts of the course.

258. Students respond very well to the teaching described above. They enjoy English in the sixth form and take pleasure in forming and expressing opinions on the subjects studied. A Year 12 group reading the first scene in *The Rivals* were quite willing to explore what could be gleaned or assumed from such an early reading. They also develop an understanding of the criteria needed for successful essays. Many students are also keen to discuss and describe relevant reading from outside the course.
259. There is very good leadership and management of English in the sixth form. Teachers are very familiar with all aspects of the courses and they have detailed knowledge of the assessment criteria. There is a consistent view of the subject that transcends examination requirements and encourages students to become independent thinkers who use language wherever possible to develop their views and opinions.

MODERN LANGUAGES

260. The focus was on French but German and Spanish were also sampled. In 2002, examination results in German at A level were above average and below average at AS level. In Spanish, results were below average at both levels. The numbers of candidates in each subject were very small and comparisons should be treated with caution. One lesson each of German and Spanish was observed. In both, students made very good progress as a result of very good teaching.

FRENCH

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving.
- Students are keen to learn and make good progress.
- The leadership and management of the subject are good.

Areas for improvement

- More opportunities for students to extend their oral skills through discussions in French.
- A wider range of reading to extend their cultural and aesthetic understanding.

261. Standards in French in A level examinations in 2002 were below average, with some students achieving below their predicted grade. At AS level, standards were average overall, with seven of the 14 students gaining a grade A or B. All students completed

their courses and all gained a pass grade. In the current Year 12 there are 11 students and there are 10 in Year 13.

262. The standards of work of current students are at least average and some are above average. In a Year 12 lesson about France and Europe, all students showed a good level of understanding of spoken French, heard on tape and in the fluent French of their teacher. They listened carefully, identified key points, made notes and then reported back on these in French. Some students spoke with confidence and fair accuracy; others were hesitant and lacked the ability to say more than a few short sentences. Their written work shows confidence in expressing opinions on familiar topics. In general, they apply grammatical knowledge correctly and use an effective range of vocabulary. They communicate clearly.
263. In Year 13, students' writing is entirely focused on preparation for the examination. This gives them good opportunities to read associated texts (although seldom from books), extract relevant information and key phrases and to express their opinions. The standards of their written work range from satisfactory to very good. The topics they study are mainly concerned with social aspects of life in France. This contributes well to students' social and personal development, but they have few opportunities to extend their cultural and aesthetic knowledge of France and Francophone countries.
264. In a Year 13 lesson students again had good opportunities to understand spoken French by listening to their teacher's rapid use of the language. They had fewer opportunities to speak themselves and to extend their ideas through discussion. As a result, their speaking skills are less well developed than those of listening, reading and writing.
265. Teaching is good in terms of listening, reading and writing, but less so in finding ways to extend pupils' oral skills. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and provide a good model of pronunciation and intonation for students. They know the course syllabuses well and guide students expertly through the requirements for course work, while allowing students the necessary independence. Students feel that teachers know their capabilities well and that they are given good guidance on how to improve their work.
266. The good teaching and learning in French result from several factors, including the good relationships established between teachers and students. They are also the result of good leadership and management of the subject by the head of faculty and of French. She has analysed examination results and students' predicted grades and used this data to set targets for students. This helps students to focus on individual goals. Students are well informed about their progress and this is reported on, with some specific detail, in reports to parents. The faculty is well placed to make a substantial contribution to the sixth form curriculum, especially if the curriculum on offer in the future attracts more students to continue with their study of languages.